



Episode 430 – Sensei Ras Hylton | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello, everyone and welcome! This is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 430. Today, I'm joined by my guest, Sensei Ras Hylton. If you don't know me, my name is Jeremy Lesniak. I'm the host here for martial arts radio. I'm the founder of whistlekick and I absolutely love martial arts which is why I do everything that I do. It's why we bring you this show twice a week. It's why we bring you all the great products at whistlekick.com and if you want to check any of those out, you can use the code PODCAST15. That's going to get you 15% off everything in the store. If you want to learn more about the show, maybe check out photos or transcript or see all the other episodes, you can do that. It's all for free, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Today's guest is someone I've had the opportunity to get to know over the last few years. I've watched him compete in a variety of ways and I've seen the spirit that he brings to his competition regardless of what type of competing he's doing. He's a kind man, he's a family man but he is, undoubtedly, someone I do not want punching me in the face. On today's episode, we talk about his traditional roots, his more modern competitions and all the things that led up to where he's at today so let's check it out. Sensei Hylton, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

Ras Hylton:

Glad to be here, Sir, how are you today?

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I'm good. Glad to have you here. It's been a while since we had somebody on the show that I know personally. We've done a long string of people that, not only do I not know but I've never met. People I've never been in the same room with and you're a bit different. I've watched you sweat and I don't know if you've bled while I've been there. I've watched you induce bleeding, that's for sure.

Ras Hylton:

It may have happened a time or two but I have definitely bled, happened more on the training, that's all.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right, right. I'm not suggesting for a moment that you don't take shots. I know you train hard, man, but good, I'm glad you're here. This is going to be fun because you occupy this really interesting space in that you are an atypical fighter today because your roots are really traditional.

Ras Hylton:

Yeah, I guess, I mean, as a trend that has been more prevalent just with the advent of social media and all but generally speaking, yeah, I'd say people like me tend to occupy the minority.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I remember the first time I saw you in a fight. At the beginning of your fight, you bowed and that was great. I loved it!

Ras Hylton:

It still strikes me as odd that people find it odd. That's probably the one thing that I hear comments about more than anything. I mean, obviously, I do have my own unique message visually on somebody who is outside your norm but that's probably the one thing that I really get commented on the most but for me, it just seems like the most appropriate thing to do. We both, I kind of liken it to the original waivers that were signed back in China, back in Okinawa, Japan. It's just a long held tradition. You sign a contract, you say that you're going to engage in physical combat with a certain set of rules and you're going to abide by those rules and regardless of the outcome, there's honor and respect for both. Just seems like the thing you do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I agree and I think that that's why it struck me and I suspect that that's why it strikes other people is that here you are, you're in a cage. You're doing something that is wholly non-traditional and you're bringing your traditional roots, bringing who you are into it and I suspect that I'm not the only one, well, you've said that other people have commented on it. I suspect everyone sees it and it probably strikes them as well but not in a negative way. I think, for a lot of us, looking at that, we know exactly what that is and it's you showing respect and in an environment where it's often encouraged to be disrespectful



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and flamboyant for the purpose of the business side of it, you have this personality that's, I mean, your fight personality seems to be incredibly authentic. I don't know you super well but we've spent some time together and I don't see a different person at all in promotional materials or in the ring versus the guy that I've hung out with at events.

Ras Hylton:

No. I think you hit it right there. I am who I am. There's no, I mean, obviously, there are patterns around people that will change slightly but generally speaking, who we are doesn't change. We have a set pattern that we tend to stick to even though behaviors change, even though you'll see little things around us change. We are who we are and you got a couple of times that I tried to either expand or deviate hasn't benefitted me so I see no reason to change in the real place. It seems like the only significant change I've made is going back to basics. That seems to be going pretty well at the moment so, again, I like my pattern. I'm going to stick to it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What do you mean by back to basics?

