



Episode 90 – Sensei Scott Lombardo | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Scott Lombardo:

As somebody who studies martial arts yourself, you know there's always somebody who comes up to you and asks, well, have you ever had to use it? My response to that is always the same is just yeah, I use it every single day.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello everyone! It's episode 90 of whistlekick martial arts radio, the only place to hear the best stories from the best martial artists like today's guest, Sensei Scott Lombardo. My name is Jeremy Lesniak and I founded whistlekick but I'm also your host here for martial arts radio. Whistlekick, I'm very proud to say, makes the world's best sparring gear and some really great apparel and accessories all for those of you involved in the traditional martial arts. Thank you to the returning listeners and hello and welcome to those of you checking us out for the very first time. If you're not familiar with our products, you should take a look at what we make. Our yoga pants are our newest item and they've become very popular very quickly. Check out all of the great features that have been flying out of our warehouse at whistlekick.com. If you want to see the show notes, those are on another website, that's whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. While you're over there, get on the newsletter list. We offer special content to subscribers and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guests for the show. We only email a few times a month, never sell your information and sometimes we mail out a pretty generous coupon. On episode 90, we're joined by Isshin-ryū karateka and founder of Veterans Martial Arts Training, Sensei Scott Lombardo. While we do spend some time talking about the organization, most of our time is spent getting to know Sensei Lombardo and hearing his stories. A long-time martial artist practicing karate, Sensei Lombardo shares great stories about the ups and downs he's experienced through his life and he doesn't hold anything back. We get a pretty good window into this man and what makes him tick. This episode runs the range of emotions and I hope you enjoy it. Check it out. Sensei Lombardo, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

Scott Lombardo:

Thanks, Jeremy. Pleasure to be here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's a pleasure to have you and really looking forward to this and of course, you're not far away from me so this was almost one that we looked to do in person but of course, once I learned what you're doing, I wanted to get this episode out quickly because I think what you're doing is awesome and we'll get into that a little bit later but here we are over Skype virtually meeting so I appreciate your time today.

Scott Lombardo:

Oh, me too, thank you.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Thanks. So, let's just jump right in head first. How did you get started in the martial arts?

Scott Lombardo:

So, back in the late 80's, actually, 1990, to be exact, I was a rock and roll guitar player playing in a heavy metal band and had broken up with a girlfriend and a friend of mine was a security guard at a hospital and my sensei, who I studied with for the past 26 years, he was in the hospital teaching the security force passive restraint. How to restrain patients in the hospital without doing physical harm. So, this gentleman who is a friend of mine started studying with him at his dojo and when this whole episode came out, I left my band and I left my girlfriend and he said, hey, if you're not doing anything, you should come down and check out this karate class that I started doing. The teacher is an awesome guy and its super inexpensive. He has a regular day job and he charges like 5 bucks a week and he's like you'll love it, it's a lot of fun. So, I went down, worked out a few times there and basically, fell in love with it, I guess, you want to say and could not imagine my life without it at this point and I was in my early 20's and I'm about to turn 50 so, what else can you say? It's a...I stumbled upon it and couldn't imagine life without it at this point.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you think if you hadn't left your band, you hadn't left this relationship, you would've been in a place where you were receptive to martial arts training?

Scott Lombardo:

It's interesting. I was interested in martial arts when I was a kid and back in those days, we didn't have as many options as kids have nowadays either and I wanted to play a musical instrument and I wanted to study martial arts and my parents said pick one so when I was about 12, I picked playing the guitar over martial arts and I have never really thought about it again until I was an adult. It definitely altered my path in life. I was a hotheaded kid. I was kind of a wild, young man, in terms of playing in bands, playing in clubs, late 80s, early 90s, drinking, other activities, not anything crazy to excess where I needed martial arts as a rehabilitation but it definitely changed the direction of my life in terms of who I became as a person, as a man, really kind of helped shaped my life in that time period when you're in your twenties and you don't have a good idea of what direction you're going in.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It sounds like your musical path and your martial arts path would have been in conflict maybe.

Scott Lombardo:

Yeah, definitely.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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If you got them at same time. Okay. Well, cool, so that gives us a bit of your origin story and I'm sure you've got a bunch of other stories and...right? Because martial artists have the best stories. That's really the thrust of this whole show, that's why we started the show because personally, I just wanted to hear everybody's great martial arts stories.

Scott Lombardo:

Yeah, that makes sense.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Take a second. Think about your best one and tell us that.

Scott Lombardo:

I don't even need a second, my best one happened fairly recently. I was driving to the gym in the morning and this is a very odd story, but it will connect at the end, you'll pick it up.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Alright, I believe you. I have faith.

Scott Lombardo:

My wife and I were on our way to the gym in the morning, we're driving down the street and there was a stray dog in the middle of the main road. Right to where it kind of splits off at an intersection. So, I pulled my car over, my wife jumped out, she was trying to get the dog out of the road and so she was maybe a hundred feet away from me or so and I was getting out of my car and then a town police officer pulled up behind me and threw his flashers on and somebody had mentioned the stray dog to him so he got out. I'm trying to call animal control and they're not picking up and he said, I don't even think I have a leash in my car and I said, well, let me look at my trunk and see if I have a leash because we have 2 dogs at home. So I opened my trunk and I had recently been teaching a self-defense class to raise funds for the veterans karate program that I teach and I pop open my trunk and I have a torso of Bob, the human punching bag in my trunk, right in front of this police officer who then immediately looks over at me and thinks I have half a body in my trunk and turns and looks, I thought he was going to reach for his gun and tell me to get on the ground while I was like, hey, wait a minute, wait a minute, it's a punching bag. So, that was probably the most recent entertaining martial arts story I can relay and it was, we both got a pretty good chuckle out of it. It was pretty funny.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, how did that end? What happened with the dog and...

