



Episode 78 – Sir Gemini Asonte | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hello everyone it's episode 78 of whistlekick martial arts radio. The only place you are the best stories from the best martial artists like today's guest Sir Gemini Asonte. My name is Jeremy Lesniak and I founded whistlekick and I'm also your host here for martial arts radio. Whistlekick, as so many of you know already, makes the world's best sparring gear as well as really great apparel and accessories all for practitioners and fans of traditional martial arts. I'd like to welcome our new listeners, and thank those of you checking us out again. If you're not familiar with our products head on over to [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) and take a look at what we make. If there's one thing we become known for other than this podcast, it's our sparring boots. They're the closest thing you can get to sparring barefoot but they're still safe and comfortable. Add to that, the lack of a tow strap more durable materials and longer-lasting design and you start to see why they've become so popular so quickly, check them out over [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). Now, if you want to see the show notes for this or any other episode, those are on a whole different website and that's [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). While you're over there go ahead and sign up for the newsletter, we offer special content to subscribers and is the only place to find out about upcoming guest for the show. We only email a few times a month, we never sell your information and sometimes we even throw in a coupon. Now today on martial arts radio we have a really interesting guest, someone unlike anyone we've had on before. For Sir Gemini Asonte gives us a wonderful look inside the world of historical European martial arts but he has a lot of time and with martial arts styles that more of us are used to. This makes him uniquely qualified to give us an introduction to what his world looks like and help us understand the similarities between his practices and the rest of the martial arts community. Let's go.

Sir Gemini, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

**Gemini Asonte:**

Thank you very much. It's an honor to be here.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

A lot of fun to have you here. Now, of course I welcomed you with a title that few in the Asian martial arts are going to be familiar with. So, we should probably explain right off the bat that you are not here is a representative or primarily a karate stylist or tae kwon do stylist so let's just gonna wrap the answer of that in the first question, how did you get started in the martial arts and why am I referring to you as Sir?

**Gemini Asonte:**

I started in the martial arts when I was seven. I began, I was very active energetic child and but we lived out in the country here in California very small town called Gustine, only about 3000-4000 people in it at



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the time and we lived out the country on a ranch and other than ranch work to do you know you would watch kung Fu theater on Sunday and then go out and pretend to be a ninja or kung Fu master and run around. But because you know there's not a lot of people out here, you'd be doing it by yourself and that I was very active in and I wanted to learn martial arts I want to learn karate or kung Fu actually wanted to learn kung Fu and I bugged my mother and bugged her and bugged her and I think she thought it might be a good way to get some of my extra energy out so I started taking classes in a town about 40 miles away, 30 miles away. And I went and to observe the class and it was very intense [00:04:01.26] they used to be a post office downtown in a town called Seire and I member walking in and they my parents just dropped me off, they had other things to go do so they dropped me off and I was gonna walk through adult class and then go take the kids class because it was a brand-new thing for for him. So, I remember watching it and everybody was stretching and sweating and just very intense and I remember this very slight short guy walks in and everybody whatever they were doing just instantly snapped to attention, stood up, vowed, he walked through the room and then walked into his office and then everybody went back to their very intense stretching preparing for the lesson, I was just in awe. I thought, my goodness, what is this guy he was just like the Masters I was seeing on television. And that very same class, one of the guys I was watching him achieve the splits for the first time and then about three seconds later the screaming started because he had ripped all of the all of the ligaments in the inside of his groin on each side and they called the ambulance and took him away and all this time while I'm standing there watching, to this day, I am not extremely flexible and I think part of that is psychological but I say it anyway and I watch the class and I was just absolutely amazed. His kid's class is only once a week the and so I did that and immediately like two weeks later, we went outside and started working out in the park, I learned later that you just leased the rented the building for a couple of months and as soon as summer started he he always practiced in an outside never stayed inside. And his name is Dave Spinella and he was the most impressive man I've ever seen in my entire life and I would go back every week and I did that for about two and half years when I turned 10, I got the opportunity to go full-time that which is 2 to 3 times a week and then there was two-hour sessions, it was taekwondo and he was extremely strict and I was unbelievably fanatical. And I went to three times a week to three hours at night and we practice outside outside, outside the first summer and then we took a job like we normally do and we jogged and stopped, we went out of the park down the street and we stopped in front of this building that had you know [00:06:48.06] self-defense and I was just in awe, it was like my my Mecca my Shangri-La and walked it had you know everything and nothing all at the same time. It had mirrors and wood floors and a couple of posters on the wall and that was it. Nothing else. Man, there's a little place in the back to change and that is where I took my beatings I couldn't go to the kids class and he didn't do a really extensive kids class and so he said that because I have been going for a couple of years and I was very dedicated he offered that I can fit it and go to the adult class and I was just thrilled and so I did. And the youngest person next to me was 19 years old and they did not treat me like a 10-year-old. I thought and stars and kitchen punched and worked out on the hardwood floor and beat myself into what I thought a great martial artist would be. And I practice every day, I still practice every day you know and I went through until I was 16 with him almost 17 days and then he closed the school and I took about a year off still practiced every day and then found a goju ryu school and I studied goju ryu for the next five years through black belt and then the same school offered an akijitsu classes and I remained there and had another location ad moved too and did akijitsu for