Ras Hylton:

I have really taken a stance on being a healthier fighter, sticking to whatever my walk-around weight is because I feel like one of the greatest disappointment to the MMA community or martial arts in general is this whole weight cutting that's been more and more scientifically-tuned so that you can be the biggest person in your weight class at any given point and that's, as much as I appreciate the skillset the wrestlers have brought into the equation, it's one of the most necessary skillsets that you need in controlling range but it's one of those dirty habit that's constantly talked about is actually being promoted as an effective winning strategy and I find that to be just disappointing so I get back on this, or I originally got on this platform because I was spending so long and so many resources trying to bulk up and get to the top of the heavyweight class but it just never felt good. Best I got was a little over 250 but I had to take so much creatine and so many calories that I was spending so much time trying to gain weight that it really didn't fit so I decided to go the other way, see how low I could go and that was actually right before my first knockout, Yorgan, unfortunately but what I found is that happy middle ground, this cruiser weight and in MMA that's 225 pounds which I tend to stick right in the low to mid-220s anyway when I'm just doing what I do. I'm a high calorie input regardless. I take in a lot and I burn a lot but it's a happier place for me and whether it's my diet, my training, my family life, just sticking to keeping things simple and authentic is what benefitting me so, yeah. Back to basics and sticking to them being the most important part of that.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Yes. Now, I'm going to guess that you're not the only person who feels this way but you're the minority there, aren't you? I see a lot of conversation and people missing weight cut and everything so it's still the majority of players where they drop the weight, right?

Ras Hylton:

Yeah. We're starting kind of like, I don't remember who, but there is one of the headline fighters in the UFC right now who is just talking almost verbatim the way that I've been about weight cutting that starts huge problems there. Think it was John Jones who's another one who in stature is similar to me and he's had trouble maintaining that 205 area in. there's still a lot of controversy around what substances you may or may not have been involved in how long ago. I don't want to get into all that but he's someone who just because we share a similar frame, I'd like to see him as a 225 fighting. He's already phenomenal. Imagine how much greater the show would be if he was fighting at the weight that he walks around that. if he was comfortably operating inside that octagon instead of having that struggle and I said in a gym a million times, that paper that we sign, does indemnity up to and including death. Walking into a situation that you know is potentially life threatening at anything less than a hundred percent is taking an unnecessary risk. I got a lot home. I need to be able to look at my children who look up screaming and cheer. That's a pretty scary face already so why make it worse, right?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I want to go back. I want to unpack that a little bit. This idea that your...let's look at it this way, the majority of people listening have not been in an organized fight like this. Most people probably seen something so we don't fully understand what it's like to get in there and we definitely don't understand a lot of the prep work so what, first off, how much weight are people dropping? What does that look like? Is it a 5-pound thing, is it a 25-pound thing?

Ras Hylton:

Really, that depends on what weight class we're talking about. If we're talking, say, bantam weight or featherweight or thereabouts, then sure, there are some extreme situations but generally speaking, we're looking at around the 10 to 20 pounds but if you get up to the welterweight and middleweight area, you've got guys who are generally walking somewhere north of 200-pounds getting down into there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Getting down into where? For people who don't know what the weights are?

Ras Hylton:

Oh, I'm sorry. Welterweight in MMA is currently at 170 and middle weight is at 185 and you've got guys and girls who are dropping down to there. it's not really popular with larger weight classes inside



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American, I mean, as far as the limits are concerned but popularly, men's weight class is where you see a lot of the exciting fights are more around welterweight. It's a huge draw. It's really exciting, you get more of the agility and the technique of a smaller fighter but you still got the knockout ability of the bigger fighters sitting on their weight classes. When you're friending, let me back that up a little bit. When you as a fighter are preparing, there's fight camp which is a give or take, an 8-week period where you are preparing yourself mentally and physically to engage in this conversation. Generally, around that time period is where weight alternation tends to occur but what's becomes popular is people being down within the last week, the last 2 or 3 days, the last 24 hours who are using dehydration tactics to suck the water out of their bodies so they're going around only with gelatin, muscle or gain eight in order to make the very top end of that weight class and then rehydrating in the 18 or however many hours before the competition the next day. Now, there's been plenty of research that absolutely tend to be down but again, you're not a 100% when you go back in and in my mind it feels like, the way itself, there's just too much that you spend taking away everyone in your life. For me, that's wife, children. I've got somewhere up north of 40 hours a week that I've got to work and on top of that, I've got several hours of training a day. As you can imagine, having basically an 80-hour work week for a 2-month period would wear on anybody. Now, we're adding on the stress that you put on the body and the mind of dehydrating yourself deliberately before walking into a combat situation. It's a lot of stressors, the foot on yourself in a very short amount of time and sure, some people do handle that okay but as we're seeing more and more frequently. Not every body type can do that so as you become older, the more hazardous it becomes to your health and it's just generally a bad plan and that's just my opinion. Take it or leave it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure, and if someone like John Jones is talking about this, then do you think we may have been a cusp on the movement? Do you think this could be changing?

