



Episode 68 – Sensei Rocky DiRico | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How's it going, everybody? It's episode 68 of whistlekick martial arts radio. The only place to hear the best stories from the best martial artists like today's guest, Sensei Rocky DiRico. My name is Jeremy Lesniak and I founded whistlekick but here on martial arts radio, I'm your host. Whistlekick, as many of you know makes the world's best sparring gear as well as great apparel and accessories, all for practitioners and fans of the traditional martial arts. I'd like to welcome our new listeners and thank those of you tuning in again. If you're not familiar with our products, why don't you head on over to [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) and take a look at what we make? One of our most popular items is our sweatpants. Those of you out there who have a pair know why. If you want to see the show notes, that's on a different website, [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) and while you're over there, go ahead and sign up for the newsletter. We offer special content to the subscribers and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guests for the show. Just like our last couple of episodes, this one features a quiz so after you've listened, head on over to the website, go to the show notes, take the quiz and see how you stack up to others on the leaderboard. We're starting to see some of you take those quizzes which is great. Don't be afraid to give us some feedback. We're still figuring those things out. Today, we're joined by Sensei Rocky DiRico. An excellent martial artist and accomplished competitor. Sensei DiRico, like all of our guests, loves the martial arts. Unlike a lot of our guests, though, he's made competition a core part of his training and career. We spent some time talking about that but also his traditional root, how he got started and a whole lot more so let's hear what he has to say. Sensei DiRico, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

**Rocky DiRico:**

It's my pleasure to be here.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

The pleasure is all mine. This is going to be a lot of fun. Looking forward to hearing your answers to all these questions and getting to know you a little bit better and I'm sure the listeners are, too. You've got a name that goes back a little ways and I'm sure I'm not the only person who recognizes your name especially those of us up here in the northeast but before we get too deep into some of these things that you're known for, why don't we go back? How did you get started in the martial arts and why?

**Rocky DiRico:**

I was always fascinated by martial arts in the 1960s. I used to see bits and pieces of martial arts in TV shows. The Wild, Wild West and the 2 other show so I was fascinated but since there were very few martial arts schools, I never really had the opportunity to train then in 1972, a friend of mine was training at a school in Waltham, Massachusetts. His name, by the way, was Steve McGalan. Steve was showing me some techniques that he had learned while training at that particular school called the



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United Studios of Self Defense and that got me really interested and a few months later, I joined the school.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Great, so, tell us a little bit about that early time. You're seeing martial arts in television and maybe some movies and what was it that drew you to it?

**Rocky DiRico:**

I think it's because it was all we considered mystical that someone could throw a punch or kick or drop a big opponent down and me, not being a very big person myself, felt drawn to that concept of being able to defeat a larger opponent so those TV shows often would have one person that would, perhaps would start to see even with a bigger opponent or perhaps multiple opponents and I find that very interesting.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And so, with your early start in the martial arts, did you find that mystical piece or reality...?

**Rocky DiRico:**

I did. I found that if you train and you learn the techniques properly, the techniques are effective and therefore, you do possess that ability. It's all a matter of training and being patient and learning the technique properly and keep training until you perfect it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, here you are, you're training in Massachusetts, I think you said Waltham, and you're getting going. Give us a rough idea, how old were you? Teenager, child, adult?

**Rocky DiRico:**

I just turned 20. It was 1972. I joined the school late in the year and enjoyed it immediately. I remember walking up the very first day up the set of stairs because the school was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and here I was, with each step that I took thinking, okay, my initiation is going to be that they're going to beat me up to see if I'm really serious about training but actually it was not that way at all. They were friendly and I had a great time in my first class.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And you were hooked?

**Rocky DiRico:**

Yes, I was hooked.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And you never stopped?