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another four. I was also exposed to Western boxing and a French style called Sauvage which is French kickboxing and studied French kickboxing sauvage for another three years along with it. And finally, in Asian styles I studied a kempo, an American kempo, they called shoshu kempo out here, but that is basically American kempo and I went through black belt in American kempo as well. Then I started in 1994-95, I stood my first seminar in Western-style martial arts, that is the martial arts from Europe, starting from the medieval period Around 1300 and it travels all the way down to the present day. It's not as known as or as recognizable as the Asian styles, but once I began with it, I began learning about a treatise by an Italian author, he was born about 1350 and he wrote a book called the flower of battle and the Getty Museum down in California you have copies, there's four copies in existence and it has texts and it just absolutely came alive. I started studying and learning more and more about taking seminars with people like Bob Karen who was one of the leading authorities on it at the time and just absolutely fell in love with the idea of the medieval knights and the Western weapons. I was always super super interested in weapons and nunchucks the sword, samurai sword, the bow, the [00:10:37.10] and spear. I was always fascinated with weapons and I excelled at them and so taking on Western weapons really called for me so I kept studying and along the way I would find anybody and everybody that I could practice with which was pretty sparse and rare at the time it had gained a huge amount of popularity since then. And there are organization and there are reenactment groups there are and reenactment groups the range from attempting to just reenact combat that may turn into kind of a sports groups like the society of creative Anachronism, there are more of a sport group. They're, consider them like a kendo, what kendo would be to the actual steel representation of the samurai sword, right? Kendo can strike specific targets they were specific armor, you know, there are specific rules of engagement sort of thing, those type of groups do that type of c [00:11:42.28]. Then there's a historical European martial arts or HEMA groups and they use different types of materials. The reenactment groups mainly stick to rattan wood, much like an escrima stick and the Filipino style only much thicker, they run about an inch and a 1/4 inch and 1/2 to make weapons out. Of the HEMA groups tend to use either blunted steel, which are called [00:12:07.21] steel or they use poly mold synthetic weapons that represent the same heft and width of a real blade and there's been a lot of advances in technology in using those type of training tools, most of the time you use anything from general modern fencing gear, although again the communities has grown so much that their entire industries now on the gear alone and all the way up to full armor. I fight all the way up into in tournaments all the way up to full harness. I wear a harness that represents about 1380-1400 and we can talk about that what it is and all that, but and then I wear just fencing gear sometimes it just depends on the type determined that I wanted to do it all just like I did in the Asian styles. And so, I've been doing and competing [00:13:05.00] for the last 17 years and in their rankings, in some of the styles, they do have rankings just like the Asian styles do, they vary from school to school, from place to place, and one of the first one that I received was in a group where you it was more the sport side of it. And doubts called the SCA society of creative anachronism and you go up through the ranks kind of, kind of in the same vein as a martial art except you don't graduate in belt rankings you go up and you fight in tournaments and you fights is melees which are groups on groups Full Contact and you have to achieve a certain amount of knowledge about the history and so forth. And you actually voted on by council, they also take into account your what they call your pure like qualities. So, are you good person, are you a leader, are you honest, you uphold those ideals of chivalry and that's one of the things that is follow me along this career all the way



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through. And the council votes and the title that you receive is knight and that's why title of Sir comes with it. And you know, a lot of the HEMA groups, Historical European Martial Arts Groups, they have different title sets, they go all the way up to Masters in theirs but really I keep the title loosely at Sir Gemini, my real name is Gemini, hazards of being born in the 60s, but I do keep the title simply because my school not only has a martial art aspect to it and a very serious one but the entire idea of the school, the entire emphasis of the school and training also upholds the ideals of chivalry. And what I've always done interesting in that is those ideals, if you go through the ideals of a taekwondo, right? You have honesty, integrity, indomitable spirit, right? The whole, the list that people you know Count off every time. Well, the knightly virtues are exactly the same as that because you know, humans want to treat humans as they want to be treated, right? So, those things are always present, that's how humans want to set up a system to treat each other. So, you have the ideals of chivalry for us are honor, courtesy, justice, prowess, which is you know your feats of arms, strength, humility, courage, honesty, and fidelity. And so, I that type of environment really, really spoke to me and a lot of the Western community just focuses on interpretation of the old manuscripts and bringing them to life in the martial artist. I wanted to always hold onto the attachment of those social interactions that martial artist would have and those social responsibilities that a martial artist would have and so we really purport the ideals of Chivalry which is why our school was called by Knight's quest and that's been my journey in a nutshell.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well cool. So obviously was a lot of fun for me when we started talking the idea of having you on the show, because you do represent this different aspect of martial arts when we haven't had on the show and wanted I'm to guess the majority of our listeners aren't familiar with. I know, I'm certainly very unfamiliar with medieval martial arts I mean, European martial arts, I think this is how you referring to it, historical European martial arts. So, you have this wonderful ability to bring in this new information to us but you also have the context of Asian martial arts which the majority of our listeners are going to be looking at what you're saying from that perspective. So, you're a nice bridge for us and as you said it is becoming more popular, here I am in Vermont and we have a group, multiple groups now that are offering historical European martial arts, it's not huge you can't find it the same way you can find taekwondo or a karate school but they're out there and they're growing.

**Gemini Asonte:**

Yes, and I think that one of the things that I saw beginning in my studies of European martial arts and in deeper European medieval history and such was that the ability to teach it especially to children was not as prevalent. You have some people that came from the Asian styles that were working with it but you have a lot of people that came from classical fencing background but you didn't have a whole lot of people that could structure it and see it as a structure to reinterpret for others. Some schools adhere strictly just with specific manuscripts. So, there are some schools that are strictly [00:18:34.29] schools. They strictly work off of his manuscripts and they are beautiful. You can find them easily online you can find the illustrations and the translations that we have up-to-date on and the translations are complete just like all other translations, they changed because people do more and more work on it and they