Ras Hylton:

I really hope that it is a quick change so, yeah. Every sport evolves, everything around humans evolve. It bears that change is coming and I believe there was actually mention of the cruiser weight division in those upper commercials anyway. There's MMA talk about this new weight division or that new weight division being something that they do but as media outlets continue to pick up these stories and these people that high of a profile continue to clamor for this. It's going to be a good business decision and 225 is a great bridge in between light heavyweight which is 205 and the top weight for heavyweight is 265. That is a 60 pound gap. [00:17:20] cannot have the middle ground between that especially where after the last heavyweight fight we saw was the biggest pay per view cards in the UFC. Both of the fighters, Daniel Cormier and Stipe Miocic, came in the 230s that's right in my ball park area. There are big names who are great fighters that are sitting right on the doorstep of exactly I want to be.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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So, what quite often on this show, we're talking about people's goals towards the end but I got the feeling that as we talk about your goals, we're going to end up working backwards because we haven't talked about your background yet which I know we're going to get into so let me ask you that goal question now. You just kind of set it. you're looking to, let's say move up, no disrespect to the fight promotions that you're working with now but your goal is to keep growing as a fighter, it sounds like.

Ras Hylton:

Of course, and, our respect and gratitude to New England Fight, [00:18:06] had definitely given me a great foundation and I've been able to make my start here but they're well-aware of my goals. I don't make any deceptive movements. They know that my goal is to hit the UFC and, yes, having this ability to kick off the cruiser weight division on a regional level gets me physically and mentally ready for what I'm pushing to have happen by the time I get there which is to have a cruiser weight title available at the highest levels of the sport and has there's already been movement for that. we've also had commissions for that to happen. I've seen a few different promotions in the northeast who have done it so yeah, I'm looking to move up and make it to the top of the food chain and if any of those big names are there waiting for me, then all the better.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice. What do you have to do to get there? What are the hurdles or roadblocks or obstacles?

Ras Hylton:

It's going to be a lot more the same. There is a lot of time and effort and sacrifice and that last word sacrifice all across categories. There's a lot of time where I'm already working overtime at work and I'm going to gym. That's time that I don't get to sit down and relax, play a little game with my kids, that's time I don't have a date night with my wife. That's time where I don't sit back and relax. I don't want it to sound like it's all work. I do love my team, my fight family and all of my fans and all the great people who I've been able to meet through this but no qualms about it, there are lots involved here so I'm doing my best to continue to pay my dues here and meet every challenger with the same attitude. Yes, I have respect and I will honor the agreement that we're getting into but I'm doing everything possible to walk out of every engagement with victory so that I could continue to move on and right now, that hurdle for me is Yorgan De Castro. When that man knocked me out, walks out, turned around right after that down at the Dana White's Contender series and is now fighting for the UFC. So, there's my first goal. I need to go and avenge that loss and whoever steps up between now and then to get me there is going to be yet another hurdle.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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It sounds like you're choosing your words carefully because I know how passionate you are about this. I know that you're, within the context of the fight, you're aggressive but you're also a very kind person, at least in my experience with you so it sounds like you're trying to find a nice guy way to trash talk.

Ras Hylton:

I am 100% confident in the work that I put in, the people who have trained me, the teammates who sacrificed with me that make it possible for me to get out there and do what I do so, yes. I am definitely confident in my ability to secure the victory and I've probably privately said the same thing. I want to make sure that every fight that I get into is going to end in a way that the judges don't have to work. I'm going to finish every opponent and I'm not going to see that final bell. That's probably the best version of trash talk that I can do and I'll always try to deal with that verbally in a measured manner because I mean no disrespect to whoever have done the exact same thing that I've done. I'm just always going to feel like I need it more.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, let's go back now. Now that we know where you are and where you're going. Where did it all start? How did you find martial arts?

Ras Hylton:

I, that's kind of a two-part story, really. First, I started learning how to box and learning about anatomy with my father. He was born in 1935 so he was a bit older than most of the dads of kids my age and that meant that he had some health problems growing up so he was already dealing with neuropathy from diabetes and wasn't really able to show things the way that he wanted to so I started that with my younger brother. I was 5 and he was 2 years younger than I so we did that for a few years and then, it became a lot of explanation and description and we continue that way as best we could but it wasn't really what he wanted so when I was 10 and my younger brother was 8, he found, my dad found a judo instructor in Augusta, Maine and he was teaching down at the local YMCA and, for the life of me, I wish I could remember his name because that man was the one who really started it all for me. He was a brown belt in hapkido.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's funny because I trained with him, too.

