



Episode 87 – Martial Arts Weapons | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey there everybody, we're back for another episode of whistlekick martial arts radio. This time it's episode 89 and today, we're going to talk about martial arts weapons. One of my favorite subjects. Now, 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 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, you can learn more or buy over at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). Of our past podcast episodes, show notes and a lot more, we're on a different site and that's [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). From either site, you can sign up for our newsletter and you really should. We offer exclusive content to subscribers and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guests of the show.

We've got a great iTunes review to share with you and this one comes in from pistol975. It's a five-star review which we always love and it says, actually it's titled Great Show. Jeremy has put a wonderful show together here. The wisdom and insight given in this show is topnotch and entertaining. If you're an experienced martial artist, someone looking to get involved or anywhere in between, I highly recommend this show. Thanks, Jeremy, Pete.

Well, thank you Pete. I really appreciate you spending the time to leave that for us, of course, the show is a lot bigger than just myself. I do put in a lot of the time on the back-end but we got the guests, we got the people to help some schedule in there, there's a lot going on in this mix and, of course, the feedback that we receive from all of you and the show ideas and all that, really honestly, could not do it without all of you. To paraphrase one of our guests on the show, without all of you, I would just be a crazy guy talking into a microphone and maybe that's all I am but you're all listening so what does that say about you? Anyway, moving on, Pete. Go ahead, shoot us a message and we'll get you your free pack of whistlekick stuff. Really appreciate that and to the rest of you that have left reviews, thank you, keep 'em coming, they're really helping us out.

So, let's jump into it, let's talk about martial arts weapons. Let's start talking about the history, of course. Now, it doesn't take a big stretch of the imagination to realize that weapons are probably just about as old as fighting. If you're in an altercation with someone and you're a caveman and there's a rock, you're probably going to want to one-up the guy. You're probably going to want to hit him with a rock or a stick. It's pretty obvious but the oldest surviving weapons are these set of 8 spears that archaeologists found and those go back three hundred thousand years so pretty cool stuff there.

Of course, the most popular martial arts weapons history really centers around Okinawa and this was a story that was told to me many, many times during my early martial arts career and the same story went that on Okinawa, an island off Japan for those of you who don't know, weapons were illegal there so the common people, the Okinawans, developed their weapons and their weapons practices from their farm implements and it's a great story and it really kind of embodies the martial spirit and I love it. The only problem is that there's absolutely no historical evidence supporting it. Yes, weapons were illegal but there's no real proof that the weapons systems that were developed on Okinawa came directly from



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farm implements. There is quite a few documents showing that those weapons came over from China and the weapons systems weren't really practiced by the commoners on Okinawa but actually more the warrior class and some scholars said that the weapons based forms from Okinawa may actually predate karate, that unarmed systems from Okinawa so that's kind of being debated a little bit on the academic side but kind of interesting to think that weapons could be that much of its own component of the martial arts that it comes before the empty hand stuff, at least, in this region and we're going to talk a little bit more about the relationship between weapons arts and unarmed arts as we move forward.

Of course, when we start to think about weapons as the broad component of the martial arts, we start adding in things like swords. There's a ton that we can talk about and we're not going to go into depth about all of the different origins or the different weapons art across the globe because we'd be here all day. Turn this into a Ken Burns documentary for those of you that don't know who Ken Burns is, go look him up.

Of course, there are sword styles that originated in China, Japan, Korea, medieval Europe, ancient Europe, the Greeks, the Romans, they all had swords, the ancient Indian art of Kalaripayattu. I'm not saying that anywhere close to right, they had bladed weapons. We've talked about that a little bit, I think in social media, not so much on this show as possibly being the original martial art. The one that was brought by the Bodhidharma to Chinese temples that everything else that we think of as the original martial arts stem from but even as far back as the ancient Indian practice of Kalaripayattu, they had bladed weapons.

Now, the first Japanese swords were made of iron and they came from techniques that the Chinese developed and brought through Korea, that was some time in the 4<sup>th</sup> century or so but the katana, with that distinctive curved blade, when we think about Japanese swords, we tend to think of the katana and that shape. That was years later that that developed, somewhere between 800 and 1200. The shinai, that great bamboo practice sword that some of us have experienced across the back of our legs. I know I have. That actually wasn't developed until the 1800s. Now, we really can't talk about Japanese swordsmanship, Japanese swordsmanship history without mentioning Miyamoto Musashi who is the author of The Book of The Five Rings and he lived sometime in the 1600s. Late 1500s, early 1600s if you want to be really specific there.