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realize that you know in previous translations you missed the wrong [00:19:02.24] and the word doesn't mean what you thought it meant and so you kind of go, oh okay that's what that means and that the constant. Some people are of the German school some people are the Italian school. [00:19:17.00] is more the Italian school you have the German school which is more of the Lichtenhower line, [00:19:24.00] wrote around the same time actually interesting early enough. He wrote, he was born in the 1400s and wrote thereafter and he had an illustrated [00:19:37.26] beautiful illustrations. And so, if you have these illustrations done around the around the same time, we don't have anything earlier than the 1300s. The earliest one we have intact is what people refer to as the 133 and that is a manuscript on sword and buckler, it's an anonymous author and the reason it has that name is because that's what it was categorized in the royal armories because it was an anonymous author. Some people called the i33 and it is also full of beautiful illustrations and some non-some explanations and there are entire schools devoted to that one system as well. My school was not, my school is the hybrid. My school is probably one of the first hybrids that actually took the manuscripts and took the techniques over last 15 years and and employed them into what a practical application could be. So not only do we use the weapons of the period, but we also use practical application because of my Asian style background for instance, there are many kicks and punches shown in the manuscripts, there are no explanations on how to do them though. Not that we see so far but from my agent fell back on and especially for my background and savate. I use savate techniques in the punches and kicks that we use in our style, our style called Up lamacchia and I know that's kind of a daunting work but it literally translates to fighting in armor and so I use that bridge to kind of not only look at it from 24 century mind because obviously I was not there, but I also look at it as something that I can teach to everyone and try to make it as accessible to as many people as possible.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool. Well that's quite the primer and I'm sure that a lot of us listening, maybe I shouldn't speak for everyone, I can speak for myself though, I feel like I have a much better understanding of what it is you do and not only the differences but you know, I'm really feeling like there's a lot more similarity than I would've expected when we start

### **Gemini Asonte:**

Huge huge. And you would recognize every kick, every punch, every grappling technique we work from a manuscript on wrestling. We work from a 1500s manuscript on wrestling some [00:22:24.14] who was a grappler in Germany and the techniques that you see in his manuscript and many others, we have hundreds of manuscripts but none really is complete, you'll see the same judoka moves, use the same, the exact same. You know, I am still student, I feel it's very very important and I am an [00:22:48.29] I take that Akio and I study from the wonderful instructor and a [00:22:55.26] sensei here and the similarities and the techniques are fascinating and thrilling because you know a lock is a lock is a lock. The human body works only so many ways, we only have 206 bones and they only work in certain ways and so, there's really nothing new under the sun, again it's just everybody's different take on on on how it works.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah and certainly I want to go down this rabbit hole because I'm sure you and I could talk for quite a long time on it but, you know in the martial arts especially in a lot of Asian martial arts, people get bogged down in history and lineage and who was the first is to do certain things and how old is this art, and I bet we could have a discussion about some of these roots because you know if you have access, if we have access to these manuscripts now, certainly people had access to them hundred years ago. So, where's that influence flowing, where do those lines really go.

**Gemini Asonte:**

People people think a lot of times that there was a disconnect, there really wasn't. We have many authors from you know, through the 16th and 17th, 1800s and 1900s that wrote about these masters, they wrote about these authors. So, it was never really lost it just really wasn't as paid attention to. I'll give you an example of something completely different but have the same type of application. So, have you seen the Sherlock Holmes movies?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

The newer set? Yes.

**Gemini Asonte:**

Okay. Well, Arthur Conan Doyle wrote the Sherlock Holmes movies right? Not the movies, I'm sorry the books. Well inside the Sherlock Holmes series, he described at the martial arts that Sherlock Holmes used, it was called barditsu. Okay. And for a long time, it was really kinda just ignored and fought as part of something in his books, in the fantasy. Well there were few people that knew, knew of it but there was a lot of people that all of a sudden like well wait a minute, let's go take a look at this and sure enough, in the 1800s, Japanese were coming to England and a few of them, judoka especially were being introduced in England and using a part of their arts along with English boxing and a lot of other English traditional techniques, stick fighting, sword fighting and it was a martial arts that eventually developed in Victorian England and [00:25:42.11] called barditsu. And to this day, we have people that are rediscovering, unearthing this art and its fascinating and it's beautiful there's these judo throws that are strictly judo throws because they were judoka coming from Japan and living in England in these places. These places were very forward thinking for their time, women took martial arts at that time. They learned to defend themselves for self-defense purposes walking on the streets of London and their techniques involving umbrella or a walking cane or walking stick. And so, you know it's amazing how the martial arts from all over the world will blend because human's been blending for you know, millennia and it's incredibly fascinating to me to see those convergences.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Yeah and if you or anyone out there is used to following whistlekick on social media you know that we've put out some of those pieces about people rediscovering the lost actual martial art of Sherlock Holmes in the early women's self-defense stuff because you know as we start to dig in and really discover, you know I am a bit of a history nerd and also martial arts nerd, two of my passions and so anytime they intersect that's a lot of fun.

**Gemini Asonte:**

Yeah good good friend of mine [00:27:06.07] out in San Francisco actually is one of the best practitioners on the West Coast that I know of and that he and quite a few others will put on that we have what's called Dickens Fair out here in San Francisco at the Cow Palace, one of our big-time stadiums where they reenact the world of Charles Dickens during the winter time and he puts on barditsu tournaments and demonstrations and they are beautiful to watch. You can actually go on YouTube and just look at Dickens fair and you'll probably see him doing some of them it's pretty impressive.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh cool. So that was quite the intro, quite the this set up I mean obviously ago we got a little bit deeper because we had to you know we need a little bit more context before we could go on, before we could talk about who you are and your journey through martial arts over the last 17 years I think you said. But now it's Storytime

**Gemini Asonte:**

Yeah the western martial arts is 17 near from seven.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right. So, I mean there's a lot there. Of course, it sounds like I mean correct me if I'm wrong but it's the Western martial arts that you're most passionate about now.

**Gemini Asonte:**

Yes yes

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay. So, mean martial arts is a journey and for just about all this we wonder maybe not, always to different styles are to different continents of styles but you know, we move around a little bit and I think it is important for us to understand who you are now to have that context. So, let's dig through and this



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can be from any point in your timeline of course, but when it tell us a story. Tell us your best martial arts story.

**Gemini Asonte:**

So, did some thinking about this and as I told you, kind of in our preshow talk, I actually listen to every episode this podcast. I am a huge fan of this podcast, I think it's I spent [00:29:06.16] the content and I love the format of it and I love the story aspect of it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I didn't pay him to say that.