Scott Lombardo:



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We ended up...The owner actually ended up coming out of their house down the street and called the dog and found the dog. It all ended well but it was pretty comical event and which was just really like a week ago.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, wow! That's really recent. I think most people that have trained for some significant period of time and have to explain something in their car to someone along the way. No, no, this is for training or we put out a bunch of stuff over social media and our most popular post ever that we're working on, doing a follow up on, was you know you're a martial artist if and so one of the ones coming out of the sequel was if you ever had to explain something in your car by relating it to one of the Ninja Turtles.

Scott Lombardo:

Right, exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I can totally see Bob in your trunk and that split-second. That's great.

Scott Lombardo:

And then, other stories really, I kind of revert back to something that happened, maybe about, 20 years ago and you know, as somebody who studies martial arts yourself, you know there's always somebody who comes up to you and asks, well, have you ever had to use it? And my response to that is always the same is yeah, I use it every single day. I use it in my conversation with people, work, friends, relationship. It trains you how to think properly. So, but in terms of, physical use versus mental, spiritual use, I was on vacation with a friend of mine. This is before I was married and we were down in Mexico and we were sitting outside on a bench outside of an area where there were a bunch of bars and clubs and things like that and it was pretty late and there's a lot of activity down there and it's around the time of spring break and we're having a sit and having conversation and the next thing we know, somebody's coming towards us, cursing, angry and the gentleman I was with was a black belt at the time. I think we might've been second degrees and this guy coming right for us and as he gets closer, we start to see, oh man, this is not going to be good and he was probably 6'4", 240, 250 pounds, probably like a college football player something and it was really obvious that he was angry and he was coming right for us. So, I'm thinking I try to make sure that I'm always a very conscious of who my adversary is and no matter what you know, there is somebody bigger and stronger than you are and I think this is going to be really bad. So, he's coming towards us talking about how he got thrown out of the club and he was really upset about it. So, I immediately jumped off the bench and I leave out the expletives and basically just said, yeah, those SOBs, they threw us out too! We're never going in there again and that place is horrible and that's not the words I used but I was very in tune with his attitude and the next thing you know, we were high-fiving and heading down the street to get a beer somewhere else and to me, that's, you know, I can't find a better martial arts, I can't make up a better martial arts story than



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that because that's really what taking somebody's energy is and spinning it back around to kind of change the situation, alter what's actually happening in that moment. So, and the physicality of it is all gone. I mean, it's all in your thought process and that was probably the closest I've come outside of a tournament situation or demonstrating something in class to a physical altercation which I never let it get there. All about your thought process.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I love that story and I think, for one main reason, and you just summed it up beautifully there at the end. As martial artists, we spend so much of our time training to win a fight but we don't spend very much time, training to avoid them all together.

Scott Lombardo:

Yup!

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I think that that's the beauty in what you just expressed. You were able to empathize with this gentleman and not only avoid the physical confrontation because really, nobody wins in that situation, somebody's going to get hurt.

Scott Lombardo:

Yup, and it was most likely going to be us.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, yeah, I mean, I'm—go ahead.

Scott Lombardo:

That's the other part of it too, right? You have to be able to evaluate your own skills and understand, the Clint Eastwood line of man's got to know his limitations and that comes along in life all the time. Knowing when you're going to, so to speak, put your guns down.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, there's a line from a book that I read years ago and it says, know when to lose the fight because there's all kinds of different ways to win and to lose and losing the fight can sometimes just be not winning the fight, like in your example there and I'm really, this is one of those stories, its going to stick with me for a bit. I'm going to be reflecting on that because I can just see myself in that moment because I've had moments like that and I know, for all you know, you made that guy's day better.

Scott Lombardo:

I hope so.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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What else could have happened? He could've...the two of you could've won. "Won." What impact could that have had on his life or maybe he beats the tar out of the two of you and goes to jail and what impact does that have in his life and we don't know and you found, as far as I'm concerned, the only way where everybody wins.

Scott Lombardo:

Yup. Yup. I recently read a quote and I can't remember who it's by because I'm not looking at it right now but it was from a soke of Japanese style karate and the quote was I'm not teaching you how to fight, I'm teaching you how to control evil and I've never, I don't think I've ever read anything more accurate than that statement. It was brilliant.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I like that a lot. That's great. So, let's suppose that you never left your band or you and this girl from your early twenties, you've stayed together and from whatever reason, martial arts just didn't really enter the picture, what do you think your life would look like now?

