



Episode 434 – Ms. Susan Spann | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello, thanks for tuning in! This is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 436. Today, I'm joined by my guest, Mr. James Wilks. I'm Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host for this show, the founder of whistlekick and I really love martial arts and that's why we bring you this show twice a week and that's why we do so many other things. In fact, if you want to check out all the other things that we do, you can visit whistlekick.com, you can find links to all the projects we do including this show as well as our store. We've got apparel and protective equipment, uniforms, it's a whole bunch of stuff for your martial arts training or your martial arts lifestyle and if you use the code PODCAST15, that's going to get you 15% off every single thing in that store. If you want the show notes, you can find those in a separate site, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, we've got links and photos, videos, transcripts, all kinds of stuff over there and sign up for the newsletter while you're over there. We got some cool stuff that comes out in the newsletter, stuff you don't find anywhere else. Depending on the circles you roll in, you may have heard of today's guest. He has achieved some pretty outstanding things in the world of combat and now, he's dedicated his life to something else. I'm not going to give any of this away but just know, this episode, we talk about stuff we've never talked about on martial arts radio, stuff I really enjoyed having a conversation about and I hope you'll enjoy listening so here we go. Mr. Wilks, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

James Wilks:



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Thanks for having me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey, thanks for coming on. I appreciate it and this is a, I suspect this one's going to be a little bit different and it's fun for me to say as the host, here we are, 4+ years in, 400 and some episodes and we still find martial artists with stories that are different. Things that a lot of us haven't experienced, paths that are, I don't want to say unique, but non-traditional and I think that we're going to end up with one of those today. If I was a betting man, which I'm not, I would bet that. Thanks for being here and thanks for giving us that opportunity.

James Wilks:

Oh yeah, I'm excited to be here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good, good. We start in a pretty generic way that you might expect. It's a martial arts show, we talk about martial arts so when we throw away the ball, how did you get started with the martial arts?

James Wilks:

Very early on, my uncle was a high rank Karate fighter in the UK. My dad studied Kung Fu and my grandfather, it's alleged that he faked his birth certificate to get into World War II so he could fight against Germans and so, I think, fighting was really in the blood of the family and then, martial arts was obviously an extension of that and so, it just led naturally to just starting Karate and then, from there, I was really watching a lot of the Bruce Lee films and that really inspired me to keep going.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You start because of family, we'll say, pre-disposition, maybe some pressure there but you stuck around, you kept training and was that because of family pressure too or did you find something in your training that resonated with you?

James Wilks:

Well, no, early on, I don't think I was that keen when I was sort of 8 years old and my dad was putting me in Karate, didn't really want to be there but once I started watching the Bruce Lee films, that really inspired me in that's why I really stuck to it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What was your first Bruce Lee film?

James Wilks:



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I think it was Enter the Dragon, to be honest. There's a lot of great ones, Big Boss and so forth, but Enter the Dragon was my first.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And what was it about Bruce Lee, do you remember? Most people and the majority of episodes have Bruce Lee mentioned at some point. It's hard to be a martial artist and not talk about Bruce Lee despite how long he's been gone but I find this fascinating that most of us remember our first Bruce Lee movie and how we felt when we first saw him on screen.

James Wilks:

Yeah, he was so dynamic, so powerful. The moves were so impressive and taking on multiple opponents, I thought it was very cool that someone could defend themselves. At that age, I thought it was all real and I later came to realize that there's different sides to Bruce Lee. So, the movie personality and then his real approach to combat but yeah, the time, it was very flashy, looked very cool and really inspirational.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And where did your martial journey go from there? Did you keep training or...?

James Wilks:

I studied Karate for a while and I think at about 15, I started doing taekwondo and I went to a different school and started doing that and what happened, I think I was around that age when I got into a fight on a street and I got beaten up and I started realizing that all those routines and the katas and everything that I learnt in the past really weren't doing me any good and that's when I really started looking into Bruce Lee's philosophy, his search for truth in combat, he would say research your own experience, absorb what is useful, reject what is useless, add what is specifically your own and I started realizing the difference between the moves that looked really good and those that were practical so that's when I started opening my horizons and starting reading various books, looking at various styles, realizing that you need to incorporate grappling and that's where it really took off for me and I started studying as much as possible and training more.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, it's certainly not uncommon for people to train and then, find that in some way that art or some aspect of their training fails them. It could happen as it did with you, in a confrontation on the street, it could be in personal exchanges with their instructors or other students. quite often, we start out with martial arts and somebody tells us this is all you need to know. This school, this style, everything here, this is a 100% of what you need and of course, that's almost never the case and we'll carve out exception for something rare that I've not experienced but we need more. We need to diversify and so,



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you went on this mission to do that fairly young, younger than most people will do that and again, you turn to Bruce Lee.