**Gemini Asonte:**

No no no the monies exchanged at all. I really do and I actually was turned to it because I've listened to martial arts podcast and another martial arts podcast, Marshall talk, actually mentioned you with a lot of praise and they weren't wrong. So, story I have is my best is because I think it was the one that was most ingrained in me from the very beginning. There's been a long journey a lot of tournaments and a lot of [00:29:46.02] and a lot of injuries and you know fighters, martial artists, are not always smart people. We'll fight when we're hurt, we'll fight when we're injured, we'll fight when we're sick, we'll fight when were not supposed to and a lot of us do that. When I think back to one of the most influential or the best moments I had, I had finished, I was 10 and I started with sabumnim and as I said I was fanatical, I worked out every day I trained every single day. My poor parents, I broke everything that was wood brick on the ranch, I broke every bag they bought me, just you know, I punched in the sand because you know, in Enter the Dragon that part where they're shoving her hands in the hot sand and shoving their hand in the hot rocks and stuff like that, that must be something you do to train. So, I'm in the backyard pounding and stand literally and pounding a bucket of rocks and just crazy stuff. But I don't know, I don't know how much of the traditionalist he was from his instructor, I never really learned a lot about his instructor his master but I'll tell you this he was one of the most impressive people I have ever seen and I wanted to be just like that student in the movies. You know, I wanted to be that people, that disciple and I worked really, really hard at it. I put everything I had into it and I was with a white belt for over two years. And that's [00:31:25.06] no stripes and only five belts. And I never got a black belt in taekwondo and I'm really actually proud of that because at that time you were not even allowed to test under the age of 18 in his system, in his [00:31:40.26] in his school. And so, I followed the adults I you know sparred with the adults and he invited you to test and he was, I remember watching him one time, write out by hand calligraphy invitations to his test for his students and it was this huge thing. You know, if you got an invitation to test, cause the only test that I think twice or three times a year and that was this huge thing and it was a very private deal held in the school and such. And I was a white belt for over two years and I didn't think anything of it, I thought that's how it was supposed to go you know. I thought that's what everybody did right? That's what they did on the





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movies you work your entire life as an apprentice that whole what do you call it, kaizen in Japanese where you work at a specific task your entire life to achieve perfection that will never come. And I remember about two and half years so you have remembered I started with him when I'm seven so I'm 12 now, almost 13, and after all this time he has on leaving class one day sweaty and and and bedraggled, he hands me an envelope and smiles. And I literally thought I was Charlie getting golden ticket to the Wonka factory. I was absolutely, I was stunned by it for some reason, it just never dawned on me that I would that I will get the tests. You know before I was with adults or something I don't know what I was thinking at the time. And I remember getting it and I remember going through the test about a month later and it was grueling, it was four hours for an orange belt, it was incredible, it was incredible. And I did it, I took the test and he did not give your rankings at the end of the test. He said, thank you very much, he had two other matches come down and evaluate with him and senior students which was Mr. McKissick evaluate it. And so, I tested and then went back to class and about a month went by, and after a one class one evening a really hard one, I remember we really went through the [00:34:17.01] and you know punches and you know we did the whole thing, I don't know if you guys did that where you would slam your foot on the floor to warm up your feet to get the ball of your feet tough, you know. And you'd hear this bang bang, remember that? T

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No, I've never done that but that doesn't sound pleasant.

**Gemini Asonte:**

We did that all time. So, when you do the same thing, you kneel down and pound on the wood floor to get your hands. Anyway, we got down this class and I'm kinda straggling out and I know we had stopped class, we were just about ready to bow out, and he asked me to come forward and you know, I came forward and kneel down and he asked me for my belt and so I took it off and out of his gi, he had went back while we are setting up the bow out, he went into his office and I guess he went gone, got it and out of his gi he pulled out my orange belt and I was in tears. To this day, I get emotional about it because it was years and years and years of work and it didn't matter as much as the smile that he had, the a glow about him about somebody dedicated enough to just to stay with him and that was absolutely the proudest thing I ever had. And to this day I don't have my white belt because he kept it and it is was unbelievably moving to me and I'll never forget it. And you know, like I said I was proud of that, I went all the way through the red belt with him but he unfortunately had to close the school. And I went to blackbelts in goju ryu with blackbelts [00:36:04.20] kempo and studied pretty deep in the akijitsu and you know getting a knighthood, winning the major tournaments in a lot of organizations and reenactment groups and hima tournaments. You know I try not only to practice but Excel in in everything I dealt into, especially in the martial arts but that was something I think I don't think I've ever come across anything so special in my martial career was my first ranking from him.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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And why would you say that was so special? Was it the time you had to invest was it that it was your first rank, what was it?

**Gemini Asonte:**

I think it was all altogether right? You start at seven and this mystical little man, [00:37:06.02] just out of a movie man. And everything he did was this, I'm sure I'm looking at it through a 10-year-old eyes, but everything he did was perfect. You know, we had students that were twice his size and he could and it wasn't a mystical thing at all. I mean, he could punch a hole through your chest and everything on him with iron, man! And I worked so hard and I didn't stop working hard, I was still as fanatical, I still practice you know every single day and must've instilled something because I still practice every single day. But I think that whole being a child, the wonderment of the martial arts the enjoyment of it, even the fantasy aspect of it right? You're doing what you see is happening in the movies, you're doing with Bruce Lee does, you're doing what the ninjas do, you're doing you know, the palm of death in your head because you're 10 or 12 and then you gain recognition and achievement through it. I think that whole combination of that, you know is something that you can't re-create, I don't think you can re-create it. I think that you gather that yeah, there are fantastic accolades, there are some very emotional moments in anyone's martial arts journey whether it'd be black belt or you know Master, I don't know how many accolades people have now. But I think the combination of the work, the ideal, the man, and everything that is involved in it, I think was so special that it clearly left an impression.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. Clearly I mean I can hear your voice as you talking about it. Certainly, it still in all these years later has impact, just to think about it and, of course, I'm sure he wasn't the only one that has a strong impact on your martial arts training, your martial arts career. So I'd like you to think of somebody else. Ideally, someone that you didn't train under directly. Tell us about somebody that helped you out, helped you moving forward or just had a strong impact on you.