**Rocky DiRico:**

And I never stopped.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think that's pretty similar to what most of the guests that we have. For whatever reason, everybody comes to it for a slightly different reason but very rarely do they fade away and they just keep going and I think that's the beauty of martial arts is that you can just keep going as you age, as your body changes. There is always a different way to approach the martial arts but let's move on. Let's start talking about some stories here, as our listeners know, we're all about stories. I'm a fan of a good story, of course, and I'm sure you've got a ton of them. Why don't you tell us your best martial arts story?

**Rocky DiRico:**

As far as my best martial arts story, I probably would say my best martial art highlight, I have many, but I would say representing the United States in Italy in 1995 where we did 10 shows in 10 days in 10 different cities and the reason why is, first of all, representing United States was such an honor but also I was born in Italy and I lived there until I was 6 years old. I never got to see the country and this was the perfect opportunity for me to go back to my country where I was born and actually get to see the cities and many of the famous landmarks and so forth so I found that to be, perhaps, the highlight of my martial arts career.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That sounds like a pretty incredible trip so when you say representing now, this was demonstrations rather than competitions?

**Rocky DiRico:**

Yes, there was a promoter in Italy that had a special show he would do every year called Pascuas del Budo and basically, what that means is martial art Easter and he would invite someone to represent various countries from around the world and I was chosen in that particular year, 1995.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow. That sounds like a lot of fun so obviously, you weren't the only there. Any other names that we might know? Any of your compatriots that we may recognize?

**Rocky DiRico:**



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Carmichael Simon was another American. He was also in Team Paul Mitchell and also my teacher happened to be chosen that year to demonstrate his self defense techniques, my teacher being Grand Master Nick Cerio.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's a couple names that people might recognize, great! Was that at all an emotional trip for you? I mean, I could imagine that...

**Rocky DiRico:**

Absolutely, absolutely. It was emotional because, even though I am proud to be an American citizen and I consider myself an American, I still have a connection to Italy, obviously having been born there and still have relatives there so for me to go back for myself and what the country is like and eat the food, meet the people, it was very emotional.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sounds like a great trip. Wonderful and of course, I've talked a lot of people that have done international travel with respect to martial arts and the martial arts community that we have whether it's in your city or your state, your region, it transcends, and I'm guessing, that you experienced that too, that maybe there were, I don't know if there are people from other countries outside of Italy involved in this too, but I'm going to guess you found quite a few new friends very quickly.

**Rocky DiRico:**

I did, as a matter of fact. I made friends from France, Australia, Germany and many other places and, just for the record, in reference to this Pascua del Budo, I was paid to do this. They paid me a fee plus all my expenses including food, hotel, travel, you name it and when my students would ask me, how much they paid me, I told them it was one million lira which is true and that equates to about \$1500.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right, a million of something sounds like a lot until you consider the exchange rate, for sure.

**Rocky DiRico:**

Yes.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, let's go back. Let's go back to a time when you were 19 and something happens in your life and you don't end up going to that martial arts school that day and, for whatever reason, you never set foot in a martial arts school. Take a moment and imagine what your life would look like and then tell us about it.



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**Rocky DiRico:**

Very good question. If I had never trained in martial arts, I'd probably be would've become a history teacher which I'm sure I would have done a good job but, most importantly, almost certainly, I'd probably would have never met my future wife who I met at 1975 when she joined my school in Arlington, Massachusetts so that would've changed everything. My wife's trained for 5 years, earned her black belt and she's still training to this day. We got married in 1978 and we're still married 38 years later. She's not only my wife but she's also my best friend. Her name is Wendy.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's a pretty big piece of your life and, of course, a lot of the people listening have likely, if not, met their spouse through the martial arts have trained or something that...martial arts, of course, tends to be a family affair. I don't need to tell you that but I'm sure everybody else out there listening knows that so I think we can all say it's a great thing you started training. I'm sure Wendy would say the same thing. Hopefully, she would say the same thing, right?

