



Episode 87 – Martial Artists are Their Own Worst Enemies | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey, everybody, we're back for another episode for whistlekick martial arts radio. This time it's episode 87 and today, talking about the way martial artists aren't so nice to each other. I'm the founder here at whistlekick but I'm better known as your host, Jeremy Lesniak. Whistlekick, if you don't know, makes the world's best sparring gear and excellent apparel and accessories for practitioners and fans of the traditional martial arts. I'd like to welcome our new listeners and thank all of you that are listening again. If you're not familiar with our products, why don't you head on over to whistlekick.com so you can learn more or make a purchase. Of our past podcast episodes, show notes and a lot more are in a different website and that's whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. From either site, you can sign up for a newsletter and you really should. We offer exclusive content to our subscribers and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guests for the show.

Now, like I said, the subject of today's episode is all those different ways that martial artists, don't really support each other. This episode's been kind of building in the back of my head for, honestly, a few months now but some things happened in my life over the last week. We're not going to get into what they are but I really felt it was time to just kind of put this out there. Now, I'm expecting that this episode is going to ruffle some feathers and that's good because I want some discussion to come out of it. Change doesn't happen without people talking about it.

Now, I've personally witnessed, or even been on the negative end of everything that I'm going to be talking about today, and I'm absolutely not saying that all martial artists are the type of people that I'm going to talk about today. In fact, even the majority of martial artists aren't like the folks that we're going to talk about today but, unfortunately, there are enough of us that are this way that it makes a tremendous impact on our entire world, community, realm, however you want to classify the grouping of martial artists. Now, if what I say upsets you today, maybe that means there's something about yourself that you might want to consider working on. Who knows? It's not for me to judge. I don't know you. These are my opinions. Take them or leave them as you will.

Now, despite cultural acceptance of the martial arts, we see in the UFC, the winners there are held up in pretty high cultural esteem. Most recently, Conor McGregor was all over the news and his potential, whatever's going on with his retirement, whether or not you classify him as a martial artist or not, to the majority of the population, he is one. Bruce Lee, despite being gone for right around 40 years is still the icon of the martial arts world and if you watch any successful blockbuster movie, there's a fight scene in there and it involves some martial art. Now, if you look at all that, that clearly indicates that the world, the United States, the western world, is very accepting of martial arts. Yet, if I was to ask you, what percentage of the American population practice martial arts? Would you know? It's actually pretty low. It's one and a half percent. Now, that's not good or bad but if we compare that to the global population, three and a half percent of the world practices martial arts. Why are we, in America, less than half of that? There's certainly a whole bunch of reasons. We could probably do a whole episode on why that disparity exists but I think one of the main reasons is the culture that we create.



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Martial artists aren't always nice to each other and I think, because of that, the majority of people who start, as children, don't last into adulthood with their martial arts training and those that do start as adults, don't seem to last terribly long. Again, lots of reasons. Don't get bogged down in that. If you disagree or you're thinking of some other things, let's continue, you'll see more what I'm talking about.

I believe we have a genuine problem and if we can address it, we can see some dramatic growth in the martial arts despite any other issues that have an impact on our retention and our enrollment. Martial artists seem to be really good or really prone to attacking each other and you don't have to look any farther than social media. If someone posts a photo or a video of someone doing something amazing, there are often, just as many, if not more, comments tearing it apart especially on YouTube. Now, I know YouTube is kind of known for fostering troll behavior but I think you need to look at the content of those troll comments. It's not criticism or not always criticism coming from ignorant people. People that just say, oh, that would never work on the street and those kind of exchanges that I think that we've all heard or seen from time to time. Some of those criticisms are coming from real martial artists that actually know what they're doing and the irony, to me, is that many of those people making those criticisms that know what they're doing, not only can't do what the person in the video or the photo is doing, they were never able to. It's not just curmudgeonly older martial artists that are no longer able to train and criticizing from afar, it's younger people who perhaps could, if they train hard enough, do the thing but because they can't because they don't want to put in the work, it's easier to them to just tear down what someone else is doing.