Korean swordsmanship, that's kind of an interesting place right now. You've got some people that are reconstructing this sort of lost knowledge, there're books, photos, some things that have been discovered fairly recently or just kind of archives that are getting pulled back out while you have others practicing sort of Korean versions of Japanese sword art like Kendo but at least, as far as Korea goes, evidence of sword practice goes all the way back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, kind of ties in with as iron swords are travelling from China through Korea to Japan but the earliest evidence of regimented, systematized sword training in Korea goes back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and part of the reason, perhaps the main reason that Korean sword training really faded out was because in the late 1800s, Japan had a really strong cultural influence and Japan was focusing a lot more on firearms so there was a big shift there in the military to focus more on guns.



## Episode 87 – Martial Arts Weapons | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

Swords, of course, go back a lot further than the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The first swords in Egypt were made of bronze and they go back more than four thousand years so there's a lot going on back there. We don't have a ton of records of how they were used or anything so I'm not going to spend any real time digging into that.

Of course, if we think about the types of weapons, Okinawan weapons have a fairly small set that we talk about. We've got the bow, the staff, the sai, tonfa, nunchaku, just personal aside, please don't call them numbchucks, drives me crazy. Kama, Tekko, which is basically brass knuckles, tinbe-rochin, shield and a spear, surujin, which is kind of weighted chain or cord, the eku, which is an oar, tambo, which is a short staff about the length of a forearm, sometimes used in pairs, kuwa which is really a gardening hoe, the hanbō which is a shorter staff about the length of the leg, nunti bo, which is kind of a staff with a sai on the end and sansetsukon which is a three-sectional staff. Think of a nunchaku but with an extra wooden piece and an extra piece of rope and that's pretty much it. There may be some others, again, we've got this question of where all these weapons came from so different Okinawan martial arts have different weapons that they use, different sets, I guess, is probably a better way to put it but those are kind of the core accepted ones.

Indian weapons, mentioned those before, they had a lot more in the way of blades, different lengths, different shapes for different purposes but a blade is a blade. So, even though the shapes were different, they were all designed to either slice or stab.

Chinese martial arts weapons, of course, is a much longer list. You've got a bigger geographic area, people doing things differently and, potentially, depending on how you interpret history, for a longer period of time. Most of them are similar to at least something on that list of Okinawan weapons that I mentioned but then you have some other things that are completely different like shuang gao, the hook swords. Those are completely different. There's nothing in Okinawan or, from what I've read, Japanese martial history that is anything similar. If you've never seen these, we've got some video up on the show notes page, [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) and they are swords that literally have hooks on the end and they're really cool, I've seen people work with them in competitions. A lot of fun, something I'd love to play with myself someday.

In some martial arts schools, weapons are taught in parallel so my original martial arts upbringing, we started working with the bow, the staff, usually around yellow belt and in some schools, that's how they do it. That's part of the core curriculum and you have to learn certain weapons to progress to certain ranks. In other schools, it's optional. Some, it's completely separate and they award separate rank for weapons training because it's a different skill set treated almost like a different martial arts entirely.

In arnis, students typically learn the stick and knife techniques before they learn any empty hand techniques and that's the opposite of what most martial arts styles do. Most of you that are listening, if you've learned martial arts weapons, you've learned them as an extension of your body. That's what most martial arts systems teach. You take the empty hand techniques, put a weapon in your hands and you adapt what you're doing and it just gives you a better understanding of how to manipulate the weapon.



## Episode 87 – Martial Arts Weapons | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

European swordsmanship is kind of receiving this renaissance which maybe is an ironic choice of words and not one that I intended. We talked a little bit about that history on episode 78 with Sir Gemini Asonte and personally, I find that era of martial arts history really fascinating because I don't know anything about it but when we think about weapons, if we think about swords, of course, that's one of the eras where sword work was, if not, at the highest skill level, it was, at least, so deeply rooted in the culture that it survived today. Even in a movie like Shrek, there are knights and they have swords or there are Lego sets that have swords and shields from that era so I just find that really neat and I think it's cool that we're starting to see more of that come into the broader martial arts realm.

I think that most of us that train in the martial arts, even the most skilled unarmed martial artist, would probably take the advantage of having a weapon in the fight if that opportunity rose because weapons give you an advantage and at least, in the way that we define weapons in martial arts, there's something all around you. I bet within your reach right now, there's something that you could use as a weapon. Most often, it's something that you could use in place of a knife or a staff or a stick and that's why these are usually the first weapons in most martial arts systems because you can adapt just about anything to those techniques.

