



Episode 419 – How Much Do Size and Strength Matter in Martial Arts |
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Jeremy Lesniak:

Hi there welcome, this is whistlekick martial arts radio Episode 419. Today, we're talking about the impact that size and strength can have on martial arts and combat. Maybe you're new to the show, maybe you don't know what we do, so here's what we do. Twice a week we release a free episode of martial arts radio. On Mondays we bring you an interview with a martial artist, sometimes it's a prominent person sometimes it's someone that you might find training in your own school, maybe it is someone from your own school. And then on Thursdays we bring you a topic driven show, something like this where we explore a question or an idea sometimes we do that with a person and sometimes like today it's just me. Now, if you want to get the most out of each and every episode you should head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com not only can you find all of the other 418 episodes available, you can get photos and videos and links to the guests, you can find show notes, you can even find a transcript. You can also find a link to whistlekick.com and at whistlekick.com you can sign up for the newsletter, you can find the other things we're involved in all to the benefit of the martial arts and you can even shop at our online store. We have uniforms, we have apparel, we have protective equipment. And if you use the code `podcast15`, you can get 15% off anything you find over there.

Let's dig into today's topic. There are a few debates that pop up now and again among martial artists. And one of them is on how big of an impact being larger or stronger will make in a fight. Now there are two ways that I could do this episode, I could simply say, yes, if you're bigger and stronger you're



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probably can have an easier time in a fight and then I could just sign off. But it's a more nuanced conversation than that. I don't think there's anyone out there that would suggest being weaker or smaller is an advantage. Now it's not automatically going to guarantee victory, a win if you're bigger and stronger but it doesn't hurt. Now first let me dispel a few myths. When people talk about the pros and cons of being bigger and stronger, a lot of people like to say that when you are stronger you get slower and that is not necessarily true. There's a myth that came out of the bodybuilding world that has been perpetuated and found its way in the martial arts that bigger people are slower. They can be, maybe even often are but they don't have to be and if you want proof go watch some of the best heavyweight boxers in the world. Those guys are big, they're strong and they're incredibly fast. If you want to see something incredibly scary, go online and look for YouTube footage of Mike Tyson at age 18 doing pad work, I've seen a couple of these videos and they are frightening. That was a man who had speed and strength and skill. But that's not what we're talking about today we're talking about simply the size aspect and the strength aspect that can accompany size. When we talk about someone being bigger, there are two different ways we can define that, we could talk about height and reach, you know that the person generally being a taller or longer individual, and we can also talk about just physical stature, weight, the person being a bigger person. And both of those have an impact, of course if you're taller, if you have more reach you can inflict damage or block or do whatever you need to do in a larger circle than if you are smaller. While I'm not a terribly tall individual, I do remember that as I got older, as I grew I found certain things easier than when I was smaller. When you look at professional fighting, they indicate reach, the length of the arms as being a very relevant statistic and people with reach do have an advantage. If your opponent can hit you and you can't hit them back, that's pre-sold check in that column for them isn't it? But let's talk about weight let's talk about that physical stature. The downside in being bigger and carrying more weight is that it takes more energy to move that around. You are going to expend more calories, you're going to get more tired moving around as a bigger person. And that's why when we tend to watch MMA, or professional fighting of any kind, in most divisions people will slim down as much as they can to stay within the weight class that they're competing in, because there is very little advantage in carrying around a bunch of fat but there is plenty of advantage in carrying muscle.

Now carrying around that muscle has a number of benefits. Of course if you have more muscle, you're going to be stronger we'll address that in a moment, but that muscle, it has weight and when you transfer that weight into a punch or kick or any other strike, an elbow, it doesn't matter what it is, the more weight behind it, the more damage it's going to do force equals mass times acceleration right? That mass the amount of body behind the technique matters. So everything else being equal, if you add another 10-20 pounds onto your frame and you still punch or kick as fast as you were otherwise, you're going to generate more force. You're going to create more damage when you land that technique. So I think it's pretty clear to say that size is an overwhelming advantage, the more overwhelming the difference in size, the greater the advantage is going to be there. But let's talk about strength. Whereas



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with size, pretty much any combat rules favor size. Whether it's light contact or no contact, Full Contact, if you have more reach you're probably going to do better. But strength is a benefit when we're talking about contact and the more contact that is permitted, the greater the advantage strength plays. If we're talking about light touch, no touch point sparring, which is not the way point sparring is done everywhere but I consider this to be kind of one end of the spectrum of contact when it comes to contact sports that barely touch sort of rule set, strength plays no part. In fact stronger people who have less control or less control over the small amounts of contact, are gonna have a harder time in there and while that certainly doesn't describe everyone who's very strong, I have met a number of people over the years who are so used to training strong in the mid to upper force levels that they generate, that they have a really hard time training light. So, of course what you're used to training that's where you're going to be more comfortable, more experienced and so getting outside of that can be a challenge.