As a community, we really don't value the achievements of other martial artists. We really seem to think that if we hold someone up and we value what they've done, that it diminishes the value of what we've done and I think that that is at the heart of the culture that we're creating that has kept martial arts from really breaking out in America and becoming something that 3, 4, 5% or more of the population does. You've heard me say it on the show before if you're a returning listener, I believe, or one of the goals here at whistlekick, is that everyone has some time, at least 6 months, training in the martial arts. I think the world will be a much, much better place if that happened.

So, when we look at criticism at a particular style of martial arts, the person making the critique is usually part of a martial arts style that's pretty similar to what they're criticizing. To say it another way, I don't see really loud arguments going on between Taekwondo practitioners and Kung Fu practitioners about the historical accuracy or anything like that. It's, say, a particular Okinawan Karate style, criticizing another Okinawan Karate style. The martial arts criticisms that we're seeing are coming from styles that are essentially related. They've got the same roots. It seems that the closer the styles, the fiercer the arguing. You see these people that are concerned with historical accuracy. Who did something, who did it first, who did it best or, my favorite, the right way to do a form drives me crazy! It doesn't really matter. We're going to talk more about why it doesn't matter as we go further on and then of course, we've got the politics.

A lot of people seem to get upset over someone else receiving a promotion that they don't feel was deserved or, one of the others that I've seen from time to time, a martial arts school refusing to join a



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particular organization or leaving an organization or starting an organization of their own. This seems to create so much bad blood amongst the martial arts community and it just creates rift after rift after rift. Now, some of these arguments certainly go back to a time when martial arts was at its infancy. If we imagine the early 1900s when most Karate styles were developing, you could see that someone would develop their own style and someone else would criticize it and it would be tested and there's some value in that testing. It helped improve what people were doing. It helped prove out the different techniques and the different methodologies and I think that's great but the vast majority of us now, I'd say 95% plus, are training in an art that has been tested for decades, if not, much longer. Those tests have been passed, it's okay. Those arts are still around, those styles still exist for a reason and it's okay to accept that someone else trains differently than you. That doesn't make either of you wrong.

There are different martial arts styles because there are different people with different goals for martial arts, for what they're going to do for their training for their own personal development and I think if we look, martial arts styles rarely die off but instructors go out of business, comparatively, all the time. Now, why is that? I would say is because the problems with any martial art really aren't so much the art, it's the people behind them, the people teaching it. If someone's a bad instructor, people tend to figure it out and we don't need someone on the rooftops or on Facebook, shouting, or figuratively shouting, that this is the case. Just shut up and train! You worry about you. When I'm working with children, that's one of my favorite sayings, you worry about you, because that's really all you have control over. Now, if you have a school, of course, you worry about your students. That's important but beyond that microcosm, 99% of the stuff that people get really worked up about doesn't matter. Some people say that when you find fault with someone else and you're finding that fault for something that has no impact on you or the people that matter to you, it's really outside of your space and you can't let it go, it's because you find the same fault in yourself and you don't know how to handle it and what I think of the people that I've known to be the most critical of other martial artists, I definitely see some flaws there.

Now, when I unpack this, most of it seems to come down to a conflict between something that I see as very positive and something that I see, at the heart of it, to be very admirable. You've got, on the one hand, the quest for self-improvement which leads martial artists to train in that art and in that way that makes the most sense to them, that's really positive, that's good but the criticism of others, in many cases, seem to come from poorly articulated or poorly implemented efforts to help others improve. Seems to be the belief that what I have found to work for me would likely be better for you and my attempt at getting you to try my way comes across as what you're doing is wrong, my way is right. But everyone really needs the opportunity to develop themselves in the pace and in the method that is best for them. That's what the martial art is all about.

Only the martial artist that's training knows the best path for themselves. That's not the same as saying that they know better than their instructor, don't get upset at me, I can see some of you, steam coming out of your ears. No, the instructor's job is to guide the students. The student's job is to make the decisions as to what is best for them. After all, the student holds the most important decision: whether



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or not to train. The irony through all of this of course is that some of these actions are really just bullying. Here we have the group of people, martial artists, most often charged with ending bullying, teaching our children how to not be bullies or be bullied, and there are so many bullies among our ranks and that blows my mind! Most of the arguments that martial artists get into about all these stuff, none of it matters. It has absolutely no bearing on anybody. So, it's time to end the cycle.