**Gemini Asonte:**

You're right. I've had had quite a few people in my journey that had had a strong impact on me and other, other masters and instructors that I've worked with over the years and a hundred names come to your mind. Paul and John [00:39:49] and Master McDonalds from [00:39:53], Bob Karan and folks like that but I thought about this when I saw this question and one of the things that I want to get across in the influences that I've had over my years of martial arts and I think is something that has really become an advantage to me is that although I've had hugely influential people in my life on the journey, I have always taken something about it. Taken something from their teaching, implemented it in my own life and my journey and appreciated it, showed that appreciation as best I possibly could and kept on the path and the journey. I've actually never, I've stayed with Mister Spinella all the time that I could up until I was 16 and so he's the longest I stayed with one Master. The others I've stayed with 4, 5 years at



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a time and then I, inevitably, moved on every single time. I haven't had one person through my journey and looking back, I think that that's actually worked to my advantage because it allowed me to be open to so many different influences as I walked the path and I've kept a lot of people as friends along the way but I've gone through the journey of thirty, what, seven plus years now. Taking a lot of what I could from people and showing my appreciation for them and the interest in it but moving on as well to come up with and work with the school and the style that I have now and I really think that that's been important for my path. I don't think I would have done and been where I'm at right now if I would've stayed with Mister Spinella. I don't think I would've stayed with, had the epiphanies and had the success that I had in different styles if I had stayed with one person or another one so the list is long but I'm not really sure if anyone of them is more important than the other one. I think that the journey itself has been the most important thing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Interesting and certainly, you're going to have a different perspective on your training and you're going to be in a completely different spot because you've had such a diversified, some would say scattered, but I don't really want to use that word because it sounds negative. I guess diverse is probably a better one training and history through the arts. I think that that's something that we often look down upon as traditionalists because there is something to be said for developing your skills in a particular art and taking them to a very, very high level and of course that takes a tremendous amount of time. You can't be the best at Goju in 10 years or 20 years. It requires finding Goju probably in your teens and training until you're a hundred and then somehow not die, right?

**Gemini Asonte:**

Correct. Absolutely.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think one of the things that I've always said about the martial arts, one of the things that I love about it is that it's as much or as little to you that you want it to be you can get out of it whatever you want and there's something to be said for that diversity and I think there's a lot of martial artists that would do, I don't want to say better, could stand to train in some other things and round out their training a little bit.

**Gemini Asonte:**

I think in all it depends on where you wanted to be. For me, I kind of developed over decades the idea that I wanted to develop more and more, more diversity and so from pretty early on, I think once my original school closed, I kind of decided that my path was going to be a journey of many different arts until I found the one that's really called to me and its, I don't know, it's interesting to me that what



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really did call to me in the end was creating an art from various established sources into something not new but not completely linear from history so, and I think that was the right thing for my path. I don't think I would be as far along in my martial career. I certainly don't think I would have been as successful in my martial career if I didn't have those journeys in the Asian styles and some can stay with the black belt, some not but I think training and the understanding and the years and years and years of teaching, because that has been a completely additional journey, just learning the art of teaching. Learning the art of how to teach properly, going through all these growing pains, of mistakes, of being awkward being in front of people and learning how to be a master in a house. That's a journey in itself and I don't think I would have been as successful or far along if I haven't gone that way.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure, I agree. Now you've mentioned competition a couple times during our conversation and I believe that you mention it in the context of the western martial arts. So, could you tell us what those competition really look like for those that never attended like me?

**Gemini Asonte:**

Sure. Sure. I did Asian style competitions for years. Not with any seriousness really because they were fun and it was places I could go fight. My friends went to them, I went to them, it was something that we all did. It was great. I had been in my career. I've been a police officer and they have what's called the Police Olympics. In the Police Olympics, they actually have Asian martial arts tournament as well and I fought in as well which was a lot of fun. In the western style, the tournaments are developing in an interesting way. Some tournaments are very much like an Asian style tournament where you will have the four-corner judges and a center official and they'll have the red and the white flag and you'll have various weapon styles up for grappling, for dagger and they'll call usually lay on or [00:47:26] in French and they will fight and when someone is struck they will stop it, they will look at the judges, the judges will score it and then they will move on and they're timed rounds and they will do that in synthetic weapons and [00:47:44] steel weapons and they will do that in anything from very soft armor much like modern fencing gear all the way through to full steel. There is also full contact combat tournaments. Organizations such as the Battle of Nations and they have melees where its literally the old medieval style lists except for your team defeats another team by putting the other team on the ground so you can fight and hit and grapple and do all the things that you need to do but you need to get the other person on the ground and once they're in the ground, they're considered dead and its basically battles of attrition and those are huge events and they happen in many countries as do the HEMA events and then you have a lot of the reenactment groups that use the wooden weapons and they will do tournaments by an honor system to which the combatants will actually be on the field and they will fight but the strike is actually determined by the person who is hit. So if, Jeremy, if you and I were fighting each other, whether it be with swords or swords and shields or spears and what have you and you struck me with a blow and through time and training you get to calibrate the strength of that blow, if you hit me, it is up to me and my honor to acknowledge that blow and to call it good. That's a very interesting style of tournament, one which I love. I don't love all, everything, about it and the