James Wilks:

Yeah, that's right and like you said, every style has something that's useful but some styles have more use than others. I think a lot of stuff have been watered down, obviously and a lot of it's become commercialized. The whole belt system is really commercialization, not saying there's no benefits in that as well, having a belt system, but it's really about keeping those students and it becomes a lot about money and keeping your school going and so, I think, a lot of the martial arts are watered down, people don't like getting hit. They don't want to put in the hard work and the effort and so, to commercialize, you got to soften things up for a lot of people and that's sort of diminished the effects of a lot of these arts but essentially, yeah, I started looking at Bruce Lee and realizing that you got to pick and choose. Not just eclectically and taking it from here and there but synergistically, to see how those different arts and those different techniques work together.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, here you are, you're still fairly young and you're leaning into some of Bruce Lee's philosophies, what did you do with that information? You said that you continued training and expanded your training but what did that look like?

James Wilks:

I kept studying taekwondo and at the time, there was nothing very close by so I would take opportunities, for example, there's a man by name of Jeff Thompson who was really looking, he was a doorman in Coventry, England and he would really, he sort of taking the same approach, building in different techniques from different styles. He also had something called Animal Day where it's sort of an all-out, it's sort of like a May Fight. They would even allow biting, to release, not to bite through the skin, even hitting in the groin, that sort of thing so I remember going there when I was 17 and getting my taekwondo gi just ripped off within seconds. Never experienced that before because you didn't really grapple in taekwondo. There was maybe a few takedowns where they grab the gi but I haven't experienced that but that was another sort of awakening moment like hey, I really got to pick this up so I was studying a little bit from books and things like that. I didn't really have many places to train except occasionally going to see Jeff Thompson's group then when I was 18, I went away to university and that's where I really started bringing lots of different arts so I started studying Japanese Jiu Jitsu, kickboxing, Wing Chun and that eventually let me down to this sort of Jun Feng Kung Fu and Jeet Kune Do path as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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And if we roll back 5 minutes and took bets on what martial art would this individual end up at? Jeet Kune Do would make sense just the way you're talking about Bruce Lee so what was your experience? How did you first find Jeet Kune Do and what did it feel like when you did?

James Wilks:

I came across the book, the Tao of Jeet Kune Do, Bruce Lee's book. He wrote a lot of when he was injured with his back injury in bed and it was a conglomeration of all his notes and I think that book right there was sort of very instrumental in laying out the principle he would say on research your experience, absorb what is useful, reject what is useless and add what is specifically your own, as I've said and that really set as a guideline for all of my arts moving forward so it's one thing being able to study in lots of martial arts but it's another thing to understand the criteria of which is important so if you don't understand the immutable principles of combat, for example, risk-reward ratio or economy of motion, these things you have to take into account, until you look through that lens when you're studying in these different classes, don't just take what the instructor says for granted but rather, have an analytical eye and look at those immutable principles and think does this fit in? Is this technique economical? For the risk that I do, for example, if I do a spinning back kick to the head, what is my risk there on the street? Well, a wrestler could grab my leg, slam me on the floor, my head smashes on the ground, what is my reward? Well, sure, sometimes you can knock people out with a spinning hook kick to the head but most of the time, it doesn't. It just sort of hits the person and if they're tough, it sort of pisses them off and then, they pick you up and smash you on the ground again so, if you compare that to, say, an eye jab or eye slap or a quick jab to the face, the risk there is pretty minimal whereas the reward, if you land a good shot, can be pretty high so keeping in mind those principles when learning new technique.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And that makes a lot of sense. In business, I tend to think of it as opportunity cost but you're talking about the exact same thing and I'll confess, I've thought of it but I haven't thought of it in quite the way that you're expressing it so is this stuff that you started to reason out yourself or did this come from one of the books or an instructor?