**Rocky DiRico:**

Yes, but she often jokes and she says she married the teacher so she wouldn't have to pay for lessons.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I knew a few other people who have done that too, actually. So, let's bring it back, we can come back to real reality now and you did get to start training at 20 and you have everything that you've learned and as you look back now, I'd like you to imagine, not imagine, I'd like you to remember a difficult time. A challenging time, whether that was a day or a month or some part of your life, and tell us how your martial arts training or experience helped you overcome it?

**Rocky DiRico:**

I can't specifically think of one difficult time. I think most of us have many difficult times in our lives and, to me personally, my martial arts training helped me through my most difficult time.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Can you tell us a little more? When you...how about this, I'll tweak it a little bit. Let's say, in your day to day life, you bump up against something. Let's say, be it a difficult person outside the dojo or just something that seems a little overwhelming. How do you approach that? How do you gather yourself and observe?

**Rocky DiRico:**

Okay, well, I can say this. I never really have to use my martial arts training, physical training except for one time when I had a drunk person grab me around the neck and I used one kick and it was over but,



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on several occasions, when there are people that wanted to fight me or to prove that they were right, I would just get in a stance and give a loud [00:14:32] so I consider those few times that I was approached where somebody thought they would be able to defeat me a difficult time because you have to do the right thing at the right time and I felt like I reacted in all those situations correctly including a time when I was in Boston. A beautiful day on Harrison Ave in Boston and the homeless person I was trying to help asked if there was anything I can do to help him and all of a sudden, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a knife and said he was going to cut me out and I just backed off a little bit, watched and he didn't do much after that and I walked away and I felt I did the right thing and people asked me why I didn't kick him or punch him, but I never really felt threatened. Again, even though that was potentially a difficult time for me, I did the right thing and martial arts helped me through it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm reminded of one of the quotes from Karate Kid...I don't think it's the first one but maybe I'm jumbling them...when Mister Miyagi says, best not fight but if fight, win. That one's always stuck with me.

**Rocky DiRico:**

I like that, yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, a lot of times, I think as martial artists, the outside world looks at us and thinks that what we're training for is, almost exclusively, trying to win a fight. I would argue that most of our training is to not even have to fight. Would you agree?

**Rocky DiRico:**

I totally agree.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Good. We're on the same pace. That makes us go better. So, you mentioned Professor Cerio who is, of course, a legendary figure in the Kenpo world but other than him, other than the people that you've had as your formal instructors, if you had to name someone as the most influential in your martial arts career, who would it be?

**Rocky DiRico:**

There have been several but if I have to pick one, I would have to say the coach of Team Paul Mitchell, Grand Master Don Rodriguez. He asked me to be on the team in 1990 and I said to him, well, I have to think about it so, I thought about it for about 2 seconds and I said yes and then, I have been always happy to be on the team and have Coach Rodriguez as a person that's always inspired me to do better





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and a lot of my success in competition, I would say, is a direct result of him believing in me and pushing me and supporting me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, something that we haven't really talked about much on this show is that level of competition where people are organized into teams and have coaches and, of course, we've had other members of Team Paul Mitchell on here. We've had Christine Bannon-Rodriguez, we've had Freddie LaPan on here. People that, of course, you know both of them quite well but if someone was out there right now and they're listening and they wanted to coach martial artists at that high competitive level, what would you say makes Grand Master Rodriguez a great coach for you?

**Rocky DiRico:**

I'd say how he coaches various competitors and he really knows how to motivate them. He knows how to say the right thing at the right time. He probably would have been a successful coach in any sport because of his dedication. He believes in himself. He's just a very motivating person so, for me personally, was the perfect person to have motivate me. He would be at the ring where you're competing, calling your name and cheering you on so I think it's just the overall attitude that he has where he believes in his team, he cheers his team, he gives valuable advice to the team so therefore, I think anybody on the team is going to benefit for having found Rodriguez as their coach.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What were practices like with him?