When we start talking about higher levels of contact, if you can hit harder you have an advantage. Over the last 10 years or so, I haven't grown. I am no taller now at 40 than I was at 30. In fact, I'm no taller now at 40 than it was at 14 but I'm certainly a lot stronger and while some of my skills have definitely improved, the number one thing that is contributed to my sparring skill, to my advantages has been my strength. Not only am I able to execute techniques with more force, people recognize that I can execute techniques with more force and thus are more respectful of those techniques. Now this is a little bit of a more fuzzy line, how we draw this out that's, it's a lot more subjective. If I punch someone in the head and then I get stronger and punch them in the head again, that second punch is going to hurt more. We know how that impacts the results of self-defense situation or a combat sport. But the way people may or may not respect the strength the technique that you have, that's far different. That's something that I don't know that we can really talk about other than to say yes, that is real and that does happen at times.

But what about just pure raw strength? The ability to move more mass easier. While the number-one impact of that that is not discussed is that it makes sparring less of a cardiovascular demand. If you are more easily able to move a lot of weight around. Your body is going to be conditioned to use less energy is going to become efficient at moving that weight around. Well your body is weight so to move around that internal weight that body of yours that's not is high the demand. Getting stronger makes you in a sense fitter which plays out in combat sports and self-defense. So I think it's pretty clear there's an advantage there. And let's revisit the thing I said towards the top the idea that if you're stronger you're necessarily slower or you have less range of motion. It is true there are plenty of people out there who are musclebound, that's the term I hear people using and most of that is going to come from one of two places in fact maybe even all of this come from one of two places. A genetic predisposition to being inflexible, because that matters, there are genetics that make you more or less flexible that's real. You can overcome them or you can succumb to them but they're part of what makes you you. And then you have people who train and move weight without moving in the full range of motion. How good of a punch are you going to throw if you train that punch 10,000 times only throwing it out three quarters of



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the way. Anyone who is outside of that three quarters of your punch isn't going to get hit or at least not with effective force because you haven't been training in that range of motion. A lot of people who lift weights do not lift that we in full range of motion. If you go to a gym and you watch people lifting weights you'll probably see this at least half maybe even three quarters the people I see at gyms aren't lifting weights with full range of motion. That full range of motion is what your body adapts or adapt away from, what you do what your body gets used to. If you you either use it or you lose it. I think I just said same thing like four different ways.

I've read studies I don't have them handy but there are, there is there is data out there to support the idea that getting stronger doesn't necessarily mean you have to get less flexible or slower. So I think it's pretty fair to say, everything else being equal being larger and or being stronger is an advantage. Is there variance from person to person? Absolutely are there strong people that I would rather fight rather than certain weaker people? Some taller people rather than some smaller people? Absolutely. But in every case it comes down to the skills that they have. What we should remember when we talk about the situation, is that there are weight classes in almost every combat sport. And those weight classes aren't terribly larger, we're not talking about 50 pound or hundred pound classes. Quite often it's 810 pounds. I think I've seen some there 12 or 15 but usually it's not very large of a the shift than you go up the class. If that didn't matter they would have so many weight classes would they? It would be easier to have people all in the same pool beating on each other. Now, lastly I can provide a little bit of anecdote because over the last couple years I spent a lot of time adding muscles something that was important to me for a variety of health reasons that we won't get into here. But over the last couple years I've added about 12 to 15 pounds of muscle which doesn't sound like a huge amount, other than it is. I'm a lot stronger than I was and my training partners have remarked that I hit shields, I hit them much harder than I had previously. I don't feel like him that much stronger but I see the results in the weights that I lift. I don't think I'm slower lease nothing seems to indicate that I am and I know I haven't lost flexibility but I know that when I'm out there and I'm sparring around with people, I have an easier time because I'm stronger. We could spend a lot more time talking about how this is impacting me, but I'm just one person, this is just an anecdote. And if you've had a different experience I would love to hear about it because there is no scientific information going on here, I didn't conduct some research study. I'm not taking biopsies of people's muscles. This is just based on observation and little bit of research I've done over the years.

So I'd love to hear your feedback. Please head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, let me know what you've experienced for yourself or with people you've trained with, with regard to size and strength. And if you have comments that you don't want to share publicly go ahead and email me Jeremy@whistlekick.com. Don't forget you can find us in social media were @whistlekick all over the place and you've got whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for transcripts and you've got whistlekick.com for the store, use code `podcast15`. That's what I got for you today. I'd love to hear your feedback, I'd love to



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know what you want to see on future shows, maybe some guest suggestions. Let me know what you think I will be back with more for you. Until next time. Train hard, smile, and have a great day.