



Episode 67 – Karate Kid | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey there, everyone! It's episode 67 of whistlekick martial arts radio. The only place to hear the best conversations about the martial arts like today's episode all about that classic movie, The Karate Kid. I'm the founder here at whistlekick but I'm better known as your host, Jeremy Lesniak. Whistlekick, in case you don't know, makes the world's best sparring gear and some 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 about them at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). All of our past podcast episodes, show notes and a lot more are at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). today's episode also has a full transcript with lots of photos, videos, links and some other great stuff over on the website. If you're listening from a computer, you might want to follow along with everything we've posted there and while you're over at the website, go ahead and sign up for the newsletter. We offer exclusive content to subscribers and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guests.

Now, when we talk about martial arts movies, there are a few that immediately come to mind for most people. If you're a martial artist or a fan of the genre, you likely know a lot of them but for those that do not train in the martial arts or are only casually interested in the movies, there's a much shorter list. Undoubtedly, The Karate Kid, the original one, is on that list for just about everyone. Released in 1984, The Karate Kid made waves in both popular culture and the martial arts world.

For several years after, martial arts schools of all types would be flooded with interested students that wanted to be just like Daniel LaRusso. To this day, if someone sarcastically imitates the martial arts, they're usually performing the crane kick, just like Daniel did. Did you know that technique, as it's demonstrated in the movie, really doesn't exist in any traditional martial art? When it was released, the tagline for the movie was only the old one could teach the secrets of the masters. Our love for Mister Miyagi, whose first name was Kesuke, though it was stated as Nariyoshi in The Karate Kid part 2, was due in large part to Pat Morita's brilliant acting. It's easy to forget but Pat Morita's Miyagi earned him Academy Award and Oscar nominations. Did you know that he was named after Chojun Miyagi, the founder of Goju-Ryu Karate? And yes, the style he teaches Daniel is Goju-Ryu.

The movie was filmed in late 1983 throughout the Los Angeles area though some filming was done in Arizona. On set, the cast had a really hard time believing Ralph Macchio, who starred as Daniel LaRusso, was 22 years old. Filmed with a budget of only \$8 Million, the movie grossed \$90 Million at the box office and all of that was in the United States.

The other tagline used in the movie? He taught him the secret to karate lies in the mind and heart, not in the hands. Really does a better job of capturing the spirit of the movie. The movie is beloved, not for the writing or the acting and it's definitely not for the action sequences, people love this movie because we can relate to it. before bullying was a buzzword, we could identify with Daniel wanting to



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just live his life. To have friends and a girlfriend in his new home? That resonated for a lot of us and some of those people that resonated for were critics.

Roger Ebert gave it 4 stars despite admitting that he never wanted to see the movie. In the end of his review, he calls it one of 1984's best movies. When we think about the movie, it's easy to think of it in terms of sides. Good and Evil, though you could certainly make a case that neither Johnny, played by William Zabka, nor Sensei Kreese, played by Martin Kove, were evil. Bad guys, sure. But how much would Johnny's disposition is a result of Kreese's influence? We don't know. While his methods were certainly not positive, his students likely went through life with a confidence and probably weren't in Daniel's position too often. Zabka, who had no martial arts experience when he was cast in the movie, has stated numerous times, even during an episode of the sitcom *How I Met Your Mother*, where he plays himself, that people hate the character of Johnny so much that they try to fight him and they still do. Of course, the connection between the two warring factions is Ali, Daniel's love interest played by Elisabeth Shue, who temporarily left her schooling at Harvard for the movie went on to act in a large number of roles. She's still acting today with her most recent notable appearances being as Julie Finlay in *CSI*.

When you talk about the movie like *The Karate Kid*, everyone has their favorite parts. The wax on, wax off scene is, not only imitated by people that see it, there's some legitimate martial arts training in there. The scene with the fly and the chopsticks, inspired thousands of us to try just what we saw, though we all ended up like Miyagi rather than Daniel. Do you think Daniel's success at catching the fly which followed Miyagi's comment of man who catch fly with chopstick accomplish anything was actually foreshadowing to the rest of the movie of Daniel's success? Who knows?

During the training session where Miyagi wears the baseball catcher's equipment, we see Daniel start to apply his training. We were right there with him as he truly starts to understand what he's capable of and, of course, the most memorable scene for most of us is the end with Daniel poised in the crane stance, ready to kick Johnny in the face. We know he can do it. We saw him do it earlier in the movie but no matter how many times we watch him get ready, we still go there with him or, at least, I do.

To watch the film, to know his entire trajectory in life comes down to the timing of this single kick, a few of us will ever have a moment like that where a split second makes a real and distinct change in our lives. It's easy to see the influence this film had, not only in the martial arts, but popular culture. I started training the year before it came out. When I saw it, though, it validated what I was doing. I felt like I was Daniel LaRusso. I believed the martial arts would transform my life, would keep me from being beat up by bullies and get the girl. I suppose two out of three isn't bad, right? But what most of us don't realize is how different this movie could've been.

The studio wanted to cut the scene where Miyagi is drunk saying it slowed the movie down too much. Fortunately, the director, John Avildsen, fought to keep it in and some believe it was this scene



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that earned Pat Morita the award nominations. Did you know Charlie Sheen was originally offered the role of Daniel but he turned it down? Clint Eastwood's son, Kyle, auditioned for the role of Daniel but he didn't get it and his father was so mad that he banned all coke products from the set. Coke owned the production studio, Columbia, at the time.

While there are a lot of rumors that Chuck Norris was offered the role of Sensei Kreese, the bad guy, it isn't true. He has come out to say that had he been offered the role, he would've turned it down because he didn't want to portray the martial arts in that way. Pat Morita was initially turned down for the role of Miyagi because he was best known as a comedian. If you didn't know, Morita was an actor in the sitcom *Happy Days*. The director thought Morita was the best choice but producer, Jerry Weintraub, was concerned that the audience wouldn't take him seriously but for his second screen test, Morita grew a beard and added a Japanese accent which completely changed Weintraub's mind and, in the string of almosts, Daniel's original last name was Webber. Johnny Lawrence was originally going to be Donald Rice and the song, *You're the Best*, was originally written for *Rocky III* but when *Survivor's Eye of the Tiger* came along, they dropped it and *The Karate Kid* picked it up.

That great car Mr. Miyagi gives Daniel for his birthday, the producer gave it to Ralph Macchio who owned it for quite a while. If you're wondering what it was, it was a 1948 Ford Super Deluxe Club Convertible and remember Johnny's great red leather jacket or terrible red leather jacket, depending on your perspective, Billy Zabka ended up taking that home with him.

The crew wearing the skeleton costumes in the movie complained that Pat Morita's stunt double was hitting them too hard and that's why they kept flubbing their scene. Well, it's not surprising that the work of someone like the legendary Fumio Demura would be authentic. Yes, Fumio Demura was Pat Morita's stunt double. The scene is repeated over and over because Demura's strikes would throw everyone off so much that they had to stop and restart each time. Now, Demura told the director that if he could put his own team in the costumes, they'd get it right in a single take. They did and they did. Pat Morita has said that a lot of his influence in playing Miyagi came from the time he spent with Fumio Demura including both his mannerisms and his speech.

What's your favorite part of *The Karate Kid* that had an impact on your life or maybe you're a martial arts school owner that saw a change in your business from the movie? We want to hear from you. Leave us a comment somewhere, either on the website or on social media. You can find the show notes and a place for comments at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) and as for social media, we're in Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram, all with the username *whistlekick*.

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