Scott Lombardo:

I don't think I'd be here, Jeremy, and I'll tell you why. All the band and everything would have ended anyway. In 1992, I came home from work, I was working at a music store, had some dinner, started to feel sick, laid down, tried to go to sleep, couldn't, ended up going to the emergency room, had my brother drove me to the emergency room. He lived, he had a two-family house. He lived upstairs from me and drove me to the emergency room and I went in to surgery for what the doctors thought was a ruptured appendix but it turns out that I had a tumor in my abdomen that ruptured and I was basically bleeding to death on the inside. I was drowning in my own blood by the time they went in to see what was going on and at that, after the exploratory surgery, I was informed that I was in Stage 4 cancer of something called a germ cell which is a tumor in my abdomen that had ruptured and just went throughout my lymph system in literally a course of a few hours and I was admitted to memorial Sloan Kettering in Manhattan. I was living in, I grew up in New Jersey and basically spent the next year of my life in there going through high-dose chemotherapy, a couple of different surgeries, had all my lymph nodes dissected and removed from my groin and my armpits, had my own bone marrow harvested and given back. It was a 21 blood transfusions, very interesting time period of my life which, without having begun studying martial arts and without my sensei, I don't believe I would have ever spiritually or mentally made it through that experience.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, without trying to pry too much.

Scott Lombardo:

Oh, you're welcome to it. There's nothing to hide.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, you already shared a lot in sharing that but I would like to ask you to go a little deeper because I'm going to guess most of our listeners have never been through that kind of physical experience, I certainly haven't. So, when you say without your sensei, without your martial arts experience to that point, you wouldn't have made it, what do you mean, what do you think would have been different?

Scott Lombardo:

As a young man, I don't know I would have had the mental capacity to handle that situation in a way that...you know, I had become in a short period of time that I had been studying with my instructor, I had learned to become a fighter and not necessarily meaning a physical fighter, although that's part of it, and I think that has a lot to do with the dropout rates with new karate students is that you have to get past the just physical part and it's hard to do that and I don't want to say it's hard to do that without a difficult experience in your life but it's just hard to do. You come to karate and when you start it's all physical. You're not thinking about how is this going to help me avoid problems? How is this going to help me keep a clear head? How's this going to help me remain stress free? You don't think about those things. You think about punching and kicking when you first start and I have to say I'm very lucky the instructor that I found and basically, he was not only a karate instructor for me but he was a mentor, a friend for a very long time. He just passed away in February, unfortunately, but he was more than a physical karate teacher. This was a person that whenever you sat down to have a beer with him, shoot a game of pool, inside a class, outside a class, whenever you had a conversation with this man, there was always something to take away. There was always some kind of lesson involved and it wasn't intentional either. It was just something that he said that made you think when you walked away from the table that you're like, man, I never looked at it that way before and without that experience, his name, by the way, was, he was Grand Master Ernie Temple. He was the most recent Grand Master in the [00:21:26] lineage of Isshin-ryū Karate. I have to mention him because I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing right now without him but I would not have had the spiritual wherewithal to make it through that experience without giving up. You walk into the hospital like that, the most experienced doctor with your rare type of cancer says, you have a less than 10% chance of walking out of here alive and without martial arts, I would have said, okay, I'm dead and with the martial arts experience, it was like, really? Get your gear on and bring it on, buddy. The totally different outlook, a totally different frame of mind and a totally different way of applying your thought and your spirit to something that's adversarial and I always, everybody always looks at cancer and oh man, it's everybody's worst enemy and I kind of got past that and made it my friend. I've said this to people before too, not in martial arts circles but in cancer circles as well, why am I going to give this disease the benefit of torturing me and stressing me out and everything else? I'm going to hold its hand and walk side by side with it and maybe I'm going to trick it a little bit into thinking that it's my buddy and it's not and when it's not looking, I'm going to kick it in the groin, you know what I mean? So, I think, again, it goes back to that same process of thought. How do you process your thoughts? How do you use your thoughts for good versus bad? How are you going to



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use your thoughts to defend yourself in addition to your physical skills, your spiritual skills, your mental skills? There's a balance. You have to put it all together.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely and I appreciate you going a bit deeper there. I appreciate you sharing that with us. That's incredibly powerful stuff and I felt like I was there on that journey with you in the hospital room.

Scott Lombardo:

Yeah, and I hope that nobody ever has to do that to learn what I learned from it. That's another thing. That's a takeaway for me. That experience in my life is a huge takeaway and it's a huge teaching benefit for me as well, to have had that experience. Would I want to do it again? No. Do I wish it never happened? No, I don't wish that either. I wouldn't trade it for anything but I wouldn't want to do it again.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Fair enough. So of course, clearly the instructor you mentioned, Templeton?

Scott Lombardo:

Master Temple.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Temple had a huge impact on you and maybe we could even say gave you the toolset to save your life.

Scott Lombardo:

Yes, without a doubt.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Which is pretty darn powerful and something that I don't think many of us can ever look at one person and say, that person saved my life or helped me save my own life is huge and I don't want to discount that.

Scott Lombardo:

Yep, yep, absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But if we could take someone else because I think we all understand what has been imparted by our instructors.

Scott Lombardo:



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Yep.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Who else would you say had a huge, who had the largest impact on your martial arts upbringing outside of him?

Scott Lombardo:

So, I'm trying to cipher that question in a way, in a non-martial arts way or somebody else that's tied to martial arts?