**Rocky DiRico:**

We didn't have a lot of practices because we would all come from all over the United States so we didn't really get a chance to have too many. He would always expect the best from us. He would expect our best performance every time no matter what whether you didn't feel well or maybe had a slight injury and he demanded the best and we probably got the best.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Great. Yeah, he is someone that is on our shortlist to have on this show so, if you're listening now, Mister Rodriguez, I want to talk to you. so, competition. Of course, competition is something that, I would say, is core to your ties with martial arts. Would you agree with that? It's pretty fundamental for who you are?

**Rocky DiRico:**

Yes. I went to my first tournament in 1973. I had a lot of fun and I was hooked and I really enjoyed tournaments.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What is it about tournaments that you enjoy?

**Rocky DiRico:**

The competition and the camaraderie. I have made so many friends with competition. People from all over the world and so many from different states in the United States and so many of them are such good friends that if I'm ever in a particular part of the country, I know that they would invite me to their home, to their dojo and that's such a good feeling to know that you have so many friends in so many places.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's like having a whole other martial arts family.

**Rocky DiRico:**

Well put. I agree to that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Some people that listen to this show know a little bit about my past. I don't talk about this very often but I used to compete as a teenager and had that big, broad competition family and then when whistlekick started, one of the ways that we market is we attend events so there was nearly 20-year gap in there but it was like I never left. All these people are still my friends, they're still doing the same thing...well not the same things...the same things, some of them that were competing are now coaching but that family is still there and it's one of the things that I love about martial arts whether the arts itself or the people, it's always there for you and I think that's pretty fantastic.

**Rocky DiRico:**

It is. I have to agree with you, Jeremy, when you make friends in the martial arts, you're basically friends for life.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sometimes, even the ones that maybe, I don't want to say that you don't want, but some are better friends more than others. Sometimes, you take the good with the bad.

**Rocky DiRico:**

What is interesting that I found is that some of the people that competed against me and want to beat me became my best friends.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**





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And I have no doubt that once any of you steps into that ring, that friendship has the pause button on it because it's a lot more fun to compete against your friends and to push your friends and to best your friends.

**Rocky DiRico:**

Absolutely. One thing I always have prided myself in doing and that's always congratulating all those who competed against me for their effort. I was very fortunate enough to win, I don't know exactly the percentages but I know it's over 90% of my competitions, but I made it a point to always congratulate anyone that competed against me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, stepping into the competition ring is intimidating. Doesn't matter how good you are.

**Rocky DiRico:**

Absolutely and even though, I was the number one seed for so many years and was expected to win my weapons forms and my...weapons and kata divisions, I always felt like I had to prove myself because I didn't want to be in a position where I didn't have my [00:24:25] performing where someone could say, I can't believe that guy is rated number one and look at him, he doesn't look that good so I always pushed myself, as well as having Coach Rodriguez push me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sometimes there can be more pressure being the one with the expectations than being the underdog.

**Rocky DiRico:**

Yes, and I always compete with big competitors. I always competed against people like Terry Kramer, just to name one, but I competed against Jim Smith who is now rated as one of the top senior competitors and there were many others. Sensei Brian Ricci. I actually competed against my own teacher for a short period of time which was a little bit challenging because I felt like maybe I shouldn't be in the ring with him because he was my teacher but I do recall one time, we were both in the grand championship and I bowed out to him out of respect.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What was his reaction to that?

**Rocky DiRico:**

He was honored and then, there was another tournament where he had to leave early and he would have, again, clashed in the grand championship so he allowed me to go and I was able to secure that grand champion.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You mentioned Jim Smith. Loyal listeners will know that we've had him on the show and anyone that is friends with him now knows that he is still competing at a high level but he's probably the most prolific competitor that I'm aware of, usually competing twice in a weekend and, if you're out there listening, Hanshi Smith is probably on the way to another competition right now.

**Rocky DiRico:**

Yes, last I heard, he was in Puerto Rico representing United States.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, that's the last that I heard from him to.

**Rocky DiRico:**

And, from my understanding, he also won first place in kata and in weapons.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I didn't have a chance to see that but I have no doubt. I've seen him compete and he is quite the competitor.