James Wilks:

Yeah, there's a combination really of Bruce Lee's writing and then, my own thoughts. A lot of thoughts I've had in parallel before reading some of Bruce Lee's stuff just really resonated with me when I really saw it in there as well because he was really, I feel, ahead of his time in terms of analyzing it and a lot of people know Bruce Lee as a movie star but they don't really know, in terms of mixed martial arts, not just the sport but really, synergistically combining those, he was really ahead of his time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And where did you go from there?



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James Wilks:

I studied martial arts in college. I was spending more time, I was at the University of Bournemouth in England and during that 4 years, I spent more time studying martial arts than I did for my degree and when I graduated there with a bachelor of science degree, I came to the U.S. and I thought it'd just be for 6 months and then, I go back and get a job so I came out to train with Paul Vunak who developed the rapid assault tactics in the '90s and early 2000s was the combat program for the US Navy SEALs so I came out to train with Paul who was also the protégé or Dan Inosanto which is Bruce Lee's main training partner and so, I occasionally go up and train with Inosanto as well in the Inosanto Academy in LA but primarily, I was training with Paul Vunak, studying under him and training with him and helping him teach as well and after a few months, I really liked it here in the States and the weather was great, the martial arts training was better. At the time in the UK, there was literally only one Gracie, there was only one Brazilian Jiu Jitsu black belt, Maurício Motta Gomes, and he was the only, so I'd never really experienced Jiu Jitsu like this, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, and so, it was just great training here in Orange County, California with the Jiu Jitsu, with the Jeet Kune Do and Jun Feng Kung Fu and decided to stay and here I am, 19 years later. I go back, obviously, to see family once a year or twice a year but I'm still here in the US.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And, most people that end up with martial arts as their overarching passion tend to lean in to some aspect of it. you've got people who are really passionate about forms, there are people who are passionate about teaching or I mean, we've had people on the show who have been kickers and breakers and movie stars and martial arts can lead us into so many places. Where has it taken you?

James Wilks:

A couple of things, some things that I really feel like I've gained from it is I love the challenge, the physical challenge, the game of chess, if you will, especially with the Jiu Jitsu which I, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and grappling, combat submission wrestling, those are my favorites so it falls to practice and I think I really appreciate the challenge that it's given me. I think it's made me a stronger person and allowed me to take on more challenges in other areas. If you're used to getting punched in the face and kicked and kneed, everything else in life should be a little bit easier, right?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

James Wilks:

And so, I think I've really, martial arts has given me, like you said earlier talking about this opportunity cost in business, I think the principles of combat when you really understand them help in other areas of life so I think that's been extremely helpful and then, I think, where I'm at now, this sort of research for



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truth in combat, this sort of mindset this sort of ability to critically think has also taken me on this journey for the search for truth in nutrition. I got injured, started looking into nutrition-recovering performance and I took the same mindset of research for truth in combat and applied that to research for truth in nutrition to recover quicker, to become a better athlete and healthier.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Have you always been research-driven, I mean, in school, something you were passionate about in this way?

James Wilks:

No, I was never really passionate in school. I did mathematics but most subjects, I didn't really care for. I'm research-driven when it comes to an area in which I'm interested so if I'm going to school and people are telling me what to think and what to do, I'm not really that keen but I think when it comes to a subject I'm really interested in then I really want to read about it and want to study.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That makes sense so tell us about this injury.

James Wilks:

I was actually sparring with a future heavyweight champion in the UFC so you he had about 80 or 90 pounds on me, Fabrício Werdum, and we were sparring and I tore a ligament in both of my knees. He went and did a fly knee, took me off the ground, I landed in some sweat, he sort of sprawled on top of me and his weight and my weight went through my knees and the sweat stopped and my feet stopped and tore ligaments in both of my knees so I thought well, how can I really heal as quickly as possible? I was training for a fight and wanted to just get back to it as soon as possible so that's when I really start digging into nutrition.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And what did you find?