Ras Hylton:

Really?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. Keep going. I'm going to dig into the memory banks and see if I can pull that out.



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Ras Hylton:

Please do. So, he was teaching down at the local Y. I'm not sure if it was the Y or one of the local centers but regardless, he was in Augusta, right around the circle where the old [00:24:50] high school was. In there, he held a brown belt rank. His son was already full-grown, he was a black belt, he was a Vietnam veteran and he had a really mild manner when it came to speaking about things. It was always kind of a low raspy voice kind of a thing going on, salt and pepper moustache. He's just a very calm, somewhat jovial guy. I remember he seemed very mellow except when it came to technique because he would describe things very gently but when it came to doing it, it was just a split-second of epic violence and you would see it in the few students who I remember who had been with him for a long time when I was there. I never got higher than yellow belt but right before I got my yellow belt, he had a student named Amy who was, I was 10 so I was kind of tall for my age but still, 10 years old and this girl, Amy was 2 or 3 inches shorter than me and she gave me the first experience I ever had in real fear of engaging in competition with a smaller competitor. She was late teens but she was already a green belt and she was just fast and skilled. Just everything that she did was proper technique and the way that this man teaches brought it out. His son was, I think, freshly black belt. It hadn't been a year or two from a couple of times that he came into our classes so it was just like me but he would always remind us that even though his dad has a brown belt, that brown belt was frayed and tattered and worn and regardless of what was around that man's waist, he was, he always had, my dad could always kick my ass and you don't forget it. That was what introduced me to the Eastern style of martial arts. Really gave me the hunger for fighting more so a couple years later, I was 12. I was a Boy Scout and we really couldn't afford doing two things at once and unfortunately, I think it was, he moved or has moved for some reason and made the decision for me but I was young at the time and I didn't know the whole story but it seemed like he had to go for some reason but ever since then, I've just been doing what I can to practice some way and do something. We moved to Florida a couple years later. I just always been looking to further that knowledge.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What was it about judo early on that struck you? I can hear the way that you're talking about it. Very reverent. It seemed like it checked a box for you that maybe, I think you need at that time. Am I getting it right?

Ras Hylton:

Yeah. I don't think I really understood the impact it had on me at the time. I was very awestruck at what I was seeing and then I said, the few years of training that I had was definitely boxing so I knew Mike Tyson, Lennox Lewis, Buster Douglas, Marvin Hagler, Sugar Ray Robinson is, to this day, my absolute idol when it comes to boxing but judo, especially the way it was presented to me by him, completely turned everything that I knew up on its head. It wasn't about landing the perfect punch. It wasn't about having that kind of footwork. It was a different kind of approach to combat and having the explanation of the



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gentle way and then, seeing what the gentle way actually meant was, yeah, awe-inspiring. It brought in a whole new world of exploration for me. It gave me something that wasn't entirely my dad so it kind of checked a little of those boxes for me as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure, sure. So, I think I heard you say Florida? So you left Maine at some point and headed south.

Ras Hylton:

Oh yeah, a lot of family drama and separation involved in that story but generally, the general bullet points are when I was 13, my younger brother had been running away so he ended up in a foster family and my older sister and brother were already off at that point. My sister had her own family. Unfortunately, my older brother had died a few years earlier and my timing, my father being from Jamaica, most of his family, who come to the States were living in Florida so when they started reconnecting, again, I was 13, wasn't really aware of all the conversations and ins and outs of it but it was decided that my parents and I would move to Florida and when we did, I was 13, I already hit a couple of growth spurts so I was getting close to 6 feet and I was kind of a husky kid so being the big guy and being the new guy and looking like a high schooler, I was introduced to, well, what the kids called, getting jumped so first time, I got 3 kids attacking me at the same time. I realize that regardless of how big I was, what I learned up to that point, there was obviously more that I needed to do and more that I needed to learn in order to protect myself and feel confident to be able to deal with any given situation and obviously, there's no such thing as being prepared for everything but I really had to go through that experience and go through some more rigorous training with a few other individuals while I was there and I kind of bounced around from style to style. I moved into different academies but really, what drew me and what I think put the MMA bug in at that point was, one of the boys that I was going to high school with at that time, showed me a video of Kimbo Slice just doing the street fighting thing and one of my senseis, while I was down there, was informal training, he had been a combat veteran and have had some formal training while he was overseas and I went to him, showing him this thing and getting curious. I said hey, is there anything like this around out? He said no, but we can go for a drive so we did and that's when I kind of, probably, for an 18-month period started finding these sort of underground promotions. Everyone thought they would get famous so backyard, warehouses, parking lots, any weekend that I could get away with, I would and we would go and train and it was messy and it was stupid and there was definitely a lot of places that I shouldn't have been but it, I don't know, I feel like screwing up was kind of what I needed to know where I needed to go. You know what I mean?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. I mean, human beings learn by making mistakes.

