



Episode 84 – Master Chris LaCava | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello everyone! It's episode 84 of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, the only place to hear the best stories from the best martial artists, like today's guest, Master Chris LaCava. My name is Jeremy Lesniak and I founded whistlekick but I'm also your host here for Martial Arts Radio. I'm proud to say that whistlekick makes the world's best sparring gear as well as really great apparel and accessories all for practitioners and fans of traditional martial arts. Thank you to the returning listeners and hello, and welcome to those of you listening for the first time. If you're not familiar with our products, you should take a look at what we make. Our sparring gears are the heart of what we make. Boots, gloves, shin guards and helmets, that are not only more comfortable, they're designed better and routinely last two years with heavy use. You can check out our testimonials, videos or place an order at our website, whistlekick.com. If you want to see the show notes, those are on another website, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. While you're over there, sign up for the newsletter. We offer special content to subscribers and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guests for the show. We only e-mail a few times a month. We never sell your information and sometimes, we even mail at a discount. Today's episode is with Master Chris LaCava, another of the wonderful martial artists I first met in 2015 at the Super Summer Seminars event. We didn't get a lot of time together at that weekend that we saw him again in January at the Hall of Honors Mega Weekend in New Jersey. After getting another chance to train with him, I knew it was time to get him on the show and here we are. Master LaCava, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

Chris LaCava:

Thanks for having me!

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey, thanks for being here. It's going to be a lot of fun for listeners out there. We've had a little bit more pre-show than I'm used to. You know, sometimes, guests come on and we just start chatting and forget that we're actually here to have an episode and not just shoot the breeze so I've got a feeling this is going to be really fun episode so thanks for your time.

Chris LaCava:

Cross your fingers, hope for the best, brother.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey, hey, I'm going to cross one hand and I got the pen poised in the other for, I'm sure, all the things we got to edit out that are awful and terrible.

Chris LaCava:

Don't worry, we'll take care of it in post.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Without a doubt. So, listeners might be picking up on the fact that I know you a little bit, not a ton but I spent a little bit time with you training. So why don't you tell everybody how you got started in the martial arts?

Chris LaCava:

Oh, I got started in the martial arts, I'm like a cliché. I was the little, weak kid with glasses that got beat up by the bullies and, henceforth, I guess, when I was younger, I had anger management issues. I grew up watching Kung Fu theater on Saturday morning, watching like Shaw brothers' movies, like *Master Killer*, all those great movies. *The Invincible Shaolin*, you got *Five Deadly Venoms* and all those things and I was like Oh my god, that's awesome! and so, eventually, said to my parents, I want to do martial arts, I want to do Kung Fu, I want to do Karate, and my mother was like, Oh hell no! We are not giving you a license to kill. You can't even keep it in control. We're not giving you that ability, and it wasn't until a friend of the family who is a Dan-rank in Tangsoodo, he said, You know what? It's probably just what he needs, and that was the beginning of me getting into martial arts.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, tell us a little bit more. So, this person encouraged you from Tangsoodo, is that what you started with?

Chris LaCava:

He didn't really encourage me. I was already fired up, ready to go!

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right, encouraged the family.

Chris LaCava:

He actually talked to my mother and my father about the benefit of martial arts and how it can instill discipline and self-control and all these kinds of great things and they were like, You know what, alright, let's try, we can always yank him, get him out of it if it was necessary, but it was actually a huge benefit for me. It helped me calm down it helped me, give me a better outlook on life and how to deal with things. We talked about conflict resolution, the physical but it also gave me a lot of the mental like how to look at things and put things in perspective. It's all about the filter. How am I actually viewing this and it was a great thing for me especially younger. It's probably the reason why I'm not in jail

Jeremy Lesniak:

Really? Do you say that seriously?

Chris LaCava:



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Well, I was pretty angry and I think, you know, I think I could've made very poor choices back then and this gave me the ability to make better choices and I'm really happy with the way things have turned out. I've got great friends. I've got a great family. I got a great wife and kids and I think if I didn't join the martial arts, I probably wouldn't have had all that. I would have been in a much different situation. I joke saying, Oh, I'd be in jail, but I don't know, to be honest. I couldn't say whether or not—I just know that I wasn't a great kid. I wasn't ridiculously terrible but I just wasn't a great behavior. I didn't have a great behavior, whatever, you know, so this definitely, martial arts did definitely help in that. I definitely appreciate and look back and say, Yup, that definitely helped,

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, it's great that you found it then—

Chris LaCava:

Oh, no doubt.

Jeremy Lesniak:

'because who knows where you could have slid for sure.

Chris LaCava:

Yeah, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, of course, here on Martial Arts radio, it's all about stories. We talked about that earlier before we started the episode. Stories are kind of what make everything tick. Before there was the written word, there were stories and I'm sure you've got a bunch. So why don't you think for a second, tell us your best one.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Like we mentioned before, because they're my stories, they're just my stories. They don't seem like anything special until one comes out and somebody goes, Oh yeah, I dig that, or Oh, no, I really connect with that, Up to that point, it's just my stories. It's just where I've been, just what I've done. They just don't have that spark that other people's stories have. I could listen to somebody else talk for hours. Trust me, that's why I'm with my wife. She doesn't stop talking No, I love you, honey. I'm just playing but, yeah, a good story. Give me a topic and maybe I can come up with one.

Chris LaCava:

I know you teach seminars.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Yeah.