James Wilks:

One of the first things I came across was the study about the roman gladiators so scientists analyzed the bones of 68 gladiator skeletons. 5,000 bones and they could tell that they were exclusively eating plants and I thought well, that can't be true because you've got to have meat and other animal products to be strong and to be healthy to have strong bones, to have strong muscles, so I just started really digging into the research and started travelling around and interviewing the head of nutrition at Harvard. They have a laboratory at Harvard, world's leading researchers looking out, looking for the best researchers in the planet and also, digging into peer-reviewed research and sure enough, it came across that it's a



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complete myth that we needed myth and animal protein to be strong and healthy. Now I'm sure there are some people listening who just instantly dismissed that and I have my own background. I'm not going to let that come through here, this is about your story, your discovery, your path so what would you say to them? Maybe give us a little bit more on why it's not necessary.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now I'm sure there are some people listening who just instantly dismissed that and I have my own background. I'm not going to let that come through here, this is about your story, your discovery, your path so what would you say to them? Maybe give us a little bit more on why it's not necessary.

James Wilks:

Yeah, totally. I definitely believe that myself before really started digging into the research and found that some of the interesting things that stood out to me is that all protein originates in plants. Animals are just the middlemen and they're doing you a disservice so they're robbing the food of fiber and phytonutrients. They're concentrating the pesticides and the toxic heavy metals and they're also adding an inflammatory compounds like [00:18:33] all of these scary-sounding things which are pretty scary which cause inflammation in the arteries and what that does is that impairs blood flow which means inhibited oxygen and nutrients to the muscles and so, basically, you can get all the nutrients that you need, including protein, from plants but it comes in a better package and that package can enhance your athletic ability and sure enough, 6 weeks after I switched, during that battling ropes, that 50-foot shipping rope, the most I've ever got was 8 minutes straight and I was training for UFC fights at this time so I was in pretty good shape. If you got 10 minutes, you got your name on the wall at that gym and there's a few people that got 20 minutes. 6 weeks after I went completely plant-based, I got an hour straight to beat the gym record. My hands were bleeding, I had blisters, my weights went up at the gym so not, only was the research there and I started coming cross other athletes that were on the top of their field across all types of sports but I also experienced that anecdote with myself so I was really pretty shocked because I thought that we have to have lots of meat, lots of animal protein to be strong and healthy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Did you make that shift all at once or was it slower?

James Wilks:

Over a couple of months, I was cutting things out. Cut out red meat and chicken, I was cutting fish, eggs and dairy. I just cut that down and eventually, I think eggs were the last thing to go. I think dairy went and fish and eggs were the last thing to go and then, it was 6 weeks after that that I did that ropes training but I just felt better, felt more energy and just felt better overall.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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What's your diet look like today?

James Wilks:

I'm a 100% plant-based now so, in the morning, I might have oatmeal or overnight oats. You can either cook it in the morning or you can just put the milk in, the plant-based milk the night before and that will have oats, berries, hempseeds, flaxseeds, pumpkin seeds, maybe some nut butter, berries, banana, that type of thing, put it in the night before in the fridge and it's ready to go in the next day or cook it like regular in the morning while it's cold outside and I might do a lentil pasta which is higher in protein, do that with some veggies, maybe with some guacamole, maybe a bean and rice burrito, something like that for dinner. It really varies. These days, there's anything you can get meat-based, there's a plant-based burger, you can get even pizza. There's all sorts of things you can eat but I'm trying to stick with whole foods so legumes, beans, peas, lentils, nuts and seeds, fruits and vegetables, whole grains, potatoes, that type of thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Did you have any challenges with any micronutrients? Was your diet lacking in anything as you've made this transition?

James Wilks:

The one thing that you've really got to take and actually, 40% of people are low in B12 whether you eat meat or not so B12 is something that I personally think that everybody should be taking. Of course, I'm not a registered dietician but regularly advocate to people on a plant-based diet certainly take B12 and B12 isn't created by animals, it's actually created by bacteria in their gut. It's also in the soil and back in the day, before we started sanitizing things so before there were pesticides, antibiotics and that sort of thing, chlorine, you would have got B12 in the water, on the vegetables and that type of thing but now, we sanitize everything which is a good thing so we are low in B12. In fact, even farm animals are fed B12 so omnivores and people that are eating meat and eggs and that type of thing as well as fruits and vegetables and plant foods, they are actually supplementing with B12 anyway, it's just indirectly. So, yeah, B12, I do take but I've never been low on anything since I've started.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right on, right on and you've compared these journeys, this research of nutrition and research of fighting or training together and I find that really fascinating because there are so many correlations. If you were to get really, really specific about nutrition, you could spend your entire day planning out and cooking and documenting what you're eating and there are people who spend a lot of time with that. Bodybuilders and other folks who go up on stage for other reasons will do that and then, you can do the same thing with your martial arts training. You can train 16, 20 hours a day if you want and still never master everything.