**Rocky DiRico:**

Yes, I would say, over the last couple of years, he was my toughest competitor. I was very fortunate to be successful against him but he did beat me in kata in Washington, DC in 2015.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, you're still competing as well?

**Rocky DiRico:**

I came back from a little break of not competing when Kevin Thompson, my teammate, was struck with ALS and I felt compelled to compete and dedicate my competitions to him and I competed 2013, 2014, 2015 and now this year, 2015, I'm taking the year off.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, we'll see you competing next year, then? Is that the plan?

**Rocky DiRico:**

Yeah, probably, although I might do a couple of tournaments late in the year. A couple of tournaments I really like, one is [00:27:41] tournament in New York and then, a friend of mine has a tournament in



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Philadelphia in December Hugo Armando, and I'll probably go to his tournament. I always have fun. He is a great promoter. He really takes good care of the competitors, very good tournament if you're a competitor because there's a lot of effort making the competitors feel welcome.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Great, sure. I can imagine some of the listeners out there now, he started competing in '73 and he's still competing, that's quite a lot of years of competition. You've competed in a high level, you've been successful. Clearly, you enjoy it but what is it that keeps you going in competition? Is there something left that you're looking to accomplish?

**Rocky DiRico:**

No, I feel I've already accomplished everything I wanted to in competition but I really enjoy the camaraderie. I enjoy the actual physical techniques when I'm performing on the floor and I feel that, in order for me to compete at a high level, I have to train diligently so that I can compete effectively so that motivates me to keep training hard and not get lazy which helps me become a better teacher in my dojo.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

As some that we've had on this show recently have said, leading by example, leading from the front to demonstrate you can still walk the walk even after you've done it a bunch of times.

**Rocky DiRico:**

Absolutely. I think also, I like to represent competitors that are a little bit older and I like to get them to think that they can do it too, that age doesn't have to be a challenge to train in martial arts and even to compete in martial arts. I had a student that started training when he was 70 and now, he's 75 and he's still training and he really loves it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's great. Now, one of the things and, clearly you're not doing this, one of the things that I've always been a little, very gently, critical of is when martial artists reach a point of stature when they achieve a high rank and, not only do they not compete, but they don't tend to demonstrate their skill at their top level to their student and to others and I think it's great that you and others like Hanshi Smith that are out there competing because it shows those of us that are younger, that are less skilled, what we can aspire to. It's very motivating so just personally, I want to thank you for continuing to do that and for any of the others out there that are doing that and for those of you that maybe have a school that take a little bit more of an arm chair approach, at times, I'd like to encourage you what it's like from your students' perspective to see what you're capable of. There is nothing more motivating.

**Rocky DiRico:**



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Great point, Jeremy.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, we've talked about a few names, people you've had the chance to compete with, to train under but if you could go back, or even now, let's say, if you could train someone that you haven't had the opportunity to, be they alive or dead, who would that be and why?

**Rocky DiRico:**

That question is a tough one to answer because I think way back and wonder what it would have been like to train with Funakoshi who started Shotokan. Yamaguchi who I believe started Goju and I think any of those early pioneers of martial arts would have been great. I believe Bill Wallace is a great martial artist. He has come to my school and demonstrated seminars several times now and I consider him to be one of the best because he's so good at what he does. He works with someone as young as 3 as effectively as he can work with somebody 73 and he's got the humor and he's just got a great attitude so it's really hard to pinpoint one person but I would put Bill Wallace on top of the list simply because I know him really well. I have a lot of respect for him.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

He is a great guy, a great martial artist. Listeners know we've had him on the show. This is fun! You're dropping these names and I get to say, well, we've had them on this show but he's a fantastic man and you're right, his sense of humor is probably unparalleled for, at least, any martial artist I've had the opportunity to work with and so, just to put it out there, anybody that has a chance to train with him if he's doing a seminar anywhere within driving distance of you, please go. You will not regret it. Are you, at all, a movie guy? You like martial arts movies?