One of the things that I really like about weapons training is that I think it gives us a different perspective. It broadens our context as martial artists. The better that we understand weapons, how to attack with them, how to defend with them, how to attack someone that has one and defending in someone that has one, I think, makes us better overall. I think it gives us a better understanding of how the body moves, how people react, the advantages and disadvantages of having a weapon, of course, just having a weapon in your hand doesn't automatically give you an advantage and there's no better example that I can offer you, at least in audio, than if you've never done self-defense against someone with a bat or a long stick, what's job number one is to get inside the end range of that weapon because once you're inside, just as if you're working with someone who's primarily a kicker, once you're inside the range of their foot, they're not nearly as dangerous and of course, the person is focusing on the weapon, or focusing on their kick if we're going to stay with that parallel, you'd actually have an advantage.

The world seems like it might be shifting into this kind of an increasingly dangerous place. I don't want to debate that but let's assume for a moment that it is. Now, some of us, carry firearms but some of us are unwilling or unable to in our day to day lives so, of course, learning skills that you can apply in the situation to give you that advantage that a weapon inherently gives you can be really important and very effective.

Getting better with a knife or a small stick, something like a kubotan, that can be really valuable and of course, figure they're all over the place, learning how to handle that is a pretty good idea. Fun fact about the kubotan, it's not the ancient weapon that a lot of people automatically assume it was. It was invented back in the 1960's and was really popularized when the Los Angeles police department started training female officers in how to use it and if you're not familiar what a kubotan is, it's basically a 4 to 6-inch long stick that often has a keychain.



## Episode 87 – Martial Arts Weapons | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

Some martial artists specialize in the training and the teaching of these smaller weapons and I would encourage a lot of you that feel like this is an appropriate path for your training to seek out someone like that. Of course, Guro Chris Thompson from episode 88, we recorded that episode not too long ago, we aired just a couple days ago when we're recording this, he's a great example of that. He is an amazing martial artist overall but especially with knives and sticks.

Personally, I think weapons are just a lot of fun to train with. There is nothing that I can do outside of weapons to change the effective range of my attacks, of my kicks, of my punches. I can't make my legs shorter or longer but I can pick up a small knife or a long spear and that can really give you a different perspective as I mentioned before on how combat can occur and how you can steer things to your advantage. If you've never trained with weapons, I really think you should, even just to play around. If you don't have a training partner or instructor or a great place to train, just pick up a stick and I don't mean go buy some fancy rattan thing off the internet, just go out in your yard out in the woods, pick up a stick and consider how you might use it in a way that takes the concepts from your unarmed training and adapts it.

I'm absolutely not a proponent of learning martial arts from videos. I'm not saying go spend 12 minutes on YouTube and call yourself a master stick fighter but if you're just interested in understanding some of the core concepts, there's really a lot of great material out there that you can look up. If you do find that weapons training is something that you want to bring into your own personal curriculum, I'll bet there's somebody nearby, every one of you out there that knows enough about weapons to help you out to at least get you started and you really should seek that person out. Besides, I don't think that weapons training is ever more fun than when you get to spar and you have to find some training partners to do that so go find some.

What are your experiences with martial arts weapons? Do you train with them? If not, why not? If you do, why? How does it relate to your unarmed training? What's your favorite weapon? Whatever the comments, 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](https://www.whistlekick.com) or you can leave us a comment on our website, [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) or you can find the video over on YouTube to search [whistlekick](https://www.whistlekick.com), the show will come up and if you think that this will be a great episode to share with one of your friends, please go ahead and do that. Help us spread the word. This show continues to grow and that's thanks to people like you that are helping us spread the word so we really appreciate that.

Now, if you want to be a guest in the show or maybe you know someone that will be a great interview, perhaps you'll have an idea for the topic for one of our Thursday shows like this, go ahead, get a hold of us. There are forms on the website or just shoot us an email [info@whistlekick.com](mailto:info@whistlekick.com). don't forget to leave us a review and if you're not, please subscribe to the newsletter, stay subscribed to the show with one of the apps, available on iOS and Android. You can learn about the products we make on [whistlekick.com](https://www.whistlekick.com) and our sparring gear is also available on Amazon. That's it for today so until next time, train hard smile and have a great day!