Chris LaCava:

And...anything crazy ever happened there? I know when I saw you in January when I was in on one of your sessions there, I was working with the first ever martial artist with a serious mullet. A Korean with a mullet, I mean, not that it was a long story but that happened on your watch so there's got to be more.

Chris LaCava:

Oh, god. A seminar-related story. Not a great story but I remember being down in Mississippi and I was down at one of Grand Master Gerry West's Hapkido International conferences and I had a great time training and that Jeff Booth and Rudy Timmerman and I was a little fanboy-ish, I was and they invited me to dinner afterwards. I had a great time at dinner and when people get to know me, they know I like to eat and so good conversation, good food, we're getting closed to finishing, I looked down at my watch and I'm like, Oh crap, I just missed my plane we all laughed and my wife was just like, Figures. Figures that you would—because you were eating, you missed your damn plane. Like I said, not a good story but it was one that made me go, Yup, Chris LaCava, what do you think so far?

Jeremy Lesniak:

May not be a long story but that's a pretty great story.

Chris LaCava:

Oh man, I was really honored that they asked me to dinner with them. All these bigwigs and here I am, Yeah, I'd love to go, so...any good stories? Good stories...

Jeremy Lesniak:

I've got a good feeling we'll end up with more so let's keep rolling. It's a great way to punctuate that question. I don't think there's anything wrong with it. So, let's take a step out. We talked a little bit about what your life could have been like without the martial arts so I want to take you back there and let's pretend that Tangsoodo friend didn't encourage your parents and your parents never relented, you didn't get to do the martial arts. Where do you think your life will be now?

Chris LaCava:

I think I wouldn't have the determination I do now. I don't think I would have had the work ethic I do now. I'm a classic ADD child. I have the attention span of a gnat. When my wife and I watched the movie, *Up*, that Pixar movies like one of those cartoon movies and the dog is kind of like doo-doo-doo and then SQUIRREL! and just took off, that's me. So I think the martial arts definitely helped me there. My back story—a little bit of my backstory is I was a professional musician. I used to play in bands and recorded CDs and been on TV, in the radio, I went on tour in Europe and blah, blah, blah and I think back, if I wasn't in the martial arts, I wouldn't have put up with all the stuff I needed to put up with and



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the work that I needed to do to accomplish those things. So where would I be without my martial arts? I would be one unhappy person. Would I be in jail? I don't know. I just know my life wouldn't be as fulfilled and as happy as it is now. It's probably a place that I wouldn't want to be. I couldn't really tell you a specific but it's probably some place I'd rather not be and I'm very fortunate to be where I am now.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Very often winds up pretty well with what most of the guests have said on the show.

Chris LaCava:

Oh cool. I'm not alone!

Jeremy Lesniak:

You're definitely not alone. Absolutely not. So, I'd like you think back—

Chris LaCava:

You're trying to get me to talk about jail, aren't you? I keep hearing this recurring theme.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You brought it up. You're the one that put it on the table. Sounds like great fodder for a podcast.

Chris LaCava:

You just keep reserving those leftovers.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Pick at that red— Hey, sometimes you throw a ketchup on it, it's like a whole

Chris LaCava:

Hey, I'm sorry.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's quite alright. So, we've had the highs and lows in life. I'd like you to think back on one of your lows and how your martial arts training helped you moved past it.

Chris LaCava:

I remember one of my lows had to deal with martial arts. I was teaching at my own place in Westport, Connecticut and things were going really well. I had a lot of students. We were having good times, we were training hard, everything was great but then, life kind of gets in the way of people and people fall off track and everything. The numbers started going down and I had a hard time paying the bills, both



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for the school and for my house, or for my home. Excuse me. It was looking kind of bleak and I'm like what am I going to do? Do I need to quit this and not do martial arts anymore? Because to be honest I couldn't afford classes if I stopped classes. If I stopped doing this, I couldn't afford classes. So, it was like I was giving up martial arts all together and that kind of really hurt inside. So, one day I end up going to the school and I can't remember the name of the tropical storm but it came through Connecticut and ripped everything up in all the surrounding areas and it was really bad. So, I ended up going to the school and I had this sign, it was filled with my logo, the house martial arts and it was hanging up on the building and when I got there, I saw it. It was like all the way across the parking lot, leaned up against the tree, all bashed up and damaged. I was like Oh my god, is this a sign? Is it time to pack up? But because of my support system, my family, my friends, and when I say my friends, I mean, people in the martial arts as well, it's not just outside martial arts. People think there's martial arts and your real life. My martial arts is my real life. With the support of all my friends, my family, my previous training in martial arts, it's like, you know what? Suck it up. Move on. You got to adapt and overcome. So that was probably a really low point for me and my—it's the martial arts and my other support network that really got me through it. Now, I'm travelling around the world and teaching seminars and whatnot. I'm loving life but if I had just packed up and let it go at that moment, none of this would have happened so that was a low part and thank God for martial arts, got me through it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I think there's little bit of a literary device there, for lack of a better terminology, was your sign being ripped off a building a sign?

Chris LaCava:

Yeah, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So pretty, pretty poignant. A lot of people would have taken that as a sign to, Okay, I'm done, I'm going to fold, and clearly you didn't do that. What do things today look for you? I'm assuming you're better?