**Rocky DiRico:**

Absolutely. I have my favorites. Some of them may surprise some people but nonetheless, they're my personal favorites if you'd like to know.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I would love to know.

**Rocky DiRico:**

Not necessarily in this order but the movie Sidekick with Chuck Norris, I thought, was very well done and that's one of my very favorites as well as Billy Jack. Maybe the all-time martial arts movie favorite for most martial artists: Enter the Dragon. So, those are my top three because there are many. I like martial arts movies as a rule whether it be Jackie Chan or whoever [00:34:20] whoever but those are my top three.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Those are great choices and you are the first person, I believe, to mention Sidekick. We've had other Chuck Norris movies mentioned but it's great that you mention that one. It's one that I think people often forget and then Billy Jack, I think, is probably, for its time, the most underrated martial arts film.

**Rocky DiRico:**

That's a great point. I have to agree with you on that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

If, anybody out there, if you don't know the history of that movie, go look it up. We'll put some stuff in the show notes, [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com), not just a link to the movie but maybe a link to some of the history on it and how it got going because the gentleman who starred in it, I'm losing his name.

**Rocky DiRico:**

Tom Laughlin.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right, thank you. Was not a martial artist when he started. He saw what was coming but instead of just kind of faking it or hiring stunt doubles, he went into, I think it was 6 months of intensive 8-hour day training so he could represent the martial arts well on film and I think there's a vibe captured in that film that I've never seen in any other movie.

**Rocky DiRico:**

Yes, I really like the story. Good guy versus bad guy sort of thing and he tried to right a lot of wrongs that were going on and it's just really a good movie. I really enjoyed it. I have watched it on several occasions and sometimes I go on YouTube and I watch some of the highlights of the movie which anybody can do which I think is cool.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah! Yeah, we... I don't know if you know the fictional character, Master Ken, if you haven't seen Enter the Dojo humorous films on YouTube but we had him on the show and his real life persona, Matt Page, and he was talking about, as a kid, having his VHS tapes of martial arts films cued up to the fight scenes that he liked so he would just watch the fight scenes and then rewind it. If he had 5 minutes before school, he could watch the fight scene but now, they get YouTube.

**Rocky DiRico:**

That's so funny because I can see a lot of people doing that.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I know for a fact, I've been going way, way back, before we even had a VCR, the local convenient store would rent VCRs and they would rent movies, I mean, they had a hundred movies, if that and I would end up with something and watch it 20 times all weekend and once I knew where the good fight scenes were, I was doing the exact same thing. Rewinding and just playing that five minutes over and over and I feel bad, I apologize to the people who own that store, I probably wore out some of your tapes. So, we don't have any common actors among those movies, do you have a favorite martial arts actor?

**Rocky DiRico:**

Again, that's a really tough one. I think there have been so many good ones. Obviously, Tom Laughlin in the Billy Jack movies. Bruce Lee, I thought acted extremely well. Chuck Norris obviously has. Cynthia Rothrock. I mean, there's just so many. It's not easy for me to pick one. If I had to pick one, I'd probably say Chuck Norris.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure. Now, Cynthia Rothrock is a name that doesn't come up on the show as often maybe because she's not quite as active as she once was. I mean, if you go to any martial arts hall of fame or things like that, she is involved, she's got some business ventures and she's certainly both an accomplished actor and martial artist but, maybe for the people out there that don't know who she is, is there a movie of hers that you'd recommend that they could start with?

**Rocky DiRico:**

Off the top of my head, I can't pick the name of one of her movies but I know that she's been in many. A lot of the movies that she filmed were actually done in Asia and, if I'm not mistaken, I think she's been in, maybe, 40 or 50 movies.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's quite a list and so what we'll do... I'll find a couple off-air and run them by you to see if you have a pick out of there. The most recent thing that she was in is The Martial Arts Kid kind of a sort of modern remake.

**Rocky DiRico:**

It's funny. I actually didn't think of that and I just saw that movie. The Martial Art Kid.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What did you think?