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tournaments that I sponsor, the tournaments that I hold are a little bit of a hybrid of that. Our tournaments are timed tournaments. They are full contact tournaments and they are, the only judge is the floor judge. We have markers on each side and what will happen is they'll have flags but you're only flagging for your corners. You have a red and white corner, red flag on one side, white flag's on the other side. The two combatants will come out and they will fight continuously and what happens is you strike the other person is on their honor to call the blow and they'll say hit and then the marker will show the tally where that blow was struck and the center judge can also override something. If someone is clearly hit but they got a lot of adrenaline, they're more inexperienced, the more inexperienced fighter, the more the center judge will go ahead and determine, hey, that was a good blow, point to this side and that's how it goes. We also have what's called the after strike and this is something that you don't see, I don't believe, in Asian style tournaments and that means if you and I, Jeremy, are sparring or fighting and I strike you, we'll say we're using long swords, and I strike you with this long sword, right? About a beat or second, within a second after that, if you strike me back, right? My point is nullified and the reason for that, it's called doppio, a double kill and the reason for that is we don't want people committing suicide to win a fight because we want to keep the technique pure as pure as we can. Want to keep the technique, right? The foundation to every martial art, Asian, Western, Indian, I don't care where you find it, the prime directive of every martial art is to strike and not be struck and I hold to that. So the tournaments that we sponsor all adhere to that and a lot of the HEMA tournaments have what's called the after blow and that just simply means you can't just run in and hope to throw a shot and fight's going to be over. The fight is not over. But if you're struck within that beat and you both strike then they stop it for a second and they call it a doppio or a double kill and they reset the fighters.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

interesting and that's kind of the similarity or parallel in a lot of Asian martial art competitions where you might have points sparring versus what a lot of competitions call continuous sparring.

**Gemini Asonte:**

Right.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Where it's not stopped because you can blitz over someone's guard as a lot of people would call it and still take it a nice solid roundhouse kick to the face.

**Gemini Asonte:**

Absolutely, absolutely.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Cool. Those sound really fun. I'm going to have to keep an eye out if there's something nearby that I can go check out.

**Gemini Asonte:**

And a lot of the large tournaments do streaming video. They're doing a lot of streaming contests now so if you look up tournaments like Long Point or SoCal Swordfight on YouTube, they'll actually have three hours of the tournaments and all its variations that you can watch so it's not hard to find.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh, neat. I'll see if I can find some of that stuff and put it in the show notes and for anybody that's new, I haven't mentioned it yet but all of our show notes and episodes and everything is on [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). So we've covered a lot of stuff, a lot of good stuff and you've told some amazing stories today but let's go on a little bit more about who you are. You made some references, some movies and how they influenced you to beat rocks and sand, just reminding me of some of the things I did myself as a kid and having watched movies and my own [00:53:22] water in the backyard and things like that but if I had to pin you down to one or two favorite martial arts movies, what would those be?

**Gemini Asonte:**

Sure. I actually, I love martial arts movies. I have a lot of favorites, of course, and I have them for different reasons. There's nostalgic reasons. The Five Deadly Venoms and things like that from the Kung Fu theater days. I love those movies. Many movies coming up growing up I just grew up on. I'm an 80's kid so all the horribly bad Asian ninja movies and there's a few that are fantastic. Because I'm the token medieval guy right now, western stylist guy, I'm going to give you some western movies that I really, really love and enjoy.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay, great.

**Gemini Asonte:**

One of them is called The Duelist. The Duelist is one of Ridley Scott's first really big production movies and it happened in the Napoleonic era. Harvey Keitel [00:54:25] and Keith Carradine stars in it and it is a movie that happens in the Napoleonic era and it's basically a quarrel between these two officers in the Napoleonic army and they literally fight, I think, five or six duels through this with sabers, small swords, on horseback, with pistols and there's some brilliant swordplay in these movies. Some brilliant swordplay and they go at each other in a lot of scenes. It's got some fantastic sword work and a lot of



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people, I think, don't realize because of the western styles aren't as popular how much of a martial arts sword fight is and Hollywood hasn't really caught up yet as far as using real western techniques in sword plays especially older medieval western techniques but, having said that, some of the later periods, what we consider later periods 17<sup>th</sup> century, 18<sup>th</sup> century, stuff had come out really, really good in a few movies and one of them is *The Duelist*. That's a really one that I really enjoy. Another one that I like as far as some of the knightly virtues is a movie called *Kingdom of Heaven*. Orlando Bloom stars in it and there are some pretty inspiring scenes in that. Very much pump you up scenes. I know a couple of episodes of your podcast, you got people mention that *Gladiator* and how that pumps people up for the day or for whatever they're doing. *Kingdom of Heaven* does that for me as well. Parts where does make someone a knight a better fighter? Well, yeah and especially when your life's on the line, it does in that instance and so I think that's pretty inspiring. Another one that is a little bit later period but has some fine, fine swordplay in it is *Captain Alatriste* which is a Viggo Mortensen movie and unfortunately, it's subtitled in Spanish. Viggo's bilingual and he actually did the entire movie in Spanish but the rapier sword and dagger, sword and cloak play in that movie is some of the best ever caught on film and its definitely worth the watch.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh, cool. I'll make sure to link those over at the website so people can check them out.

**Gemini Asonte:**

Interesting side note about *Gladiator*. We have writings by an author named Vegetius who talks about how the Romans Centurion at that time, especially by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the Roman legions were being taught, a lot of times especially towards the home country, by gladiators because they were so good at combat. Vegetius actually talks about each Centurion having to limb a tree and dig it deep enough into the ground, placing it to the ground as a post to where it still stuck out of the ground by six feet but would not sway with contact and then they were required 2 hours a day to practice with a double-weighted sword and a wicker shield every single day. It's one of the first written instances of what we have about how swordplay was practiced in the ancient world so that's kind of an interesting side note.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's really neat. I wouldn't want to dig that hole, that's for sure. There's your first test. It's a lot rougher than waxing Miyagi's car.

**Gemini Asonte:**

Right, right.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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How about actors? Is there anybody that stands out for you?