Jeremy Lesniak:

It can be either. Someone that when you look back on your martial arts path and say without them, things would have been really different.

Scott Lombardo:

Yeah. I don't know that I can pinpoint any one individual but when I moved from New Jersey to New England, there's a gentleman who works with me now in the Veterans Program and it's a very strange way that we were put together. He studied with, he's from New Jersey originally as well. He studied with Master Temple about 10 years before I did, in the early 80s, and he moved to New Hampshire long before I ever started there. I moved to New Hampshire around 1998, 1999 the first time and I had to leave and come back but Master Temple had hooked us up together in New Hampshire and he said, hey, I have this student he used to study with me, he lives in New Hampshire and his name is Miller and I was like, do you have some contact information for me? He was like, No. I'm like, okay, so I'm going to the state of New Hampshire and I'm going to open the white pages and look for somebody named Miller so this is really going to go well and I didn't have a dojo up here when I was moving up and basically, came up here and it was the 2nd number I called in the phonebook, he lives 15 minutes from me. We started working out together a week after I moved here. We became great friends. He ended up coming back to the dojo. I maintain a long distance relationship with Master Temple when I moved up here for work. Luckily, I go down there once a month for work as well, for business, my regular job in the audio industry and I would always go to work out and continue to train under him and Sensei William Miller, who really took me under his wing up here and hooked me up with a whole group of martial artists in New England and kind of broke into the scene here, started working out with a lot of folks, going to some different schools, doing some demos and he's also been a big influence on me in a personal way also because he's just one of those guys, you never hear him say a bad thing about anybody. Whether he is annoyed or not annoyed, he never, he may have the feeling but he's never going to say it and that, to me, was a big personal influence and some more growth in my life as well in the martial arts world and personally, also, just that, there's no reason for that and that was something that Master Temple had taught us too where you don't criticize other people in the dojo. It's disrespectful regardless of what their skill level is or what they're doing because you never know what that person may be going through in that moment



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in their life that is up to you to judge or criticize and I would say that this gentleman now, Sensei William Miller, who is also a good friend of mine and works with me in the Veterans Program, a big influence on me as a martial artist and as a person, in terms of, again, I keep bringing it back to thought process and it's usually that's what we're learning and yeah, I got to say probably him and the community of martial artists here in New England that have been very, they're associated with him when I first got up here. Very good people, very good martial artists, no egos and very welcoming, having me come up, a black belt from somewhere else, and jump right in to other schools and other demo programs and working out with them is just a really good experience.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure, wow, sounds like you're a great guy and, of course, you've now supported the idea that all of us in northern New England know each other which is not always true. I want everyone to know that that example of finding who you're looking for in the second random calls in the phonebook, that doesn't always happen. Probably a little more likely here in Vermont than it is in New Hampshire, Maine.

Scott Lombardo:

That's probably true.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We don't quite have 6 degrees of separation. It's usually two but he sounds like a great guy and certainly someone that has really supported your growth as a martial artist and those are wonderful people to find and we all need them.

Scott Lombardo:

What you're saying is so true and that's another thing that, random thoughts are coming into my head now so I'm just going to spit them out.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Please do.

Scott Lombardo:

One of the things that I really like about having other really talented martial artists around too is that, now, I spend the majority of my time teaching and every once in a while, I want to learn. I want to work out. I want to be pushed. I want to be driven to learn something new and having somebody like that around, having a few people like that around is fantastic because you get the opportunity to just kind of go, hey, sensei, you take the class tonight and I'm going to jump in it with all the other students and I miss that opportunity to be able to pick up on something new that somebody is showing, going through basics, going through block drills and having an opportunity to sweat and when you have somebody like that in a dojo that you trust, that you know thinks the same way you do and does things, not always



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exactly the same, but has the same mindset as you, that's a really welcome thing to have in your life as someone who's been teaching for a long time to actually be able to be in and I'm not talking about going to a seminar and learning from a 9th Dan or a 10th dan. I'm talking right in my own dojo. I got somebody who's a really talented martial artist that I'm able to step in and become, we always say the teacher becomes a student. There's always something we can learn from somebody else but it's a great thing to have. It's a great person to have around to be able to, somebody else that can drive you like you're trying to drive your students.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, yeah, without a doubt. Very fortunate. So, I think you hinted earlier at some competition? Have you ever participated in competition?

Scott Lombardo:

I did in New Jersey when I was younger.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, tell us a little about that.

Scott Lombardo:

It's a great experience. I think it was a great experience for kids. It's a great experience for adults. Again, it's an opportunity to learn. I think the most that I ever got from it was observing. So, I grew up in one dojo and out of the X amount of hundred students that were there, I fought them all and they all fought me. I fought them all multiple times. You know how this person was offensive, this person was defensive and this person had a great crescent kick and this person had a great side blade and this guy's eyes changed color when you got in the ring with them and you knew everybody's traits. So, being in the tournament circuit, it was a great opportunity to learn and you got to learn really fast. You step into the ring with somebody and you're like, okay, I got one point to figure this out and that's kind of where you are and your evaluation skills become very triggered and obviously, your adrenaline is at a different level which sometimes can stop you from thinking so you really got to dig into your breathing and learn how to figure that out very quickly. So, I'd say from the competing that I did and whether it was kata or kumite, it was pretty much the same. For me, it was great to be able to watch, to be able to participate and to be able to really pull it together quick and figure out how you're going to act, how you're going to react. I fought a little bit. I think I have one first place trophy in New Jersey back in '96 so I wasn't a fantastic, fearsome competitor and after I unfortunately got my nose broken the second time and had to go to work on Monday, I was like, alright, I got to go visit clients now with 2 black eyes and that kind of sparked the end of my competing career only because I had a regular job and I had to go to work the next day but as far as a learning experience for me, I think I did it for about 5 or 6 years, it was great. Same thing, wouldn't trade it for anything. It's a great confidence builder, great learning how to function in adverse conditions, uncomfortable conditions, really good experience.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Certainly, a valuable component to learn how to perform under pressure and to give yourself a motivation, something to strive for. There's all kinds of great reasons that have come up on the show before and you certainly just underscored that and I hope anybody out there listening, if you haven't competed, just do it once. Just give it a shot just one time. Not saying you're going to love it, not saying you're even going to like it but I think it's a valuable piece of everyone's martial art upbringing.

Scott Lombardo:

I think what you're saying, Jeremy, is right on to with anything. You got to try it once before you say no or you decide where you like it or don't like it. That makes a lot of sense so I think one of the most important things about trying something new, right, not knowing whether you're going to like it or not is when you're going into, for all the new students out there, new competitors out there that might be listening, don't go in trying to win. I think that's probably the most important thing that you can do. You're not going to set yourself up for disappointment. You're not going to set yourself up to be in a situation that you don't want to be in. You got to leave your ego at the door and you get in the ring and it's a new experience. You got to look at it like you're in the dojo, learning something new. You're going in there, it's a whole new set of circumstances but it does give you an opportunity to learn and if you do well, fantastic! But don't feel bad about yourself if you don't do well, right? Because you tried and that's kind of the big thing. We're always learning and you can't, I think, that's one of my other favorite quotes is I don't always win, wait a minute, I never lose, I either win or I learn, that's it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right, right. Yeah. Nothing, I think, exemplifies martial arts more than that quote, right? I think sometimes you see the people that go to a competition especially if you're on a circuit, if you're going to events where you're seeing the same people over and over again. The people that are winning, they're great but a lot of times they're not getting better. They stagnate and maybe they're stagnating at a high level but you see the people constantly coming in second or third to those folks, they're the ones with the fire. They're the ones that are hitting the training for hour after hour after hour because they're going to dethrone this person and that's where the value, I think, because a lot of times.

Scott Lombardo:

That's a great point.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So now if you could train with someone that you haven't and let's be completely unrealistic and even open up to dead people. You could dig somebody up and bring them back to life Frankenstein style and train with whoever. Who would you want to train with?



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Scott Lombardo:

Wow. There's so many, I think, on a celebrity level I think I want to, of course, I want to say Bruce Lee and certainly not because of his acting skills but because he was a martial artist first and I do agree wholeheartedly with a lot of his philosophy. He was a student of philosophy as well and he was also around in a time where there was a lot of bigotry and hatred and people were not sharing secrets of the martial arts and a lot of that was kind of forbidden. So, just from that aspect, I mean, that would be a fascinating person to even be around or have a conversation with, much less train in the martial arts. I have to say Funakoshi, founder of Shotokan, founder of modern-day karate. What he did for the art, spreading it from Okinawa throughout Japan and the real popularity of it that he created and made it actual part of education in Japanese universities so that, too, again, you're looking at somebody who's not just a physical karateka. You're talking about someone who has put all the elements of it together and created a life balance for themselves and tried to teach that to the masses so that, as well, I think if I had to choose, I think I'd say Funakoshi.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Great answer and certainly, anyone that has read any of his books really knows he was about as broad and inclusive, I don't mean of everyone else's, well-rounded, I think, is really the word that I'm looking for. He was an incredibly well-rounded martial artist, not just in the physical application but his knowledge of the body and the mind and the spirit and everything, it just...it's no surprise it's something that has spread so far globally came from his ideas.

Scott Lombardo:

Yeah, yeah, well said.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So how about movies? Are you at all a movie guy?

Scott Lombardo:

I love movies.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good! Good! Do you have a favorite martial arts movie or maybe you can't pick or narrow it down to one?

Scott Lombardo:

That would be difficult. Yeah, I'm a fan of all movies but I would have to say Godzilla is my all-time favorite movie character but there's nothing martial arts-related to that at all.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

We could probably get there if we stretched it but it might be at the expense of Japanese culture and we don't want to speak disparagingly of our Japanese friends.

Scott Lombardo:

And I do want to say this, if anybody has any interest in Godzilla and doesn't know the history of it, you really have to look into it. It's fascinating where the story came from, how it came about and what it actually means. It's a very metaphorical character in Japanese culture, and it's the history of it is, absolutely mind-blowing, so look up Godzilla and you'll find out all kinds of things you didn't know but karate movies, martial arts movies, I like a lot of them. I'm a big fan of Jason Statham. I'm a big fan of there was a guy around a while, I think he only made one or two movies and the name of those movies are escaping me right now but I believe he was a practitioner of Kenpo and his name was Jeff Speakman. I thought his skills and his martial art was very practical and very realistic and I loved seeing that portrayed in an actual film

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, Perfect Weapon is the movie that you're thinking of.