Chris LaCava:

Oh yeah. Yeah, I do a lot of seminars. Like I said I travel a lot and I really dig it. I love doing seminars. I like sharing what I've learned. It's like giving back but all the people I get to meet along the way, people that become my family—it's really awesome. It's really made my life much richer. It's made me be able to go places physically and emotionally and spiritually that I wouldn't've been able to get to if I wasn't. It's made my life very rich because of that so seminars is where I'm really doing the most work and really enjoying it.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Cool. So, I know you had the chance to train under some pretty great people and certainly train with some people at seminars and if we add in all the seminars that you're doing and trained with tons and tons of people but other than your immediate instructors, if I said, if I asked you who is the most influential person on your martial arts career, who would that be?

Chris LaCava:

Keith Santaman. He is absolutely the most influential because if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be in martial arts. He's the one that talked to my family and getting me into it and that him going out of his way to talk to my family to help me out was really something that was poignant for me. That's like he didn't have to do that, he wasn't getting something out of it. He was just doing that to make another person happy, to benefit someone else, to make their life richer and that always stuck with me and I think that's one of the things that I try to do every day. Whether that's at a seminar, whether that's at the supermarket or whether that's at the bank or whether that's at I'm walking out the street, it doesn't matter. I really like being able to affect someone's life in a positive way. I forgot who the quote was by but they said something to the effect of, hold on one sec, let me try to find that quote—

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure.

Chris LaCava:

—if we're going to like actually—

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, that's fine.

Chris LaCava:

let me see here. it was by Ralph Waldo Emerson, he had said, To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to leave the world a better place, to know even one life is breathed easier because you've lived, this is to have succeeded, that hits me hard and that really strikes me. I kind of, that's kind of my motto or my—the way I try to live my life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. Have you found that inspirational in your path as a teacher?

Chris LaCava:

As far as on the receiving end?

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Yeah, yeah, I mean obviously, that quote kind of punctuates the beginning of your martial arts career whether or not this gentleman knew of that quote when he spoke to your parents, we don't know but I mean, the sentiment was there.

Chris LaCava:

Oh no, right, but absolutely what he did makes that perfectly but even though it might mark my beginning, it marks my middle and hopefully, it marks my end as well. That's just something that I will take with me for my entire life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right on. I think a lot of people that teach whether it's martial arts or something different feel similarly. I know that, for me, not that I have my own school anymore, but when I am instructing being at a seminar or at a school I train at, that when I get that one interaction which doesn't happen very often but when I know I've made an impact whether or not it's someone's martial arts, a parent or even an adult come up to me and say, That thing you said made an impact on my life, that, to me, there's nothing better for me

Chris LaCava:

That's heavy, man.

Jeremy Lesniak:

than that.

Chris LaCava:

Absolutely, man. Amen, brother. Preach on, brother! You know what I'm talking about. Can I get an amen from my brother in the front row?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, amen! Well, you know, I'm not sitting on a pew, I'm standing up.

Chris LaCava:

Oh, now you're standing up.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Got to stand up for this microphone.

Chris LaCava:

Oh, okay, gotcha.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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No chairs. I'm fully engaged. My hamstrings are engaged in order to talk to you even.

Chris LaCava:

Is your core fully engaged?

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's not. It's not.

Chris LaCava:

Let's get on that, all right? All right, next question!

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, let's talk about competition. Is that ever been something that's come across your plate?

Chris LaCava:

When I was younger, yeah. I used to be in a lot of tournaments but as I got older, I really didn't do as much but when I did do tournaments, it was all about that classic either I win or I learn and that's the way I've always gone through tournaments. All right, I may not have won but I still got something out of it. I still learned what am I weak at? What do I need to work on? That's just something I got from my parents. It's not somebody else's fault, it's not your fault, what could you do to make it better? With losing in tournaments, it's like all right I didn't win, what can I do to win next time? That definitely helped drive me on as far as tournaments are concerned. I used to do well in tournaments but occasionally you get those tournaments when there's some serious, serious hardcore competition. You don't always make it out on top and that's okay. So at least you get to test your mettle.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, you don't get better being the best in the room.

Chris LaCava:

That's right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right on. Now, if you could train with someone that you haven't and even open up to dead people. If you could train with anybody who's ever lived, who would that be and why?

Chris LaCava:

Who would I train with living or dead that I haven't currently trained with?

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Yes.

Chris LaCava:

Because I'm a Hapkido guy, I think I would want to train with Choi Yong-sool. My teacher was one of the longest-running students to train with Choi Yong-sool. Choi Yong-sool's a founder of hapkido and when Dojun Choi closed his school in 1976, he taught out of my teacher's school until his death in '86. My teacher spent a lot of time with him. He would talk about him and whatnot, you hear a lot of all these different stories. A lot of stories you hear outside is, He was a mean and angry person, some people would say that. Other people will say he was warm-hearted and blah blah blah. I think it really depends on who you are and how he treated you but also, because I like digging into history and stuff like that, I would like to train with him, not only for technique but just to pick his brain on a lot of stuff that's going on. In martial arts, as the history gets longer, it gets muddier and muddier and people don't know what's true and what's not. I think that, for me, I think Choi Yong-sool would be the guy I would—the person I would want to train with.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think one of the things that are interesting looking back over some of these arts and comparing them to newer arts is intention. We might have the forms and we might have the movements from styles that are seventy-five to a hundred years old but we don't really have the intention. What was the purpose? Why was this done this way whereas the other instructors of that time were doing it?

Chris LaCava:

Absolutely. That's what's so interesting to me. Knowing the whys, not just the hows, but the whys. That makes it so much more solid and of course, being a teacher, you'd like to share that with other people as well. Yeah, I'm with you.