Ras Hylton:



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Yes, we do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When you were watching that video of Kimbo Slice and most of you out there, even if you think you don't know who Kimbo Slice is, you've seen Kimbo Slice. He is incredibly unforgettable visually and maybe we'll drop one in the show notes. You pull up a video or photo of Kimbo, oh, that guy. He's incredibly scary. He is a scary human being.

Ras Hylton:

It was very sad that he passed away but again, hard living and past mistakes but again, mistakes are not, what he did right and what he did successfully, put it out there for those guys like me who just needed some sort of outlet and was just on this YouTube thing that nobody knew about but look at what it's turned into. Like you said, there are people who visibly notice him, don't even know his name.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right, absolutely. Now, when you're headed to these backyard and warehouse events, I imagine that there was a part of you saying I want to do this someday. Am I right?

Ras Hylton:

Yeah, it was but there was no way in hell my dad will ever sanction anything like that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Regardless of that.

Ras Hylton:

He never knew about most of my training, ironically enough, those few years.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What was the why? Was it because it looked cool and you thought this could be something that could be fun to do or did you have bigger goals? Let me tell you why I ask that question. You don't strike me as someone who just kind of says this seems like it would be fun to do. It seems like when you do things, there's a couple steps into the future. Something that connects dots for you.

Ras Hylton:

Well, that's kind of double-edged. There's a strange dichotomy to a lot of my reasoning through my teens and my early twenties and it was partially some depression aspects where I really just had very little regard for myself. I was experimenting with substances, I was sneaking around, like I said, my parents had no idea the training I was doing. I was smoking, drinking, doing whatever and as I



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mentioned, my brother passed away when I was 10 so there was a certain part of me that had already fallen over into that kind of un nihilistic aspect and on the other side of things, it was one of the few instances that I felt like I had genuine control in the world. There's a certain, even when I just started up as an amateur here again, there's a certain rush, power, nervousness, anxiety, excitement. I've done a lot of dumb things and I've taken some really dumb things but, still to this day, right up there with being with my children born, my wedding day, there are, that moment of victory when I win, when I have figured out the puzzle and moved all the right pieces into all the right place where I stop someone from being able to engage in combat with me, that's the level of emotional high that I get when everything clicks into place and they just stop. It really is a complete polar opposite world that I was living in at the time and that was what kind of straightening that kept me going for a while.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I suspect, to people out there who haven't felt those things, that haven't had similar experiences that the idea of this, of combat or fighting or whatever you want to call it, intense training, as an alternative.

Ras Hylton:

Yes, very intense training at that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, I use those words because I know that there are people that don't like calling what happens in a ring a fight because to some people it's not a fight because there are rules, right? So, I'm attempting to be respectful of everyone and their definitions.

Ras Hylton:

Sure, I get it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But the idea that that will be an alternative to substances, I think, probably doesn't jive with a lot of people and I'm not criticizing. I can't empathize with it in that way.

Ras Hylton:

Sure, I get it. It's just I discovered that it's really the last real addiction that I have left.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Is it really an addiction?

Ras Hylton:



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I don't know. That's just the joke line that I use for it but I really feel like it is something that I have to do and because it feels like a need, it's probably the best way that I can describe it and I have left addictions behind but this is the one thing that has been persistent in my life that I refuse to give up and I've tried. When I was in my early 20s and I was going through my divorce, honestly, before that during my family life, I was trying to stay out of fighting, stay out of martial arts in general and I would just dabble a little bit with friends but when crises came around and I was dealing with separation and this new split family life, what kept me on track was martial arts and physical training and being involved in that regular sparring contact and shortly thereafter, that was where we met [00:40:57] and even the point-sparring and that game of dexterity and agility just wasn't enough and, lo and behold, a few years later I meet [00:41:12] and it's everything falling into place and I just have to get back into the sport because this is the way that I can do it as an adult without ending up in some unsavory circumstance.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Your karate instructor is someone that we've had on the show. Someone that I know well, someone I consider a friend.