**Rocky DiRico:**





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I thought she did a great job and I thought it was a great movie. Obviously, the Martial Art Kid is sort of like on the same story line as the original Karate Kid movie but, nonetheless, I really liked it for the simple reason that there were real martial artists in the movie, had a good storyline and I also like Don 'The Dragon' Wilson in that movie.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, yeah, he is a fantastic martial artist and a great guy and anybody that doesn't know him, go do your homework. You'll be glad that you did. So, how about books? Are you a reader at all?

**Rocky DiRico:**

I am a reader. I have read many and I'll be giving you a list but I am going to just give you the one I recommend to all my students that are, perhaps, 10 years old and older to read at home. Zen in the Martial Arts by Joe Hyams. It's good reading, it's simple reading, has very good stories. I think it helps a lot of beginners understand the martial arts perhaps a little bit better so that's the one I recommend.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's a classic and it's the first martial arts book that I read. It's been coming up a lot on the show. Listeners, that's a sign if you have not read that book, it is time. I mean, we've had, I think 3 of the last 4 interviews that you have heard, recommend that book so, time to go add that to your reading list. So, obviously, you've done a lot. You've accomplished a lot of things and we've talked about it with respect to competition that there really aren't goals, per se, that are driving you but rather, other things to motivate you but do you have any martial arts-related goals?

**Rocky DiRico:**

Well, since I've reached or exceeded my martial arts goals, I would say that any future goal would be in reference to continue to inspire others whether it's through competition, through my teaching, to inspire others because I've had this belief for many, many years that, if everybody, I mean literally everybody, if everybody over the age of 5, all over the world, practice martial arts, and they live by the martial arts code, that the world will be a much better place for everybody. That's wishful thinking but I think it speaks volume about the effect that martial arts training can have on the individual. I believe that any person that trains in the martial arts will do everything better than without the martial arts.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, people that have listened to this show for a while may think that I set you up on that question because you answered, what you just said was, not quite word for word, but 100% of the sentiment of something that I shared on the show many times and no, I did not do that and I would love for you to back me up on that.

**Rocky DiRico:**



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I say this to my classes. I remind my classes of the very thing I just said, maybe once a month, and I have, most of my class, I have parents sitting and watching and I consider that very powerful because when I mention something, let's say to my children's class, let's say the parents are listening, now they can go home and reinforce a lot of the things that I said. I think it makes for a better student when the parents say, don't forget what Sensei said. At the same time is what's interesting is the parents will kind of use me as the bad guy and say, look, Sensei says you should have this attitude at home, you're supposed to listen. So, it works very well when I get those messages across to my classes.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, it's such a powerful concept. The idea that martial arts can have such influence and one of the pieces that I often tack on and, I'm curious, your feelings on this. I don't believe there's anything else that someone can do for a short of a time, let's say 6 months, that will carry with them for the rest of their life.

**Rocky DiRico:**

I like that. I like that very much. I'm going to start using that today.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

By all means, please. Take it! Run with it! Let's get people training and see if we can affect the world.

**Rocky DiRico:**

That leads me to a very quick story I want to mention. A good friend of mine who has a school in Connecticut, Kevin Sullivan, he's also a Grand Master. He specializes in pressure points but he mentioned the story at my school, about a month ago, when he was teaching a seminar. A very powerful story. He has 2 daughters that train when they were kids with him. At 19, one of his daughters and he had a falling out. I don't know what it's about and it's not really important. They didn't talk for a year. Out of the blue, a year later, the daughter calls the father and says, Dad, thank you for teaching me Karate and he asks why are you now talking to me? Why are you telling me this story? She said, Dad, I'm the only one at college out of my 6 girlfriends that hasn't been raped. Her Karate saved her from being raped while her friends were all raped in various situations whether they were parties that they went to or whatever. I just felt that that was a really powerful story.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, yeah. This is a little bit of preaching to the choir here because the majority of the people that we have listening are martial artists. We do have some that aren't. We get feedback from them as well which is great but yeah, that really lines up pretty well and whether that, whether it was the self-defense aspects of the martial art that help her avoid that horrible situation or if it was the confidence or the ability to avoid a difficult situation, whatever it was.