Jeremy Lesniak:

'Because movements can change especially if you understand the why. If our path is to do a punch in this particular way, that path never changes. But if the path is to throw the strongest punch, the fastest punch, or a punch as a counter to this movement—

Chris LaCava:

That could be modified, absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

—that may change as we understand the body better, as new techniques develop, as people grow. I mean, as humanity, we're getting taller, I didn't get any of that but other people have.

Chris LaCava:



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You're perfect, brother, don't you sweat it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, thank you. I appreciate that. All five and a half feet of me. So just to pick at that a little bit more, so do you think that because you've spent so much time training with a man who had trained with the founder of Hapkido, you have a better understanding of those whys? Is that something that you talk to him about?

Chris LaCava:

Yeah, I mean, I would like to say I have a better understanding but the more I know, the more I realize that I don't know. So yeah, I want to know some of the whys. I want to know, because, all right, so, to preface that, if I train with him, we'd also be able to speak the same language. My teacher speaks very good English but sometimes, my Korean is not as good as his English but sometimes things get a little messed up so I don't get the full understanding of it at times but I think I would love to be able to one, speak Korean better but I would like to talk with Choi Yong-sool and really pick his brains about it, the whys. To me, it would make it more solid, so much more fulfilled because I'm not just a technician. I want to know more about it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. You ever thought about writing a book? That seems to be something that would be right up your alley.

Chris LaCava:

Yeah, I don't write.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You don't write?

Chris LaCava:

I don't write. I don't write at all. I'm a terrible writer. I would be one of those guys who would hire somebody to do it. You know anybody?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Not that's available. I'm sure there's somebody listening that wants to help you write a book on hapkido.

Chris LaCava:

That would be awesome. Hopefully, it would be interesting enough that people would want to buy it.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

People seem to buy a lot of books that shouldn't be read and I would imagine if you wrote a book, it should be.

Chris LaCava:

So, there's hope is what you're saying.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There's definitely hope. At least there's intent. Let's talk about movies.

Chris LaCava:

Oh yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, movies kind of launched your desire—

Chris LaCava:

Oh, hell yeah!

Jeremy Lesniak:

—To participate in the martial arts.

Chris LaCava:

Absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, how about other movies? Do you have a favorite? Let's start there.

Chris LaCava:

Outside the martial arts genre?

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, inside the martial arts genre. Favorite martial arts movie.

Chris LaCava:

Inside the martial arts genre. My favorite martial arts movie: *Five Deadly Venoms*.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Okay, why?

Chris LaCava:

I thought it was so cool. You had these five guys that were in this group and they were all such badasses and they all had their specific styles that each had these individual things that made them special. I just thought that it was so cool and of course, you had the mask and the mystery of it. Oh my god, who's the toad? Who's the lizard? And that was just a very cool movie for me as far as martial arts and just movies, in general. So, definitely *Five Deadly Venoms*, favorite movie. Favorite Kung Fu movie.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There's this interesting pattern for a lot of us that those early movies kind of pushed us into martial arts or at least, were there when we started have stayed as our favorites. Throughout we've had plenty of people in this show who started the martial arts because of one of Bruce Lee's movies and that movie had stayed one of their favorites, if not their favorite film, over those years. You mentioned *Five Deadly Venoms* in the beginning as one of those movies so just kind of kept that going. If I forced you to pick a couple more?

Chris LaCava:

As far as Fung Fu movies or martial arts movies?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. Yeah.

Chris LaCava:

Okay, I'mma pick one more back in the day: *Master Killer*. *Master Killer* was a great movie. Used to love that how you go to the shaolin temple and train and those—all the movies that had the different training apparatus and all the different things that you do in training. To me, that was just made me so much cooler. It's like oh my gosh, You got the Jackie Chan movies that made you do that. It was *Drunken Master*, I think it was where, that was so cool. Another movie that I really liked was *Fist of Legend* with Jet Li. I really liked that movie. You got the history of the Chinese versus the Japanese and all that but the movie, in general, was just a whole so well put together. The choreography, the story line, the character development. All that stuff was just so cool and that's another martial arts movie that I really appreciate. *Iron Monkey*, I liked *Iron Monkey*. Right there with *Iron Monkey*, you have the martial and the medical together in one movie which is very cool, 'cause I'm a licensed acupuncturist, I get off on that kind of stuff. So anytime I see eastern medicine and martial arts put together in a movie, it's like Oh yeah! and so I dig that. Those, I think, those are my top four. Most of the Shaw brothers' movies, I just really dug. As far as if I have to pick one more, what would I pick? All right, that was five, wasn't it? *Five Deadly Venoms*—

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Yeah, I think that was pretty good.

Chris LaCava:

—*Master Killer, Fist of Legend*...what's that now, yeah? That's enough. Plenty of good movies to check out, ladies and gentlemen.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, and there's this...so one of the things that happens as part of the marketing strategy here in whistlekick is we spend a lot of time on social media. There's just a lot of stuff that gets pushed out and I don't know why but I feel like I need to ask you if you've at least heard of this movie that just popped back up called *Miami Connection*?

Chris LaCava:

Miami Connection? No.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, this was this really terrible, self-financed taekwondo movie done at Miami in like 87. This taekwondo grand master, he went broke in the first three days doing it so it's all of his students and it's just kind of popped back up and everyone that'd seen it has said this movie is far better than it deserves to be. I'll try and throw a link out there. I haven't had—

Chris LaCava:

I'll check it out.