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James Wilks:

Absolutely. That's right. there were a lot of parallels. A lot of main things, I think, there's a lot of nonsense in martial arts and I think there's a lot of nonsense in nutrition advice so the majority of people get their nutrition advice from the internet and of course, anyone can claim to be an expert and you can have people who have lots of followings to have lots of influence and the same with martial arts. A lot of people find their local gym is about some good marketing, it's close by, they go in and they start believing that that master is the best person and that art is the best art and basically, that's generally not true and so, you've got to dig through all that nonsense and find the essence and find the truth and so I think the same mindset applies to both and there are a lot of parallels there but yeah, I've constantly, in that first year I spent over a thousand hours reading peer-reviewed science. Since then, I've been making this documentary, The Game Changers, and I've spent, personally, over 3,000 hours reading peer-reviewed science as well as have a full science team backing us up with a chief of science advisor controlling it all, controlling the team and managing the team and so, it's just become very clear to me, I think, in my martial arts journey, I found that no one has the absolute truth of everything but I found you really start understanding what works from what doesn't and then, in nutrition, you start realizing what's true and what's not true and the influence that the industry has publishing biased studies, you got to cut through that and really start understanding what's true and what's not.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, you said a team. Tell us about this team. What's going on there?

James Wilks:

Yeah, so we have a team. I made this documentary called The Game Changers which actually just came out last night over 1500 theaters around the world. 560 to 600 theaters last night in the US. This is actually the 2nd most-viewed film in the US last night, actually.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Congratulations!

James Wilks:

Yeah, it took a whole team to put that together. You can't make a documentary by yourself. Not only do you have this sort of executive producers and the production team and we've got a bunch of athletes actually in the executive team. Chris Paul, who's a nine-time all-star NBA player, Novak Djokovic, the number 1 male tennis player in the world, Lewis Hamilton, the 5-time Formula 1 champion but also, big movie people, James Cameron, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jackie Chan. You got the executive team, you've got editors and videographers and director but then, we also have this really strong scientific team that helped with all the research. We're consulting with 10 million dollar a year athletes, organizations, the



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military and so, we have a scientific team with registered dieticians and doctors on board to helping people make a transition towards a better transition both with their performance and for their health.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What does it look like if some high-end athlete, if LeBron James calls you up, your team up tomorrow and says, I'm interested in this and let's say we get past the scientific piece, he buys in, he's on board. What's that process look like? How are you working with these people?

James Wilks:

Funny you should mention LeBron actually. We just sent the film to his trainer and his chef requested him that it's pretty ironic that you asked about LeBron. Basically, we'll do an on-boarding session with one of our staff where they'll really break down what they're currently eating. You can't just tell someone, it's not a one way flow of information. This is what you're going to eat. First of all, you got to find out what are they eating and what are their goals. Everyone's goals are different, what they're eating, what taste and what are the calories required depending on the sport or their goals. Are they going to lose body fat or are they just going to gain muscle and try and improve their endurance and so, there's really a session that onboarders them in that way and figures out what are they eating and then, figuring out their own nutrition plan for them moving forward. Our approach is not all or nothing so it doesn't mean, I'm not trying to tell people go vegan or go vegetarian, we're trying to dispel some myths, show some facts and then, let people make their own decision and I do hope that it creates a shift towards more plant-based eating but you don't have to go all-in to get all the benefits. We like to say all or something rather than all or nothing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Interesting stuff and what was the process of making this film? I've done a little bit of video stuff over the years and I know how much time goes into it so tell us about the process of making this film.