Ras Hylton:

And someone who I'm a huge fan of.

Jeremy Lesniak:

He does have a bit of a fanbase. He has a character. There are people out there that someone is a character. No, this man is definitely a character. How did you find him?

Ras Hylton:

That would be, again, through the [00:42:07] actually, he was when I just earned my black belt under him a couple years ago and he described the first time that he'd ever seen me which was when I performed Sai Kata at, I think it was the, battle back in 2013 and it was just passing contact here and there. We say hi, chat a little bit, we get talking but I really feel like the one moment and most of your audience is going to know who I'm talking about, that one really endearing moment that kind of clinched it for me that he was somebody who I really enjoy being around and wanted to get to know more was the fact that day at the tournament, every time he's being concluded, he would be lifting one of those kids up over his head when they had won first place so for all these competitors, yeah, it's great to win a trophy but that guy's going to pick me up. Shihan Andy is going to make me fly when I win. The fact that he put himself out there and really has fun that making them has fun was what really endears him to me and to my stepdaughter Geneva and that's why I end up bringing her to him when we left Stanford because there are some great practitioners up here but she already made the choice and without realizing it, so had we. I'll never forget when my wife Janice had brought her in to tryout class over there, she came back and here's the funny thing, Janice was the one with tears in her eyes as she's



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describing Geneva walking in saying I'm home. It's a deal for me and I just started tagging along from there and yeah, I guess, the rest became history now, huh?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I think so. He's a pretty special guy. Of course, folks, we'll drop a link to Shihan Andy's episode in the show notes. If you're new to the show, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com is the easiest place to find all that.

Ras Hylton:

Please do, yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We've talked a lot about a lot of different stuff today and we've still got some time. We're going to keep talking but I'm curious because as you get this opportunity and as you take the opportunities that has been presented to you, you get exposed to a lot of different people. I mean, we know a ton of people in common and not just in competition but just as I grew up in Maine and you're now in Maine and you grew up in Maine and Maine's not that big of a place. Physically, it's big in size but martial arts in Maine is kind of tight-knit.

Ras Hylton:

Maine's just a small town, Jeremy. You know that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, it's a very big town compared to Vermont but it is a small town. Who do you want to train with? Let's say that you get some opportunities that come in your way and say I really want to round out this or I've always admired this guy or whatever, who do you want to train with?

Ras Hylton:

I think outside of your audience. No one's really going to know who I'm referring to so, again, local. One of the instructors who we've become acquainted with again through Geneva is Mr. Petersen. Erik Petersen who's just a few towns away from us here and the reason being, I had a few years with [00:46:23] over in North Conway who introduced me into Kenpo in his particular style of [00:46:33] and I had always felt bad in not having more time and being more available and one thing that I do want to do is delve back into the world of Kenpō just for myself. It wouldn't be necessarily a rank thing but one thing that I really am grateful to Shihan Andy for is the fact that he has been able to really express Shotokan in a beautiful and friendly way and appreciate the history as well as sell it. What a lot of people don't really talk about and delve into as often as I think we should is the fact that Okinawan martial arts are all tied together and yet there are different styles in little variations that we would do well to



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remember and understand. The beauty of Shotokan is that it is a great evolution and a great place in the evolution from pre-Shotokan or pre-[00:48:00] whichever you wanted to put that dividing mark at where you see a lot of Chinese influence, a lot of [00:48:09] from the Chinese mainland and then, where it evolved and became more Japanese and where things are more streamlined and formalized more. Shotokan's called a middle place and I've had a really fun time and a really, an official and fulfilling time from Kenpo, Taekwondo, Shotokan and a myriad of Chinese influence and direct Chinese styles that have been hybridized and mixed in during the course of my training over my entire life and as much as I will train in Shotokan and I knew Shihan Andy for, as long as he will put up with me, one place that I'd like to go back to would be Kenpo and for my thing with Shihan Petersen and Sydney Mason, good friend of my daughter Geneva, it's yet another great family atmosphere and he's another person who takes what I feel needs to be taken seriously, seriously and allows for the levity for individual growth. It's a great place to train as a martial artist.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right on, right on. When you look at your fighting style, you're certainly a conglomerate of a bunch of different people and a bunch of different training.

