



Episode 435 – The Mindset of the Intermediate Martial Artist |  
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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey, what's going on, everybody? Welcome back to another episode of whistlekick martial arts radio. This is part 2 of the series on the mindset of martial artists. Part 1, we talked about the mindset of the beginner martial artist. This episode, we're going to talk about the mindset of the intermediate martial artist which I'm going to not define in any kind of concrete way. How are we defining an intermediate martial artist?

An intermediate martial artist is someone who is no longer a beginner but we would not call advanced and the reason that we can't define that is that the characteristics that make someone an intermediate martial artist for that in between space is incredibly subjective. Someone could have a beginner mindset and face all the challenges that we went through in part 1 through a white belt and yellow belt or even, blue. I've known green and purple belts who act like beginners, that still have the fear and the concern and then, the struggles with not knowing anything but I think for the most part, we can think of the intermediate martial artist as your typical intermediate ranks and, of course, those vary depending on what martial arts we're talking about, what school but let's say it's generally someone that's been training for, at least, a few months up to a few years.

What's the mindset of the intermediate martial artist? This is a point in time where a lot of people drop out of training because they start to feel like they've got a good handle of what's going on. They



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oftentimes become complacent. They start to think like they know what's going on until they start working with advanced martial artists but your intermediate martial artist is going to carry themselves in a much better way than the beginner martial artist. The beginner martial artist is unconfident. They're unsure and pretty much everything they do is characterized by that but the intermediate martial artist is everything they do is characterized, not by a competency but a familiarity. An awareness of what's there, what could be and most of them are going to be aware that they're lacking in some way. Conscious incompetence, we could call it, I heard it described that way recently.

They know that there's a lot that they don't know but they may have some sense of what they do know. Now, quite often, there's a disconnect between what they think they know and what they actually know but that's not necessarily the case and why do we have to care about the mindset of the intermediate martial artist? Because we have to interact with them. You may be an intermediate martial artist, you may be advanced or beginner, you may be an instructor so understanding what's going on in the mind of an intermediate martial artist makes us better when we try to teach them, when we spar with them or we simply have a conversation with them about martial arts.

The intermediate martial artist, possible more than...no, never mind. What I was going to say, I'll finish my thoughts because it's frustrating to have unfinished thoughts, I was thinking I would say the intermediate martial artist craves validation more than others because I think that's on an individual basis so I'm not going to commit to that. The intermediate martial artist, in my experience, craves novelty. This is one of the biggest challenges and I think it's one of the reasons that, in many schools, I hear them complain that it's when someone reaches those intermediate ranks, that they are most likely to leave because for the most part, they've learned the majority of the fundamental techniques. Maybe there are some forms that they haven't learned but the amount of time that goes between learning something new has extended quite a bit.

When you're a beginner, everything is new. Every class, there's something new. You're doing something wrong, you're being corrected and it's overwhelming, right? If you watched part 1, that's the major characteristic of the beginner martial artist is that overwhelming feeling. The intermediate martial artist finds that they miss that overwhelming feeling that they've gone so far into the other side of that spectrum that they miss the novelty and they're feeling no work. They feel like they know everything. Oh, I already learned that. If you're a teacher, you've probably heard some intermediate martial artist say look, we've already learned this. They want more new stuff. Let's be fair. We've kind of conditioned them with a bunch of new stuff because we gave them new things, lots of novelty early on in their training and then, all of a sudden, we've taught them everything and they want more. How do we work with that? There are plenty of instructors who will just say, well, they've got to get over it. They'll figure it out. I don't think that's fair.



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If we want to interact with the intermediate martial artist, we have to help them see where the novelty is in the things they've already learned. How, by adjusting your stances, all of your forms, your sparring, your basics are suddenly different because now, you're able to better apply force or your reaction time is better or you're faster. To help them get through this kind of dip in their training that, honestly, lasts for years and condition them to be more accustomed to value outside of novelty because that's going to help them get to the advanced ranks.

If the mindset of the intermediate martial artist is a craving for novelty and a devaluation and even an outright rejection of that which they've known and learned, if we want them to continue, we have to help them see where that new information is coming from. Helping them see the value of their own training, of helping them experiment, trying things out on their own can be incredibly valuable. I've known intermediate martial artists who started experimenting with things that come up with really good stuff. Stuff that could set the tone for the rest of their training careers.

The middle of anything is usually the toughest. If you ask someone to memorize a set of terms or numbers, statistically, they'll have the hardest time with those in the middle. The middle of a book is the generally, the least exciting. I think it's human nature that the middle of anything is the most difficult to persist through. If you think about martial arts, you take the overwhelming, the foundation of being a beginner and we're stacking blocks, whatever visual analogy you might want to use, but you haven't reached the advanced stage yet. You can't see the top of the mountain. This is a hiking analogy because I like hiking. If you ever hiked a mountain and you get halfway, three-quarters of the way up, you can't see the bottom but you can't see the top. You have this sense, or lack of sense, of where you are and that's probably the best analogy I can think of for the intermediate martial artist. They don't quite know where they fit in. They've been doing it too long to be called a beginner but they're not good yet. They're intermediate and that can be lonely and frustrating and it requires, just as with the beginner but with a little difference, some compassion.

If you work with intermediate martial artists, give them some compassion. Help them understand that it gets better and they have the opportunity to find novelty in what they're doing. They just have to look for it. If you're an intermediate martial artist, trust that if you keep going, it gets better. It gets a lot better and it's worth the investment. I will be back with part three of this, the mindset of the advanced martial artist.

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stuff. You want to email me, [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com). Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!