James Wilks:

First of all, it takes a lot longer to make a film than you'd expect. There's a lot more work than I ever realized so I actually started with a used camera off of craigslist. I basically woke up one morning as I was digging into this research and I got to make a film about this and I partnered up with Jose Pace who is the other producer. He's actually been plant-based now for 30 years and has some screenwriting experience and just took us a long time just to get some funding on board. We did a first round of preliminary filming and we used that footage to get James Cameron and then add the director Louie Psihoyos who has the most award-winning documentary of all time and just putting that team together takes a long time. Went to 4 continents, filmed over a hundred people, experts, athletes, firefighters, soldiers and this is a long, long process and then to edit the film, put it together, they say for every 10



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minutes of a film, you should allow a month of editing so a 90-minute film you got about 9 months of editing. It takes a long, long time but it's finally out and we're excited about it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Super cool! So, what's the goal? You've put a lot of time into this and I suspect, a lot of money, and yeah, there's ways to commercialize this and you've got your team but what's the goal? Why did you want to delve in in such a time-consuming and expensive project?

James Wilks:

I think, to me, I felt like I've been lied to. I hate being lied to. I felt like my parents had told me that we need meat and animal products to be strong and there's this little scene in the documentary, I was in my Superman outfit, costume, when I was 5 years old and my dad's asked me what does Superman need to eat to be strong and healthy and he's talking about meat and I'm talking about lamb and eggs and these type of stuff and yeah, and then the marketing always told that you got to eat meat to be strong. I used to think I knew a lot about nutrition but I realized that most of my information was coming from blogs and magazines and that sort of thing. I hadn't really dug in but once I started digging into the research, I really felt like I was being lied to and I really don't like being lied to and I woke up at 2 in the morning and thought I've got to tell the world about this because everyone's being lied to. It's affecting their performance, both athletic performance, also sexual performance even with blood flow, and also, people's health and then, the planet is being destroyed by, largely the foods that we eat which people don't really realize. There's going to be a huge impact in the planet from the environment from the foods that we're eating and so, I just felt like I had to tell the world and felt it's important to get the message out.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What's the response been like?

James Wilks:

It's been surprisingly, even if it's sort of the younger male demographic which we thought might push back a bit, it's been overwhelmingly positive. We've got guys that are like 250 pounds, 6'3", totally ripped and jacked, going to these pre-screening months ago, have switched over and said they're gaining more muscle, they're feeling great and just really shot through a wide demographic and even from your 15-year old teenager that's at the gym working out to the 80-year old lady who's her friends have died of heart disease have made a switch and they're feeling great so it's pretty inspiring to see the wide demographic that's resonating with.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Whenever people talk about vegetarianism, veganism, plant-based et cetera, have you had any, I guess, pushback or maybe even threats? Is anybody trying to derail putting out this message?

James Wilks:

We really haven't had as much push back as we thought. The industry, although I think in the past, they've done things like in the Oprah Winfrey lawsuit where she talked bad about meat in a very minimal way and there was a lawsuit so do I think there's a chance that we're going to get sued, will there be some threats? Yeah, I think there will be. However, things are changing rapidly even in this last 6 months or a year, things are changing. The meat industry is not only investing in this new plant-based meat companies but they're also starting to develop their own plant-based meat products because they see where the money is going. They see the way the trends are going in this direction and so, they're sort of switching from this, largely, they're switching in this mindset of really promoting meat. I think they're starting to change now. Overall, I think the risk of death threats and lawsuits is going to minimize.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, lets circle this back to martial arts. Let's start plugging some of these things together. You talked about some pretty tangible aspects of what you're advocating here with health, with muscle development et cetera, but the folks listening here, they're martial artists, they're looking at what's going to be better for them in and outside of their training so when we consider them, if they call up, if you get some of these calling up and they're not a professional fighter, they're someone who's really passionate about their Karate training or their Kung Fu training, what would you tell them?

James Wilks:

In terms of their nutrition you mean or in terms of training as well?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's start with nutrition but yeah, all of the above.