Ras Hylton:

I am a mutt.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We all are. I think we all are. Even if you're training a single style, that style came from some amalgamation, somewhere along the way. I get a little irritated when people talk about martial arts purity. It sounds weird to me but anyway, what part of your game and I suppose maybe this isn't...I'm going to ask a question and you certainly have the freedom to not answer it. What part of your game needs the most work or what puzzle pieces do you want to add? That's probably a better way to look at it.

Ras Hylton:

Okay, that's no secret to anybody. It's not one that I'm missing but definitely I need work wrestling and I gave a bunch more a while ago that's one of the integral pieces to the MMA cage puzzle that has the biggest influence on the outcome of a lot of fights and it's very obvious when it's not there that it should have been. There's a control of distance that wrestling takes a hold of and keeps a hold of your opponent but also, whoever is engaging in the wrestling game in the most successful way is, more often, going to have a more favorable outcome. Fortunately, I have John Raio as a head coach and he's been kind in his appraisal of me but there's definitely a lot more to learn from him and a lot more time that I will be putting in the mats in order to improve that but that's the one thing that I would say I have the least amount of experience and one thing that I've been able to continue to improve with the help of



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him and my training partners in the mats [00:52:26] it's absolutely necessary to anybody who's looking to compete in MMA so make no mistake, I know what my biggest hole is. I am continuing to ham on it as much as it's allowable.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And now for kind of the last real meaty question, I'm going to ask you because at the end of the day, this is not an MMA show. You are the first fighter, I mean, we've had kickboxers on but I've intentionally turned down quite a few pro fighters that have come, that have wanted to be on the show and it's no secret. We reached out to you because I have the utmost respect for you and I think you're able to have a foot in 2 different worlds. You have 1 foot in the traditional martial arts space which, of course, is the hallmark of whistlekick. It's what we do here. We talk about that.

Ras Hylton:

I am both grateful and honored. Thanks Jeremy!

Jeremy Lesniak:

Of course, thank you. There was no better candidate and the last piece that I want us to talk about because as I already said, the majority of people listening today aren't going to empathize with the desire to step into a cage and fight.

Ras Hylton:

It's not something that's just for the most.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, no. It's certainly not for most people and I would argue that a good portion of people that are doing it probably shouldn't be based on what I've seen. That's a whole different discussion. I don't think we need to go down that road and we're also trying to keep this positive and not speak ill of others.

Ras Hylton:

Amen.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, for the traditional martial artist listening, can you help us understand how you...choosing words...how do you navigate these two different worlds and thread them together because at the top of the show we talked about this amazing jewel of you in a cage and bowing and how foreign that is and it doesn't appear that you've caved to this kind of cultural pressure of mixed martial arts to become more like them but you're also, your tradition in mixed martial arts is just as big as an anomaly as you being someone who participates in mixed martial arts competition as a traditional martial artist so that's



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pressure no matter where you are. You're kind of maintaining this element of being, depending how you look at it, an outcast or very unique. What sounds like is a bit of a thread for you through your life so, if you would, talk just what is that like? What is it like to be the MMA guy when you're in the dojo and the karate guy when you're in the cage?

Ras Hylton:

That's really funny. I used to be called the tall karate guy originally by people who didn't know my name at that point.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And for people listening, how tall are you?

Ras Hylton:

Oh, there are varying reports however I am actually 6'6". I just get to say I'm 6 and a half feet tall. It's both a blessing and a curse, really is, but to answer your question, I...here's the thing, when I finally decided that I was going to pursue entering the cage and just seeing how it was, the goal that I had was purely to become a better instructor. I had spent the previous couple of years trying to learn systems so that I could become a teacher and that's really the overall ultimate goal for me at the end of all this, whatever it leads, is to be an effective instructor. The only way to my thinking of being the most effective instructor that I can be is to put myself in sequences and situations, circumstances where I am able to test and refine techniques. Now, once upon a time, decades and some circumstances a hundred years ago, you'd have to go out and find somebody and fight them. As we've come to this modern age, it's not really, well, it's frowned upon, to say the least, and there's clashing when we get to the higher portions of that but the thing is I needed some way to take whatever system I settled on and test things in a structured, controlled manner where I could repeatedly use things and decide whether or not they work and if so, how they worked and that really is still my goal. As much as I loved the fight, I love the physical lifestyle and I love getting out there and, like I said, the feeling of winning. There's nothing quite like it but there's things on the same level. That's really what I'm doing is I'm putting myself in a position where I can prove to myself and later, when I develop a curriculum to my student that yeah, these are things that work, this is why they work and I can prove definitively that they do or don't. There are portions of traditional martial arts that have already been proven have no place in the cage but to this day, doing kata in class with the kids gives me lightbulb moments of inspiration that I realize something within the kata that I'm working on has direct relevance to my competition in the cage and my last fight, actually, goes and proves that when I was able to use portions of the Tekki sequences to stay in control and continue to stay unharmed as I move to a more favorable position. There's moments in any type of highlight reel, fight promotion where you got fighters on this end and the other thing and actually, the wonders of YouTube, there's actually people who have done compilations where you actually show a portion of a kata and you see a clip of a fight and the application of that kata, the bunkai, how it works.