Jeremy Lesniak:

—it keeps ending up in a tab in my computer to watch it and I keep running out of time.

Chris LaCava:

I'll definitely check it out.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Check it out, listeners, if you can find it online. It seems like it's going through these rights issues. People put it up and it gets taken down.

Chris LaCava:

What was the name of it again?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Miami Connection.



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Chris LaCava:

Miami Connection. Do you know who the practitioner was? The star of it?

Jeremy Lesniak:

YK Kim.

Chris LaCava:

YK Kim. Okay.

Jeremy Lesniak:

This little Korean guy who has a whole bunch of stripes in his belt and runs this huge school down in Miami now and had all this press for this re-release. It's crazy stuff. This is—in watching the bits that I had—it reminds me of *Scarface*. Not at all in plot but in terms of style and terrible music and hair and all these things. If anybody's out there, a fan of 80's movies and wants to check out a possibly terrible, possibly not terrible 80's movie. We'll link all that [00:33:44] friend of the show whistlekickmartialartsradio.com is where we keep notes on the show so this will get its own page.

Chris LaCava:

hey, maybe you can put a poll up and see what your viewers think of this movie.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, we can do that. [00:33:58] So how about actors? Is there anybody who's a favorite of yours?

Chris LaCava:

Martial arts actors or actors in general?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Martial arts actors.

Chris LaCava:

Martial arts actors. Donny Yen's good. I do enjoy Donny Yen. A lot of the guys that I like are—I'm not really watching it for the acting. I'm usually watching it for the choreography but as far as acting is concerned, Donny Yen is definitely up there in the ranks, absolutely. You kind of took me off guard with that one, buddy, thanks a lot. Appreciate that

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey, hey, I do with it with what I can. This is hard-hitting investigative journalism that we're conducting here. Is there anyone that you enjoy watching as a technician that is a maybe not so good actor?



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Chris LaCava:

Alright, some people are going to hate me for this but Jet Li .

Jeremy Lesniak:

Really?

Chris LaCava:

I definitely respect him for his acting and his martial arts but definitely respect him more for the martial arts but I guess I haven't really...I don't know. *Fist of Legend* is definitely my favorite. One of my favorites and he did a great job in that but in general, he doesn't make me go Oh my god! What a performance, as far as acting's concerned.

Jeremy Lesniak:

He's definitely a better martial artist than he is an actor. I don't think too many people out there are going to argue that. He's a tremendous martial artist.

Chris LaCava:

My god, yeah. Yeah, absolutely. We'll see how much hate mail I get off of that one.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We will absolutely link your email address, home phone number, physical address.

Chris LaCava:

Fantastic!

Jeremy Lesniak:

All that on the show notes so people can direct all that hate mail to you and not me which is important.

Chris LaCava:

How dare you not like Jet Li's acting?! Damn you!

Jeremy Lesniak:

You know, this show and maybe I'm going to jinx it now, we get very little hate mail.

Chris LaCava:

We need to change that.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Just overwhelmingly positive so I appreciate that. Hopefully, it doesn't change.

Chris LaCava:

Oh, we can make that change right now. No, I'm kidding

Jeremy Lesniak:

Like you said, we can fix anything in post so I can make you say anything that I want. Have you seen the Forbidden Kingdom?

Chris LaCava:

I have not.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Jackie Chan and Jet Li. Great film, great film.

Chris LaCava:

I definitely will check that out. I will, man. Is it on Netflix?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I don't know. I don't have Netflix.

Chris LaCava:

Oh, dude. Netflix is great, man.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I have TiVo.

Chris LaCava:

TiVo? Okay.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, I just started doing that and record everything.

Chris LaCava:

Gotcha. I gotcha. Netflix, awesome. We actually got rid of cable and just have Netflix. We have basic cable and we don't have the extras, bells and whistles and we just got basic cable and Netflix and Netflix, a lot of awesome flicks.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Oh, absolutely. I've had Netflix off and on and I go through these phases where I get in for a little while and then I'll stop because I've seen the stuff I want to see and just the way that Comcast bundles things for me to drop television would save me a dollar a month.

Chris LaCava:

Oh, gotcha.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, there's really no point but have you seen the new season of Daredevil?

Chris LaCava:

Of course! What, Season 2?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Chris LaCava:

Of course.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Listeners, if you like martial arts action, you need to check out Daredevil. It is—it's not just one of the best martial arts, we'll call it a TV show, that's been out there. It's one of the best series I've ever seen. The acting is fantastic, the martial arts, the choreography, all that's fantastic. I don't want to put words in your mouth but—

Chris LaCava:

No, no, that will be actually hard to argue. It is excellent. It is very well done. Absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, how about books? We know that you're not looking forward to writing your own book but are you a reader?

Chris LaCava:

I was never been big in the books. I think that stems from my ADD. It takes me forever to read books. Maybe I'm sharing a little too much but in order to read a book I will, let's just say, I'll read a page, I'll have to reread that page maybe twice to three times to retain what I just read so books, to me, I like them and I have them for reference. In my acupuncture clinic, I have books for reference. They're not beginning to end books. They're Okay, I need this information. I know where to get it, and I love books but as far as sitting down casually reading a novel, not me just because of the, unfortunately, my mind



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just doesn't work that way. So, if it takes a person a week to read a book, it will take me three and that's...

Jeremy Lesniak:

I understand. I'm in a similar boat.