James Wilks:

In terms of nutrition, actually, what we've done is we've put out lots of free resources on our website so that people can come and look at recipes, look at tips on how to make a switch, tips on eating out and that sort of thing so we want to do that. We have a non-profit that's putting all of that information out, actually, but I would say, think about what your sport is. Hardworking muscles run primarily on glycogen so, you can run slow, steady pace burning body fat pretty well but if you got an intense sport like martial arts, then you want to get enough carbs in to replenish glycogen stores and to do that, that's primarily coming from plants. I would just start getting more whole plant foods into your diet so that you're fueling your body properly. If you're not fueling your body properly, it's not going to operate at its best



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and that's certainly not what you want if you're trying to become an athlete of any sort or just have energy throughout the day to work at the office and play with your kids. It's certainly in martial arts. Martial arts is really, if you're going a few rounds, there's a lot of intensity and you really need those carbs to fuel yourself so again, not trying to tell people to go vegan or vegetarian but make sure you're getting plenty of carbohydrate-rich plant foods in their whole source. You don't want to go with sugar and Oreos or Pepsi are vegan but they're not made from plants originally but they're not healthy foods so I'm trying to encourage eating more fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes and some seeds, basically.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely, makes sense. So, what's your training look like now? Do you even have time to train? Sounds like you've been busy.

James Wilks:

Yeah, we've been very busy. I've been travelling around with the film and during the distribution and bringing these resources to people but no, I still get my training in and I hit the gym, keep the strength up. During the weights, I deadlift, squats, that type of thing but also a lot of rotational exercises so the problem with a lot of weight exercises at the gym is very linear where you're pushing and pulling but if you look at most sports, and especially fighting, there's a lot of rotational exercises. There's a lot of rotational implementation to whether you're punching or throwing so really working, throwing medicine balls against the wall and twisting, doing the wood chop with the cable, really focusing on a lot of rotational stuff because that's where your power comes from. That's where a lot of your moves is going to exist in that space so that's sort of hitting the gym and I like to keep high intensity interval training up so sprints on the steps, sprinting to the top, jogging and walking back down, sprinting to the top again, things like that and obviously, continue with the martial arts training whether it's getting on the mat, doing Jiu Jitsu or again, I just love Jiu Jitsu and grappling for a whole body workout. It's also so cerebral. It's really like a physical game of chess so I like getting that in and still, occasionally doing some edged weapons training, empty hand against edged weapons or edge weapon on edge weapon, blunt instruments, working well with attackers. Just really mixing it up and keeping it very varied, basically.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Tell us more about that weapons training. Is this that Filipino Martial Arts influenced or is that coming from somewhere else?

James Wilks:

Both actually. Paul Vunak also and of course, Dan Inosanto as well, have a large Filipino Martial Arts influence in their teachings and so, I'm a full instructor in Kali as well and so there's some influence from there but also, just really again, researching from experience and absorbing from different styles and



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systems, develop some of our own stuff or tweak other people's stuff that we're developing for knife defense and this is the type of stuff that I teach to the special forces and Navy SEALs, Green Berets and other government agencies like the US Air Marshalls or Federal Air Marshalls. It's really a conglomeration of synergistic styles and techniques brought together and developed on so I don't like to think of any one style. Even Jeet Kune Do, people have started to say Jeet Kune Do is the way because that's bringing in things but that sort of became its own system as well in a way which was not what Bruce Lee intended so just really not worrying too much about labeling or styles and just learning from everybody. Trying to have a white belt mentality rather than a black belt mentality where you can really be open to learning new information and having that open, empty cup so that you can absorb information so not really focusing on any one style.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We talk often about that white belt mentality on this show and how, personally, it's the difference between the best martial artists and the ones who are not quite on their level, those who reached the pinnacle, those who are the absolute best seemed to have spent a lot of time learning from other people and just being open to being a white belt, to being terrible, to finding a path forward. Would you agree?

James Wilks:

Oh, absolutely. When people think they've got that black belt, they think they've made it, they started getting out of shape, they're not open-minded, they think they know everything and so, I think recognize where you've come from, where you're at but also, really, stay openminded and learn from other people. You can learn from students sometimes. There are students that can teach you new things.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely.

James Wilks:

And so, that white belt mentality is key.

Jeremy Lesniak:

One of the questions I like to ask so I'll throw this at you now, imagine we have a time machine and a teleporter kind of rolled into one and you could go anywhere in the world and anywhere in time to train with someone else, who would that be?

James Wilks:

I think it's got to be Bruce Lee.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

I figured.

James Wilks:

Yeah, out of anybody that would be fantastic. Even just having conversations with him, I think, would be amazing but also training with him as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And you've spent a lot of time researching and reading his work, and I'm going to guess more than most people, so you probably got a handle on his philosophy and a lot of other things, what would you hope to accomplish training with him or would there be certain aspects of your training that you would say, Bruce Lee is the best person to teach me this or is it more that you're a fan?