Style doesn't matter. Just train. If someone is of a different style than you, doesn't matter. If their style is, let's say, made up or you don't think it's true to its roots or anything like that, then don't train there. Let them train. Let them train their students. If they produce good students, and by good students, I mean, good people, then there's value there. If they don't, from what I've seen, they'll fall away.

Remember why it is that you train. Why did you start training? Was it to get involved in all this crap? All these politics? All these infighting? No, it wasn't! so, don't do it. Don't carry it on. Don't perpetuate all these stuff.

The achievements of others have no value, no bearing on your own achievement. Someone else is a high rank or wins at competition, it doesn't mean anything about your own successes. They still matter. Be secure enough in what you've accomplished to let others have their own accomplishment. So, I said, someone else's rank has no bearing on you. It also has no bearing on their ability. There are people out there that are buying high ranks. Good for them. I remember one of the things that really set the tone for some of my early martial arts training, and it's funny I hadn't thought about this. This isn't even in my notes as I put together the show. I haven't thought about this in... I was probably 7 or 8 years old. I remember going to my mother and saying that a friend of mine on the bus said that he knew where he could buy a black belt from a magazine and I went home to my mother and I was just shocked that you could buy a black belt and she said, well, yeah, even a...I was probably a yellow belt at the time...even your yellow belt came from a catalog. Somebody still bought it but if I go and I buy you a black belt right now and give it to you, does that make you a black belt? And even though I was 6, 7 years old, I knew no! That doesn't make me a black belt. She said, exactly. If someone goes off and they buy a 9th Dan from somebody else or they manage to finagle their way into some promotion, it has nothing to do with their skill set. Let it go. More importantly, it has nothing to do with you even if you're in the same school. If someone outranks you and you don't feel they should, you have 2 choices as I see it. You can accept it or you can leave because ultimately, anything else, any other decision is detrimental to either your training and/or the environment that new students are coming into and do you really want to be responsible for that?

For your sake and theirs, if you can't learn to accept and flourish in that environment, you should leave. If you know someone that's engaged in this sort of behavior, this critical, this bullying, this undercutting of other martial artists, please talk to them. If you think they can handle a direct conversation, go at it that way. Tell them what you think, tell them what you're seeing, tell them why you don't like it but if you don't think they're going to respond well to that, be more subtle. Maybe share this episode with them but don't tell them why. Maybe there's another tactic you have. Whatever it is, try to get them to see what's going on. Tell to get them to realize that the thing that they love, because these actions seem



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to come from those that really love the martial arts, get them to see that what they're doing is actually harming the thing that they love most. Whatever you do, don't shut them out unless you absolutely have to because this is about personal growth. If someone is involved in this sort of behavior, they got more growing to do and as martial artists, again, lifting each other up, helping each other grow as people and as martial artist.

Try to look for martial artist and martial arts schools and events that foster community and camaraderie and all the other positive aspects of the arts. Support those people and those places and by the same token, try to avoid those that don't support the arts. Let them fall away. If we can let go of the bad people and the bad schools and the bad events within the martial arts, we can go a long way towards doing away with the bad feelings and the bad attitudes. At least, most of them. We are after all just human beings, trying to get better through our martial arts training.

So, what do you think? Are martial artists overall kind and supportive? Is it just a few bad eggs? Or are we dealing with a systemic issue? Whatever your comments, whatever your thoughts, shoot us a message. You can get to us on social media. We're on Facebook, twitter, Pinterest and Instagram, all with the username whistlekick or you can leave a comment on our website, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com and remember you can leave a comment on YouTube and if there's someone you think should hear this episode, do them a favor, share it with them. Let's get some good discussion going. It is after all the only way we can move forward.

If you want to be a guest on this show or maybe you have an idea for a show topic like this one, go ahead and reach out to us or fill out the form on the website and don't forget to subscribe to our newsletter so you can step on everything that we're doing. You can learn more about our products at whistlekick.com and our sparring gear is also readily available on Amazon. That's all for us today so until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!