Chris LaCava:

Yeah? So, I love videos and that's one of the reasons I think I love seminars—doing seminars so much, whether I'm attending them or teaching them is because that interaction. I have that kinesthetic and visual—information is coming in visually and kinesthetically that I retain it. If someone gave me a training manual, I'll be like Okay, this is going to take a while, but it's the application that really does it for me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I concur.

Chris LaCava:

So, all those people who love to read books, they're just shaking their head going, Oh god, next person!

Jeremy Lesniak:

Anybody that's taught knows that different people respond to information in different ways.

Chris LaCava:

Absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You got to teach it in different ways. What is a book other than a method for conveying information, right? And I have learned more listening to podcasts over the past couple of years than I have reading books because I can listen when I'm doing something else. I can just dedicate part of my brain and I'm able to take in more that way. Certainly, I'd rather be doing, especially if it's martial arts, I'd rather do martial arts than listen to someone than tell me how to do something but even that is better than reading about how to do something but different people learn in different ways and that's okay.

Chris LaCava:

Do we talk about teaching in the way people learn in the preamble or the pre-show? Or do we talk about it in this?

Jeremy Lesniak:

We talked about it a little bit in both.



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Chris LaCava:

Alright, rock on. I know, for me, once I started teaching academia when I started teaching at universities and whatnot, we really started getting into how do people learn and those three styles of learning. The main three styles of learning being auditory, visual and kinesthetic. One that helped me learn better but also helped me become a better teacher so I know how to present information to each other of those three types of learners so when I'm teaching a seminar I need to try to say it, show it, and have them do it. I think that's one of the benefits of when I teach is that I try to incorporate that every seminar because I don't know who learns in what methods the best so I need to hit all three.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right, and I agree and the conversation you're referencing that was before we started the show and so, listeners, what he's referencing is we had the discussion talking about the skillset to do and the skillset to teach are very different and that, oftentimes, in the martial arts, we just kind of lugged them together. Oh, you have achieved such and such rank, you are qualified to go teach. Go do it. And we talked about how those were separate and you even brought up an example of one of your instructors saying that they had known 9th Dans that couldn't teach and 1st Dans that could.

Chris LaCava:

That was a little bit more about rank, not less more about teaching but more about rank. We've talked about rank as well but for me, rank is secondary. Me, it's more about the skill and the application because people say, Oh, knowledge is power. I think that's crap. It's the application of knowledge that's power. You have, Am I learning something? So, I know something but if I can't apply it, what good is it? I'm not learning something for somebody to go, Wow, he's so smart! Oh wow! I really could care less about that. Whatever I take in, I need to be able to apply that or else that's worthless information to me. Wow, did I go off on a binge, brother? Sorry.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, it's all right. This is what this show is all about. Those tangents are gold!

Chris LaCava:

Hopefully, you'll be able to edit that in somewhere.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, going to leave it right there where it belongs.

Chris LaCava:

Awesome.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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We're taking the audience on a ride. They don't know—hey, anybody that's been listening for a little bit knows, they don't always know what they're going to get when they tune in. Sometimes we wander around. Sometimes in the Thursday shows that are just me talking about a subject or profiling movies, sometimes I wander a bit and that's okay because I think all of us have had a martial arts instructor who wanders so we kind of get used to that in this realm.

Chris LaCava:

Oh, I remember now. We were talking about my old teacher. Actually, he's my current teacher actually, Grand Master Lim. Grand Master Lim Hyun Soo. He's in Daegu, Korea. He's my Hapkido instructor and in our association, our master certificate, our master rank is separate than our 1st Dan, 2nd Dan, 3rd Dan so it doesn't matter what you are. You test for your Master certificate when it's right, when it's time and so I was in Korea and we were just training and my teacher goes, LaCava, this year you test Master Certificate, I said, I appreciate it but I'm only 3rd Dan, he's like Oh, no, no, no. Master when I say Master, and I say, Oh, all right. And he goes, Sometimes, when I had seen some people, 6th Dan, 7th Dan, 9th Dan, no master. Then I see sometimes 1st Dan, 2nd Dan, 3rd Dan, Master, So Master is not about the rank—the number rank—it's when you're ready and when he said that I was like Wow, I felt really special but I was like Wow, that's pretty deep too,

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, let's unpack that because I'd taken that to mean one's ability to teach but you're saying that's a little different.

Chris LaCava:

No, no, one's ability to do. A teaching certificate would be different.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, let's say, give me an example, let's say I'm a 4th degree in your system and I've got somebody else who's also a 4th degree but I've got a Master Certificate and they don't. What's the difference?

Chris LaCava:

What is the difference? To be honest, once again, rank for me isn't that big of a thing but I guess maybe it's recognition. Maybe I would be taught a little differently if I did or didn't have my Master Certificate. Maybe? I don't know. But I think, for me, it's showing me that my teacher believes in me enough and what I can do that it's so—just a form of appreciation like You know what? Good job. Keep up the hard work. Don't screw off.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. All right, I get it now. That's really different than what a lot of schools, say, the vast majority of what schools or styles do so it's interesting to hear that.