**Gemini Asonte:**

Yeah, again, I love Donnie Yen's spear work. I don't think...I have never seen a movie that shows control of the spear as well as what I've seen a couple of things that the Hero duel between him and Jet Li, I watch over and over and over again, I find something new and different and unique that he does in that duel every time. His mastery of that weapon is awe-inspiring.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah.

**Gemini Asonte:**

Another great actor is, probably one you're not familiar with, you, maybe, I don't know. His name is Anthony De Longis. Anthony De Longis, you may not be familiar with him but you've actually seen him a lot. He's been in a couple of the Highlander TV shows. He's more of a fight choreographer but he does acting gigs every now and again and he worked on Highlander as a fight choreographer/sword master. He has a mastery of the bull whip as well so he taught when Catwoman does her bull whip, that's Anthony De Longis's teaching. He was on set teaching that. In, what's this, Fearless, in the first duel, the gentleman that fights him with a saber, that's Anthony De Longis.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay, cool. There's, actually, I've heard the name. I wouldn't be able to place him but that name did ring a little bit of a bell for me.

**Gemini Asonte:**

And actually, I don't know the gentleman. I've met him two or three times. He's always been fantastic and cordial. Wonderful guy but he's actually really great at what he does, acting-wise but I jump back and forth all the time. I'm a fan of martial arts movies as a whole, not just one genre of it. You got Donnie Yen at one side, for showing how the spear's supposed to be done, man, and then you have people like Anthony and other fighters that take on the western weapons with great flair. David Ferrer in Cyrano de Bergerac was one of my original watched all the time movies.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**





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Yeah, great stuff. Great stuff, absolutely great stuff. How about books? Do you have any paper that you'd recommend for us or digital paper, I guess?

**Gemini Asonte:**

Absolutely. I'm a voracious reader. I have a huge library. Old books on dueling and the medieval area [01:00:41] all the way down. One that I read pretty religiously every year is called *By the Sword* by Richard Cohen and it's a book that takes on kind of the history of the sword as written by authors from the early ancient age all the way through modern fencing and it's a great read. Very captivating especially if you're interested in the sword and all and he goes through, not only the western style weapons, but a lot of the Asian style weapons. He talks about a lot of the Asian sword masters, Japanese sword masters especially, even some of the swordsmiths. He tells the tale about the cursed sword by the mad sword master and how his swords, because he was considered mad, his swords were especially deemed dangerous and how there was even decrees by the warring families that have one of his swords were found to be destroyed because people feared them so much. His book's really engaging. Another one for younger readers, I think it's still cool, I read it still. It's a book called *Castle Diary: The Journal of Tobias Burgess*. And it's authored by Richard Platt and it's illustrated, it's really heavily illustrated by a guy named Chris Riddell and if you got kids or young adults, even adults that appreciate a good illustrated book, it's not a big read, it's not a heavy read at all. It's geared towards kids but it's a fantastic book and it's about a young boy in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century, he goes to his uncles and he learns what it means to be a knight and it has a lot of what they had to do as far as archery. Archery is a big part of a young, medieval child's raising especially the hunt and such and a lot of things that he had to do on his way to knighthood. So, that one's a great one and a third one I'll give you is a fictional book which I think is really interesting. It's not really anything that would do with the western style, it's called *The Musashi Flex* by Steve Perry. He wrote, it's the last book in his *Matador Series* and Steve Perry is an eskrima kali practitioner and it's a fantastic series of books but you can read *The Musashi Flex* off its own. It's very much a journey of the protagonist's way in understanding the martial arts and understanding what it means to society, what it means to him, what it means to what he wants to leave as a legacy in the journey and I love that book. I think it's fantastic so that's a really great one.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool. We've had a couple people mention the *Matador Series* on this show before so it's nice to get another recommendation for that. The more those books pop up, the more likely I am to read them, of course, the more likely others are so we'll have to start checking those out, I guess. Now, you mention that you train every day or nearly every day, I think you said every day.

**Gemini Asonte:**

I do. I do.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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So what is it that keeps you motivated? Are they goals? Are there things you're looking to accomplish or is it passion? What's keeping you fired up?

**Gemini Asonte:**

There's a lot of things that are keeping me motivated. The school itself, my school itself, being an instructor, I think that if you are not continually learning, you're going to be, you're going to end up getting stale and I still love to fight. I have had combat in my lineage, in my journey, my entire life and I'm fascinated with the art of fighting. Not just being a martial artist, but the actual practical application in the art of fighting and so in, as many venues, as many weapons styles as I can, I like to study and apply those applications and Oplomachia itself, like the traditional manuscripts, is a battlefield art. What that means is simply that it's meant for practical use but it's meant for, I try to take as much flair out of the moves as possible and make them very direct but, for me, personally, I want to show my student or anyone that follows what I do, the sincerity in why I do it and the sincerity in why I do it for me is to really push myself to be as successful as I can possibly be. I think, sometimes, folks get in a stagnant kind of rut when they only follow. I shouldn't say that. It's a tough thing for me to explain but it's easier for me to say it for me, personally. For me, personally, I don't want to just practice in art, I want to excel in it. I don't just want to practice the application, I want to excel and I want to be a successful in it as possible and so that's why whether it be a reenactment group or whether it be a HEMA group or whether it be a combat league group, I'd have, I've won the highest tournament in all of these venues. The reason being is because, especially in my, the ones that I can get to, there's some back [01:06:47] that I haven't got to yet, I'm fired to go fighting mode, but I want to be, not only a practitioner but a successful one in it so I feel that that gains me the knowledge and the view when I bring it back to my students. They can look at it as that I'm still passionate about what I do and I am. I'm passionate about my ideas and my beliefs in what a martial arts should be. I'll give you, for instance, I don't like the practice of coaching in tournaments so you get two competitors out there and they are fighting and you have these coaches on each sides. It's not just in the martial arts, they do it in the UFC, they do it in other things, they do it in all of the things where they're screaming. Their coaches in their corners screaming out what to do, right? And I understand that it's a tradition, not a tradition, it's a thing that people do, right? They have this huge corner, a couple of people in their corner, they're screaming what to do. Well, for me, that is the coaches playing chess with human pieces. I would love to see a fight isolated where the combatants could not hear their coaches and see where it turns out to be because they're looking at it from a completely different point of view. For me, as a duelist, and that's really what a fight between two people are, is a duel. I feel that there is importance in having just you to rely on there. All the training and coaching that you get from someone is great but I think that when it comes down to it and you're testing these skills in a practical application, is it not the better test to have just you, just your mind, just your wit, just your cunning? That's been a goal of mine to purport in our tournaments, we don't allow coaching. We don't allow it at all and even in historical applications, some judicial duels in the medieval period, if you had judicial duels fighting out there and somebody out there is offering advice, they were taken away and punished. It was bad. We don't go to those extremes but we try to educate as far as our tournaments, sometimes you have to tell the soccer moms or the soccer dads out there, it's not actually okay to be screaming at the kids while they're fighting. You don't get to do that. It's interesting but it works. It works very well and that's my motivation to kind of purport, not