Scott Lombardo:

Yeah, there you go and I'm a big fan of realism which is why I always defer to the original Karate Kid also because I don't think I've seen, although it certainly is can be hokey and a little goofy at times, but there really isn't, really hasn't been another martial arts film that I know of that has been that clear to anyone, adult or children, any age group, any gender, doesn't make a difference. The clarity of the physical, mental, spiritual balance in that movie and the explanation of what true karate really is, it couldn't be any more accurate and of course, Miyagi, Mister Miyagi in the movie, the name, the lineage comes from Gōjū-ryū which is where partially Isshin-ryū come from. A combination of and Gōjū-ryū and Shorin-ryū but that name even portrayed in the film and watching that film as an Isshin-ryū practitioner and understanding the kata and understanding the concepts and philosophies. I mean, you mention it and people go, wax on and wax off and they kind of make fun of it a little bit but I really have never seen a more accurate depiction of the true philosophy of karate and what it's all about.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, such an incredible movie. We did a profile on it that I'll make sure get linked from the show notes for anybody that's a new listener to the show, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. You'll see the show notes and for all the things that we're talking about today. It might not surprise you, of course, that the original karate kid is somewhere in a dead heat for most referenced movie on this show, the other one being Edge of the Dragon.



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Scott Lombardo:

Yup, totally makes sense.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Two classic movies that really ushered in new generations of martial artists to training.

Scott Lombardo:

No doubt.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, you mentioned some incredible actors there, would you choose one of them as your favorite or maybe somebody else?

Scott Lombardo:

As far as martial arts actors went, yeah, I think I'd have to go, if I was going old school, I'd go Bruce Lee. If I was going new school, I'd probably go Jason Statham.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I've never seen anyone that has taken to fight choreography the way he has.

Scott Lombardo:

Oh, yeah, yeah and I'm a bald guy with a beard too so I kind of identify. You know what I mean?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I do know what you mean. Anyone that has seen pictures of me knows exactly that I know what you mean because I'm also a bald guy with a beard.

Scott Lombardo:

Perfect.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How about books? Are you a reader?

Scott Lombardo:

I am. I am. I enjoy the technical books as well as the philosophy. There's obviously Funakoshi's My Way of Life is the first martial arts book I've ever read and I still refer to that often. That is the one piece of reading material that I provide all of my students when they start the program. There's a couple other books as well. Zen in the Martial Arts by Joe Hyams, it's a short read and very good. Living the Martial



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Way. Trying to think. Oh, I don't know if you've ever read the books by Benjamin Hoff, the Tao of Pooh and the Te of Piglet which are.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, long time ago, yeah.

Scott Lombardo:

Yeah, okay, some of those as well from a philosophical standpoint. Trying to think technical books. Comprehensive Applications of Chin Na s very good. 25 Shotokan Kata, also very good and I'd be nuts if I didn't bring up Book of Five Rings by Musashi so yeah, I'm a big fan of martial arts reading and some of these books, you have to read them 5 times before you get the message or maybe more but a lot of valuable things in, I guess, the pen is as mighty as the sword anyway.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, what's keeping you going right now and I actually kind of want to blend that because I got a feeling it's going to blur with the next question. What do you have going on right now and what's keeping you motivated in your training?

Scott Lombardo:

Okay, about, let's say, I got to put a little backstory in here too. The most important thing that I had ever learned from Master Temple, from my sensei was give back to the art what you get from it and when I was testing for my Nidan, for my 2nd degree black belt, I was tasked for 2 years to instruct a gentleman with a prosthetic leg from the hip down and a woman with no arm from the shoulder down, basically to redesign the system of Isshin-ryū to work with amputee students because they could not find other places to study and he would not turn people away so he tasked myself and another gentleman for our Nidan test to redesign Isshin-ryū to fit these two folks. The young lady stayed for about 6 or 7 months and then she left but we ended up spending two years and additional years after that with this gentleman who was born without a leg and basically wanted to study martial arts his whole life and never thought anybody would teach him and we did. So, I acquired some very interesting skills under my sensei which was basically, out of the goodness of his heart saying, hey, this is a great opportunity for you to learn and this is a great opportunity for somebody else to learn who's always wanted to study karate and hasn't been accepted anywhere so we're going to do this. So, fast forward X amount of years later of couple different jobs, couple different relocations, continue in my martial arts studies up here in New England after leaving New Jersey, finally stuck in one place for a long period of time and enjoying it. Spend most of my life in New Jersey, moved around a little bit, moved to New England, been here for 11 years and decided that I really wanted to do something for the community and I looked into doing some different things that weren't martial arts related. I looked into volunteering for hospice, I have some friends that are part of some veterans organizations. They do some annual road races, one's called Run for the Fallen New Hampshire, another one is called Chris's Pets for Vets, I'm not trying to plug friends of



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mine but I'm in this community of people who are serving the 117,000 veterans in the state of New Hampshire of which only a third utilize the service of the VA and the rest are sometimes, I don't want to say left floundering, but they're looking for opportunities that aren't always present. So, a friend of mine who is on my Board of Directors, you still with me, Jeremy? I know I'm talking a lot, I just want to make sure you're staying.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, I'm here, I'm here, I'm trying to give you the mic.