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Chris LaCava:

For my Master certificate, it may be different from other people within the association. In our association, we do Hapkido, we also do [00:46:11] is a sword style which my teacher, Grand Master Lim studied [00:46:18] is a Japanese sword style and he also studied Korean sword styles so what he did is he blended them together to create [00:46:30] and the other reason why he created it is because, up to this point, there's been quite a bit of turmoil between Japan and Korea with the Japanese occupation of Korea. This was him trying to bridge people together, bridge those gaps that have been happening over the years, over the decades actually. And so, created this style [00:46:57] which from the outside perspective looks very Japanese. It looks very [00:47:02]-based. So, getting back to the original topic, for my Master Certificate, I just didn't have to do Hapkido and I have to do Hapkido and Gohapto for my test so I need a certain level of proficiency in both in order to get my Master Certificate. Funny thing is that when I first went to Korea, I just want to be a Hapkido guy. I didn't want to do sword, I didn't want to do any of that. When we get to Korea, first time I got into Korea—oh, dude, there's a bunch of stories right there, oh my god—all right, but anyway, first time I go to Korea, we're talking with Grand Master Lim and he says, Okay, so morning session Hapkido, what do you want to do in the afternoon? I say, I'd like to do Hapkido in the afternoon, and he had that kind of confused look on my face and he was like, No Gohapto? and I said, No, I just want to be a Hapkido man. I want my Hapkido to be topnotch. Oh, and then he said, Then maybe you do Gohapto? and I know I had that confused look on my face and he's like, Those people who do Hapkido, their Gohapto gets better and those people who do Gohapto, their hapkido gets better, and at first, I just thought it was kind of like a sales gimmick but I thought to myself, You know what? I trust him. Okay and he created the style. I'm in Korea. I would be a fool not to take advantage of an opportunity to train with a founder of a style when it's offered to me by him, It's like—so I was like Okay, morning Hapkido, afternoon Gohapto, and as I continued on, he was right! Dude, I couldn't believe it! It's like, okay, you have Hapkido. Our Hapkido is a very physical style but you need another person in order to get your energy to work on resistance and all that. You need another person. Gohapto is primarily solo practice but what I come to find out is that a lot of the footwork, the body positioning, the hand movements are—there's a lot of crossover between the two and now, then I really started to get what he was saying. Now, I get why somebody does one style, the other style gets better. You've got Hapkido where you're training with other people and then you got Gohapto where you're training by yourself and you still practicing both arts no matter what you're doing. I was like, Wow, that's awesome! so, yeah. That's my story about that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, you seem to have this epiphany moment remembering a block of stories when you went to Korea. Any one of those you want to pull out for us?

Chris LaCava:

Oh man. Getting to Korea was crazy. This was 2003. Never been to Korea before in my life. Very limited knowledge in Korea. I was in acupuncture school and I had some Koreans in my acupuncture class so



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they were kind enough to help me with some of my beginning learning of Korean. Pretty much, I knew very little to nothing, let's just put it that. We fly over to Korea then from there, we were supposed to jump on another plane and fly down to Daegu. So, we fly into Incheon which is out near Seoul and take another plane to Daegu where my teacher is and so, we fly there and this is September 11th 2003 so this is 2 years, 3 years after— 2 years after the World Trade Center and we're flying out of Boston so I'm a little freaking out a little bit so hopefully lightning doesn't strike twice. You with me on that?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Chris LaCava:

So, we fly over to Korea, we get to Incheon, all is good in the world. Korean Air is awesome, really good airline. I digress, moving back on topic. We get to Incheon and we're trying to buy tickets to the next flight down to Daegu because they fly all the time down, in-country they're flying all the time and so we're trying to buy and all the people that we keep trying to buy tickets from, they're crossing, they're taking their index fingers and crossing them that they're going Taepoo, taepoo, taepoo, and we're like, What? I don't get it. What do you mean taepoo? Come to find out: typhoon. So, no flights in or out of the airport at that time. So, now we have—we still need to get down to Daegu. What the hell are we going to do? I've never been there before so I am totally relying on everybody and the other two guys that are the primary guys who have been there before so I'm like, What do we do, guys? so I'm following their lead so instead of a 45-minute plane ride down to Daegu, this was before the KTX, the bullet train was implemented. So before then, we ended up taking instead of a 45-minute plane ride, a 5-hour bus trip through the typhoon. Oh my god! We're going through the typhoon and this bus driver was driving like a bat out of hell and we're like We're going to die I mean, cars are swerving off the road. He's kind of tail spinning a little bit and whatnot so we ended up pulling over into this rest stop and we just start buying liquor. We were like, If we're going to die, I don't want to feel this, so we just start pounding We eventually made it there and it was awesome but let's see, from where we started to when we got to Daegu, it was probably about 35 hours which normally shouldn't take that long. Normally, a flight would take between 12 to 14 hours and then another 2 hours down and you know where we're at. So, this is my first year in Korea and my parents expected a phone call from me when I got there. So, my parents are seeing pictures of Korea with boats into buildings and signs down and cars flipped over from the typhoon. They wrote me off like, Oh my god! My son is dead! Oh my god! so finally I called them they were pissed off but happy that I was alive but that was a trip from hell. Every trip after that was fantastic compared to it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

All right, so remind me not to travel to Korea with you.

Chris LaCava:



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No, you can travel with me now. That first time was terrible. Every time since, great! No problem.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But it would be my first time so maybe there's some bad luck for the first time.

Chris LaCava:

No, I'd be your good luck. I got rid of all the bad luck for anybody I bring.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, good, good. That's good to know. Well then, maybe I'll go to Korea with you.

Chris LaCava:

Cool. It'll be a good time, we'll have a blast. They treat us—they train us hard but they treat us really well. Sometimes you'll hear people talk about, Oh, the Koreans they beat up on the Americans, and that's not true here. I mean, we train hard, don't get me wrong, but we don't get anything that anybody else doesn't get. Everybody else gets the same thing as we get so it's not Uh-oh, we're going to mess up the round eye on this one it's not that at all. They train us hard but they treat us well. They take care of us. They're really good to us and I'm very fortunate to have my friends and martial arts family in Korea.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Rock on.