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**Rocky DiRico:**

Exactly. Good point because it's not just the self-defense. If people can really feel the confidence or maybe the person doesn't put themselves in situations where they become vulnerable, whatever it is, I totally agree. The trainings what makes all the difference.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, here's your chance to kind of have a commercial, toot your own horn, whatever it is. What do you have going on now if people want to get a hold of you, if people want to come train with you, do you offer seminars? Tell us what's going on.

**Rocky DiRico:**

Yes, I do offer seminars. I teach at my two schools. One in Natick, Massachusetts. One on Arlington, Massachusetts. I also happen to teach in three after-school programs where I go right to the school and teach kids in their own school. I do demos. I'm doing a demonstration with the shaolin monks at Harvard University on March 25<sup>th</sup>, which happens to be a Friday and I can be reached via my cellphone or my email. Do I need to give my cellphone or my email?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm sorry I had the microphone muted. Why don't you go ahead and share those and we will put them over on the show notes and not everyone heads over to that so if you just give it out now if you're willing to.

**Rocky DiRico:**

I give all my friends and all the families I teach my personal email and my cellphone number because I want to be reachable and I don't want them to call just my office and only be available only a portion of the day so in any event, my cellphone number's 508-662-4962 and my email is [rockyDiRico@gmail.com](mailto:rockyDiRico@gmail.com).

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, if anyone wants to get a hold of you, yeah, alright. I really appreciate you being here today. Do you have any parting words of wisdom for those that maybe listening?

**Rocky DiRico:**

I think I've already mentioned a few things, words of wisdom, if you will, but I want to mention that even though most people know me as a teacher of the martial arts and a competitor and having success in both of those areas, I also was a promoter in the early '80s through the '90s and I promoted three national tournaments with NASKA. 1986, '87 and '88 and it's called the Boston Nationals and this is a footnote that maybe very few people know but I sold my Boston Nationals after 1988 to a person that, maybe some of you have heard about there, because he is now the head of NBL, Boice Lydell. I sold him



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my tournament for a thousand dollars and Boice Lydell started the NBL, the National Blackbelt League and now has his own organization. I enjoyed being a promoter. I felt like I was a good promoter but I felt overwhelmed at times and decided to stop promoting big tournaments and started to compete again more readily after 1988 and also, I'm proud to be in 10 different halls of fame. This is not to brag but just to let people know that I've been acknowledged by various organizations and I do appreciate that and I would say, as far as anyone listening, you never really quit Karate or martial arts. It's something you do for the rest of your life. You're either a martial artist or you're not so, and then people say, oh, I quit because I didn't have the time. Well, actually, I don't believe you really quit because that's like saying, well, I'm almost going to forget everything I learned and you don't do that so, Karate or martial arts, whatever you practice, Taekwondo, whatever, you do this for the rest of your life and you will enhance your life and I wish everybody well.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Thank you for listening to episode 68 of whistlekick martial arts radio and thank you to Sensei DiRico. Head on over to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) for the show notes, the quiz, some photos and a video with some highlights from the movie, Billy Jack. If you like the show, please subscribe or download one of the apps so you never miss out on a new episode and if we could trouble you to leave us a review wherever you get your podcast, we'd really appreciate it. remember, if we read yours on the air, just email us and we'll get you a free pack of whistlekick stuff. if you know someone that would be a great interview for the show, please fill out the form at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) or if you just want to shoot us a message with a suggestion for a Thursday show, or some other feedback, there's a place to do that on the website too. You can follow us on social media. We're on Facebook, twitter, Pinterest and Instagram, pretty much everywhere you can think of and our username is always whistlekick. Remember the products you can find on [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) like our wonderfully comfortable sweatpants, seriously, you won't want to take them off. That's all for today so until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!