Scott Lombardo:

Okay, cool. Alright, cool, cool. So, a friend of mine who is on the board of directors of our dojo which is called V-MAT which stands for Veterans Martial Arts Training, a few of us, we were training in a church gymnasium that was donated to us and he said, you know, this is a really cool thing that you're doing. You should start a non-profit and people will donate money for you to train and provide the services for military veterans and I said, really, you think so? And he said, I know so and if you do it, I'll be the first one to donate. So, we started looking into it and put together, went through all the legal rigmarole of putting together non-profit and everything else and one of the big things for me was I don't want to make any money. There's a lot of non-profits out there that are claiming to be helping people and they're putting what's required on the table and putting the rest in their pocket and again, going back to my sensei, give back to the art what you got from it. What did I get from it? The story I told earlier: I got to live. I'm looking at, I'm not a veteran but my grandfather was a veteran, World War I, my father was a veteran, World War II, I had friends that are veterans that were in The Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan and I had a unique skill set that I could be using to help these people regain their daily physical, mental and spiritual balance to just deal with what goes on every day in your life because I realized, from what I learned, I think I'm pretty good at that, managing my daily life. All my friends just kind of say, oh, Scott, he's always right in the middle. Never super high, never super low. Nothing really seems to bother him or if it does, he's not really saying. He just kind of like rides the middle all the time and what do our veterans need? You know what I mean? They're warriors and they're at war and they come home and they're supposed to flick a light switch and turn it all off. That's not reality, right? So, my goal was to get some other martial artists together, my friend, Sensei William Miller and another student of his, Sensei Joe Terry. Sensei Miller was in the army. Sensei Terry was in the Marine Corps. Both black belts, both teachers and said, you know, let's do this. Let's help some veterans kind of give them a safe place to come and work out and fight if they have to. Let them come here and turn the light switch on and then, so they don't have to do that when they go home and they don't have to do that at the VFW or wherever they're going to hang out. You know what I mean? Let's try to give them a safe outlet to re-establish that warriorship here as a civilian because you can't just turn that off. So, we started doing it about, put it all together in the beginning of 2015 and it has been, it's a very, let's put it this way, it's a very inexpensive operation run. We have a wonderful facility that was presented to us in an incredibly cheap amount. It's a full, 94-acre campus that offers space to non-profit only, full handicapped access



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and we use their gymnasium for a couple hours every week to train veterans in our program and over the course of the past year or so, we have about a dozen students, all ages. We have a World War II Navy veteran who studies with us right down to, recently, army nurse just joined us who was a combat medic in Afghanistan who just came home in January. So, runs the gamut from young to old. All conflicts, all branches and it's basically a safe place of veterans to gather. They have the camaraderie that they had in the military. They had the hierarchy that they had in the military so they get a taste of some of that. Some of those things that are instilled in them as people serving in the military that you don't always get when you come back here and you go to a regular job or you're at the gym lifting weights, it's not the same. It's not the same at all and it's our way of doing what my sensei originally said, give back to the art what you got from it and help these folks with their physical, mental, spiritual balance and that's what we're trying to do. None of us take a dime from it. Everything for the veterans is free. Uniforms, books, training material, anything that they need, it's all provided by private fund raising and again, it's a matter of covering our very small rent, insurance and supplies for the students and that's it and we're really, we're really happy about it. We're excited about it. Obviously, you heard about it from somewhere. I don't know where but we have been, we've been in some of the local papers, they did a feature on us on Veterans' Day last year, we were just on the New Hampshire One News out of Concord, we've had some really good exposure, it's all been word of mouth and fliers around town, doing some stuff with some local folks at the Portsmouth Navy Yard, we have some fliers from over there, we got a few students from there, we just did some hand to hand knife training, knife defense with the Army Reserves here in Portsmouth as well. So, we're getting out from our dojo and getting into our military community as well as doing it where we are but we're trying to get out to help people and help veterans. Active, reserve or veteran in as many places as we can and that's kind of the crux of the program.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And to answer the direct question, it was one from one of those news articles. We spend a lot of time every week just making sure that we stay on the pulse of what's going on in the martial arts, not just in the United States, but globally because part of our job, our self-assigned role here at whistlekick is to make sure people know what's going on because we are a community but we are a rather fractured community as martial artists and I think it's important that we know what each other is doing so we're trying to make sure people know what's going on and that's why we reached out to you because of what you're doing because what you're doing, really for me personally, resonated. I'm not a veteran. I haven't served but I have a lot of friends that have and I've seen some of those troubles when they've come back and I think it's great what you're doing but at the same time, there's this long-standing history with martial arts and with the military. Martial arts came to this country on the backs of folks that were in the military back in Korea and World War II and they brought the martial arts to the United States through that training so here is another opportunity for the martial arts to give back to that community again and I think that's great.



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Scott Lombardo:

Thank you.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, thank you and I think it's pretty clear. You're a fairly high energy guy. I think we got that pretty well from the beginning of the show but I don't know if anyone noticed that the quality of your voice and the energy of your voice changed when you started talking about this and it's really clear to me how passionate you are about this and I just want to underscore that because I sense some humility there that you're growing this program but you may not be the type to shout from the rooftops so let me shout for you.