Chris LaCava:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, what's keeping you going? You got any goals you're working towards?

Chris LaCava:

Goals. I'd like to start doing—well, big goal besides the quote I said before. I just want to have a comfortable life being able to support my family on things I love to do and things that I love to do, martial arts, music, whatever. I'd like to be able to provide for my family doing those things so I'd like to increase my seminar schedule. I'd like to start doing DVDs and instructional videos because a lot—I get this every time when I go to the seminar, I'm down in Texas, Virginia, I'm in Georgia or wherever—I'll do the seminar, everybody's pumped and like Whoop! All right! Hey, you got any DVDs? I'm like, Oh, crap. I don't. So, it's like I sell merchandise and whatnot, I got t-shirts and all that kind of good stuff but I would like to start producing some instructional DVDs to help people that when I go places to help them remember the information that I'm putting out or maybe get some new information. Get some new information that they might be able to adapt to something that they already do so where people can



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start seeing the connections. There's a lot of people in the martial arts, they look for the differences where I look for the similarities. A lot of my friends feels the same way. They look for the similarities.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I do. I absolutely do. I like tying things together and seeing how similar even the most disparate of arts really are at the heart of—

Chris LaCava:

Oh yeah! That's one of the things with teaching at a lot of these conferences. I get to rub elbows with some pretty bigwigs. Guys who've been in twice as long as I have. Guys who have been there and done that and I watched them and I trained with them and I watch everybody because I love watching and seeing and putting things together and when you get down to it, a lot of these guys move the same. Their principles are very similar, if not the same. They just have different ways they talk about it and different ways they go about it but it's very much the same. You've heard the mountain analogy, right?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Probably but elaborate.

Chris LaCava:

Martial arts is a mountain, right? You have martial arts all at the base of the mountain, all around the mountain. Everybody sees different things on the way up but once they get to the top, everybody sees the same thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I like that.

Chris LaCava:

Yeah, and you can even take it even farther if you want it to. You have, on one side of the mountain, you have Tangsoodo, you have Taekwondo, you have styles that are very similar, they're going up their own path and they may see similar things but, yet, they still see little differences because it's their path. Now if you look all the way in the other side of the mountain, say like, Judo or Gotto, or weapons-based or whatnot, you're going to see something totally different than what they see on the other side of the mountain but yet, when they get up to the top, they still all see the same thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I like that.

Chris LaCava:

You picking up on what I'm laying down, brother?



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Jeremy Lesniak:

I can, yeah, good stuff, good stuff.

Chris LaCava:

Sometimes I can get deep, wow.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, you've mentioned a few times that you offer seminars and whatnot, so say someone wants to book you for a seminar, attend one that you've already got planned, this is kind of your commercial time. So how can people know more about that?

Chris LaCava:

Facebook is a great way to get a hold of me and I have a Facebook page. So, my Facebook page, my teacher page is facebook.com/chrislacavalac and that's my page.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. We'll definitely link that at the show notes.

Chris LaCava:

I appreciate that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. How many seminars are you doing? Sounds like you do a fair number of them.

Chris LaCava:

Right now, I'm doing about two a month.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow, that's keeping you out there.

Chris LaCava:

Yeah, so, I think next month, May, June. Yeah, next month, I'll be in Georgia, looking forward to that and it's cool, once again, when I can kind of mix things together so I'm teaching a seminar in Georgia but that weekend there's also Blade Show going on in Atlanta so I can check out Blade Show while I'm down there which is really cool.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice. Nice. 'Cause you're also a knife guy, aren't you? We didn't really get to talk about that.



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Chris LaCava:

Yeah, yeah. I study Kali. Loved knives ever since I was a little kid. I also trained under [01:00:19] I'm a certified knife instructor under him and I teach a lot of knife combatant course. A lot of people teach defense against the knife, I teach that. But one class that seems to be very popular with people, for me, is my tactical knife proficiency classes. I teach a class called DRO which stands for Deployment, Retention, and Obstructions. Those are the three things you need to be aware of and not master but be able to pull off or try to negate in any kind of altercation in self-defense so it's primarily self-defense using a knife.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. Rock on.

Chris LaCava:

Thanks, brother.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, as we wind out, not that you haven't dropped a ton of wisdom on all of us today but—

Chris LaCava:

Hopefully you can mix something down good, bro.

Jeremy Lesniak:

—Hey, without a doubt. Let's end on the highest of notes.

Chris LaCava:

Follow your dreams. No. You know what? Besides that quote, this was said to me at a conference by Bruce Chutnick. He said to me, Don't take yourself too seriously. Take what you do seriously. And he might've turned it around and said the other way but it still means the same thing. Take what you do seriously but don't take yourself too seriously because a lot of people in the martial arts get hung up on being top dog [01:01:57] being bigger than somebody else and that's where we stop learning and that's where we kind of fall down a black hole so no matter what, when you train in the martial arts, love what you do but don't take yourself too seriously. Enjoy it. Laugh.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you for listening to Episode Eighty-Four of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio and thank you to Master LaCava. Head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for the show notes including links to everything we talked about today. If you like the show, make sure you're subscribing or using one of our free apps. They're available on both iOS and Android. For those of you kind enough to leave us a review,



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