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What you're doing standing there by yourself, walking up and down the floor and screaming at certain points is not exactly what you're going to be doing in a genuine fighting circumstance but the lesson plan will give you the movements and the positions you need to really exploit whatever situation you're in. This is all a big test. All of it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There's a Michael Jai White movie where he does that too where it flashes back and forth between him doing kata and him beating the tar out of someone. I forget the name of the movie.

Ras Hylton:

I heard about that. I need to see that movie. I don't know what it is but I'm going to find it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

For some reason, Falcon Rising is what's coming to mind but I don't think that's it. I think that's the most recent one I saw. Yeah, we'll try and find that and drop it in the show notes.

Ras Hylton:

Oh yeah, please do. I want to know that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool, yeah. I can only imagine those lightbulb moments and how fun that it's coming from something as, so often, is criticized as being impractical. I mean, there are so many examples and we've had so many conversations on this show about how kata makes you better. I should use the general terms. How form makes you better at any aspect of your martial arts so I'm glad to hear that someone is utilizing it much more frequently in a much more intense way than the majority of us saying yes, this is important.

Ras Hylton:

Oh yes, it is.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, if people want to find you online, they want to find you online, they want to connect, they want to keep an eye on your career, how do they do that?

Ras Hylton:

Please, I am frequently putting up Facebook posts. My fighter page is my fighter name. Rasquatch "The Jamaican Shamrock", Ras Hylton. H-Y-L-T-O-N. It is spelled with a Y. I couldn't make it high enough in the alphabet to get those royalties unfortunately and oh, I recently just started Twitter. That's @hylton.ras and as always, I'm right there on Instagram as well that usually goes directly to my Facebook. Instagram



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is @rasquatchmma so please, drop in, have a looksee. I'm constantly updating and keeping things going there, letting you know when events are happening and especially, you'd know fights happening. I do like to drop in the show notes for my own page to just mark these moments in life whether it's a competition or recently, I just posted how one of our senseis are going off to college which is a bittersweet moment so there's a little bit of life in with the fight life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And as we end here, what parting words, what wisdom or advice or just final thoughts would you give to the people listening?

Ras Hylton:

A line that keeps on coming up for me that I feel ends up translating into a lot of different areas into a lot of different people, for me the line is use your weakness as your strength. Now, that's coming up in striking and Jiu Jitsu and wrestling and all the different skill sets but what I'd like to broaden that term out to be is you have your own set of tools. Your own set of skills. Use it. It's all perishable. Nothing is permanent and when we do get to those final stages, those twilight years of our lives if we get lucky to get there, most people find that the biggest regrets are not decisions made and failures that have happened but it's moments where you had the opportunity to take a risk for the betterment of yourself and you didn't. It's always decisions that were not made that people tend to really lament over so if you're small, use it. if you're big, use it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

The thing that I appreciate most about Sensei Hylton is that despite his goals, despite the fact that he's trying to do some really big things, he's always up for helping others. He's always available to support and to give of himself and I don't think that those two are counter. In fact, when I read or when I talk to people who are immensely successful, every one of them, to a T, is willing to support and to help others and as some have said about that being a necessary element to success if it's at all a big component of success, I have no doubt that Sensei Hylton will be immensely successful because of his attitude and his willingness to support others so in that spirit, Sir, thank you for coming on the show and I look forward to seeing you again soon. If you want to check out photos and so much more, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. If you want to see the stuff that we make, that's at whistlekick.com whether it's products or the other projects that we're involved in and if you do make a purchase, use the code PODCAST15 that gets you 15% off everything. Use it as much as you want. Let us know that you're supporting what we do and you appreciate the show. If you want to help us in another way, you can share this episode or another episode or follow us on social media. We're @whistlekick everywhere you can imagine and if you want to email me directly, jeremy@whistlekick.com. That's all I've got for you now. Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!