Scott Lombardo:

Thank you, Jeremy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And that's why we want to have you on the show. If someone wants to learn more about the program or hopefully make a donation because whistlekick will be making a donation probably by the time the show is out, that donation would have been made. If someone wants to do that, where would they go?

Scott Lombardo:

That's awesome. Thank you for that, first of all. So, they would go to our website or Facebook page. Website is www.v-mat.org and that stands for Veterans Martial Arts Training. There is a Donations page there, takes major credit cards or PayPal and you can read all about the program there as well too. A little bit about my history like we talked about, the other instructors are there, our board members and some of the other activities that they're involved in, helping the military as well. You can call us at (603) 334-9860. That's the direct line to my office here at home. (603) 334-9860 or you can look up Veterans Martial Arts Training on Facebook and you can find us there as well as Instagram which is @vmat_nh. I wanted to mention one other thing that we're talking about some of the students that we have and how interesting the connections you can make. I was very surprised after our article in The Portsmouth Herald on Veterans' Day got a call named Joe Simpson who was a lieutenant in the Navy from '44 to '67 and he wanted to come and study with us and thought that maybe he was too old and I said, no, no, not at all. We make accommodations for somebody in a wheelchair or somebody without an arm or a leg, we can certainly make accommodations for age. Not a big deal. So, he came down to study with us, still does, and I gave him a copy of My Way of Life, Funakoshi's book and what was really interesting about this so he took it home, voracious reader, read through the book, the first week he came back to class, you know, I was really fascinated by this book. Not only by Funakoshi's attitude and his teachings of Karate, he said, but when I first served in World War II, I was on a clean-up crew in Okinawa and everywhere that Okinawa is not a big island, everywhere that Funakoshi was, Joe was. I rode my bicycle



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down this path that he talked about. I was at Shuri Castle where he talked about and he said, I felt like when I was learning and how it was connected to the book and how that was connected to my original experience in the military, he was completely blown away by the way all these things just kind of came together and he's a wonderful guy and he is also active, he's active in the American Legion and some other organizations and he's been trying to help us recruit more veteran students and he's been a wonderful guy to have around and that kind of really is driving us, to have that kind of response. Somebody who's that well connected with everything so quick and you imagine what other students may have the same types of experiences so I just thought that it was really kind of cool thing that came together and he was one of our first students.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think when you have circumstances like that with all these, what do you want to call them, coincidences or not, just things that start to mesh together, I think that's a pretty good sign that you're on the right track. Personally, I believe strongly that you're on the right track and I appreciate what you're doing just as a martial artist.

Scott Lombardo:

And I will say, and I'm sorry if I cut you off just now, but I will say that the www.v-mat.org, I'll say this, that donations are important but recruiting students is more important so we have a dozen folks now, we'd love to have two or three dozen by the end of the year. I think it's completely possible as far as word of mouth goes and when we have more students, fund-raising will come. Not nearly as big of an issue as us getting the word out and making sure that veterans know that this service is available to them and it's a safe atmosphere for them to come and learn and help them get through their daily challenges. I just want to be really clear that I appreciate being on this show and I appreciate the fact that we get to mention that we have a donation page but I'm so much more interested in helping more people and so are the rest of the people in our organization.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hopefully, we can help make that happen.

Scott Lombardo:

Thanks, Jeremy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, do you have any parting advice? You just hit us with a lot of great, intense, heavy stuff and if anybody out there is not feeling inspired right now, I want you to roll back on the "tape" and listen to the last 15 minutes again but nugget of wisdom to tie it off.

Scott Lombardo:



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Yeah, I got two. I'll give you one from my sensei, from Grand Master Ernie Temple who had always said and I'm sure many people have heard this before, fall down 7 times, get up 8 and that was probably his favorite quote and sometimes he would, sometimes when you needed it, he'd knock you down but he'd always put his hand out to help you back up and that is the job of sensei's in some cases and I don't mean physically knock you down and that was one of his favorite phrases and I try to live by that as well. Fall down 7 times, get up 8. But I also want to say one of my favorites and this is good for folks that are learning and it's also good for you even after you've been learning for a very long time and this Japanese phrase and it said, saru mo ki kara ochiru which in English translates as even monkey fall from trees.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you for listening to episode 90 of whistlekick martial arts radio and thank you to Sensei Lombardo. Head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for the show notes including all of the ways you can learn more about Sensei Lombardo's organization, V-MAT. Hopefully you can consider making a donation as we did a few days ago. If you like the show, please 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, remember we randomly check out the different podcast review sites and if we find your review and mention it on the air, be sure to email us for your free box of whistlekick stuff. If you haven't left us a review yet, please do help us out and leave one. Those reviews are a lot more important than you may think. If you know someone that would be a great interview for the show, please fill out the form at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com or you want to leave us a message or a suggestion for a Thursday show or some other feedback, there's a place to do that too. You can follow us on social media. We're on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, and Instagram, pretty much everywhere you can think of and our username is always whistlekick and remember the products you can find on whistlekick.com or Amazon like our brand-new MoveFlow Yoga pants. Now if you're a school owner or a team coach, you really should check out wholesale.whistlekick.com for our great, exclusive, discounted wholesale program. Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!