James Wilks:

It's more, I think, I'd like to pick his brain deeper on the philosophies especially later on in his life because he was constantly evolving and just sort of try to figure out where he would have gone next because had he stayed alive, people started saying, well, would he have done well in a mixed martial arts competition and his weight, well, of course, we've learned a lot since then, there's a lot of information out there now especially with the grappling aspects but people forget, people think that the mixed martial arts, the sport of mixed martial arts is as real as it gets and it is, in terms of competition is as real as it gets, but you got to remember that Bruce Lee was talking about headbutting and eye-gouging and biting and kicking the groin and all these sort of things. You also got to remember he's a very small guy in terms of his weight but when you don't allow eye jabs and kicking the groin and biting and these sort of thing, strength and size becomes more of a factor so when you allow those things, speed and agility and timing and live realization and footwork; all of these attributes become more important, actually, and so, it's not whether Bruce Lee has done well, I think that he would had he had current information for someone who's extremely athletic. He would've done very well in the UFC but you got to remember that's not his mindset and same for me, fighting in the UFC and winning the ultimate fighter was just one aspect. My main focus has always been about realistic self-defense and training people to really defend themselves if they need to but I think that's the difference there as well and so, picking his mind about his philosophy and the way he's headed next.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure, sure. Let's look to the future. Let's look out, 5 years, 10 years, as far as you want to look into the horizon. What are you looking to accomplish? What's keeping you motivated? What are your goals? What's your training look like?

James Wilks:



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I think I want to keep, to me now, I'm 41, I'm no longer competing and I'm still teaching occasionally but I'm still heavily-focused on promoting better eating for people. So, in terms of my training, I do want to sort of maintain, stay in shape, keep learning new things and maintain flexibility because I feel that's one thing that you need to develop as you get older that diminishes. Keep up my fitness, stay healthy so I can play with my kids and not go too crazy, not take too many risks like perhaps what I would have done in the day like tapping out too late or just going 100% way too often so I don't want to go too hard anymore, too often at least, and then, the rest of my life I really feel like I want to keep promoting healthy eating because I think a lot of people die unnecessarily prematurely from major chronic diseases, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, that sort of thing. I think people aren't performing at their best. People can perform really well but it's not actually because of what they're eating. It's a lot often in spite of it what they're eating especially in the younger. I think I can help people have more longevity in their athletic careers and just helping other people really and then, also encouraging plant-based eating also for the planet as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool, cool stuff. Awesome! If people want to learn more about you or the film, find you on social media, where would they go?

James Wilks:

Yeah, the film, there's a website, gamechangersmovie.com. The Instagram and Facebook handles, Game Changers Movie. On Twitter, it's @GCmovie and if they want to follow me personally on Instagram, it's @lightingwilks.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Awesome. Thanks so much for being here today and one last thing as we head off, what parting words would you give to the folks listening today?

James Wilks:

I would just say keep an open mind in your training. Learn from other people and try to figure out what those immutable principles are of combat so that you have that lens to look through and then, also fuel your body well. Treat your body like it's a machine and fuel that machine with the best fuel possible because if you want optimal results, you need to have the optimal fuel.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's not often that we have someone on the show who approaches everything they do in their lives with such intellectual dedication. The idea that Mr. Wilks spent so much time researching and understanding the way combat works and then, the way nutrition works, I can really appreciate that because that's the attitude that I bring to a lot of the things that I do. Now, with his movie and his mission to help people



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from a nutrition perspective, I hope he has nothing but success so thank you so much, Sir, for coming on this show, I really appreciate our time together. If you want to learn more about today's episode, head to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, get the transcript, get the links, see the photos and maybe check out some other episodes while you're there. feel free to share this or any other episode, it's one of the best ways that you can help support whistlekick and martial arts radio. Help us grow, help us reach more people. Help us maintain our number 1 ranking. If you go to whistlekick.com, don't forget PODCAST15 gets you 15% off and remember you can follow us on social media, see all the things that we've got going on. Our original memes, content, motivation, you name it. We are @whistlekick on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. My personal email address, jeremy@whistlekick.com and I look forward to hearing from you in some way. Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!