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only the art of it, but the ideal of chivalry with it and that's something I think I've been on fire for years and I really not lost the heat for it. I've been really excited about continuing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Nice. As your talking about prohibition on coaching and people on the stands would make for some interesting competition if parents were dragged out of the bleachers for coaching their children and dragged on to another ring and now they have to fight. Could be a lot of fun.

**Gemini Asonte:**

Oh yeah. I've seen and, I don't know, you've probably been to it. You've probably been to those softball games and those basketball games, some of those sporting events. These parents are horrible to each other. They're screaming and I cannot, I can't have a school and a system and a style and an ideology of the virtues of chivalry and have people, allow people to act that way. One of the things that allows me to do what I do is I don't, I won't go with the flow on it. I just simply say, No. I've had conversation with people asking me about coaching thing in my tournaments I don't allow it. People are like, you know it's done all the time. Absolutely. Just because it's done, doesn't make it right. If I have my say, and I do, you don't get to. You get to be out there by yourself. You get to do this alone and I think that it has made especially, I'm biased, I love my students and I think my students have been better for it, more confident for it. I think that they have to discuss things on the floor. If they don't feel something's right, they have to talk about it on the floor. The rule is once you leave the mat, its done. So talk about it on the mat.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I like that. So, now's your chance to promote yourself. Your commercial if someone's near you or is coming out to visit the West Coast, maybe wants to train or participate in one of your competitions. How do they find out more?

**Gemini Asonte:**

You can go to [knightsquest.us](http://knightsquest.us), that's the website and [knightsquest.us](http://knightsquest.us) has the links to our Facebook page and our Instagram, all of the links. It even has the links to our YouTube channel. We do a free YouTube channel, obviously, but we do a channel on there called the Modern Medieval, our Knight's Quest Modern Medieval and it's a lot to do with some of the old manuscripts, what they're about. Questions that people have asked and wrote in about so I had a lot of people writing in about kicks and punches, so we did an episode on it. I also do DIY projects, do-it-yourself projects, for people that may want to practice at home or get a little bit of introduction to it on how to make practice weapons and I keep the cost under \$20 so say the practice post, we call it the pell, that we're talking about, I show you how to make a modern one. Stuff from Home Depot for under 20 bucks or a practice sword which is called a cudgel, a wooden sword sometimes called a waster. We show you how to make a safe one for



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under 20 bucks or a practice spear or a shield. So you can go to our website, the [kinghtsquest.us](http://kinghtsquest.us) website, and you can get, you can go right on there that shows the links to the YouTube page and to all the pages. On there you can also email me and contact me directly. I always travel. We have a DVD out on the basic sword and shield technique of our style, Oplomachia. That's for sale on the website but you can call, ask any question you want to, I'm really, really open to anybody asking anything you want. I think that's one of the greatest things about the technology that we have now. It's also a curse. People like to say bad things on the internet. They get those internet muscles and they think they're, and that's fine but I think it's a necessary evil to be able to have conversations and to help people out as far as any information that they need about the medieval masters or where I get my sources, any of that. It's all on that website, [kinghtsquest.us](http://kinghtsquest.us) and I do seminars. Like I said, I travel all across the country. Usually people just pay to ship me someplace and I'll take care of my accommodations once I get there and I'll do anything from two-day to sometimes, four or five-day blocks of education. We do everything on introduction to sword and shield to medieval wrestling, to dagger work, to practical application. In other words, this medieval technique happened to [01:14:52] in the 1420s. This is, if you were walking down the street, is how you would interpret this technique to help you not die so we do a lot of that so yeah, that's the best place, that's the best source.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool and we'll link to all that stuff over at the website [whistlekickmartialarts.com](http://whistlekickmartialarts.com). Really appreciate you being here but why don't you take us out on a high note? Any parting advice for everyone listening?

**Gemini Asonte:**

Absolutely. Our motto for the school in Latin is [01:15:29] and what that basically means is might makes way. Not might makes right, might makes way. What we teach and what we mean by that is do not let life happen to you. Do not let circumstance and life just happen to you. There is virtue in being partially of stoic condition. Understanding the situation, determining what are the outcomes both good and bad, accepting them and moving forward but it's also imperative for anyone, martial artists, non-martial artists, just every day human, to take a chance to not let life happen to you. Get out there if you have a passion, martial arts-related or not, invest yourself in it. One of the greatest quotes I've ever heard is everything has a life price. It's always the equal amount of life in it you're willing to invest in it to achieve and there's, obviously, some plain truth in that but be willing to achieve it. Be willing to invest your life to do it and don't let circumstances be the end all, be all. Make yourself mighty. Whether it be education, whether it be in physical fitness, whether it be in knowledge because sometimes there's difference between education and knowledge but don't let life happen to you. Make your own self mighty and make your own way.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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