



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Thanks for coming by! This is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 442. Today, my guest is Miss Julia Cross. I'm Jeremy Lesniak. I'm your host on this show, I'm the founder here at whistlekick and I love the martial arts. I love traditional martial art. I've been doing it my whole life and now, it's my profession. Between these show and all the things that we've got going on here at whistlekick, it's keeping me pretty busy and you can see everything that we're doing. Go to whistlekick.com, check out everything that we're doing from martial journal to our offerings for martial arts schools and if you make a purchase, anything over there, you can save 15% with the code PODCAST15, help us support the show, justify all the time that we put in this thing. Hopefully, you enjoy it. We bring you two shows a week and yeah, it's fun. I hope you're digging it. Let's talk about today's guest. One of my favorite things about the martial arts is that there are so many opportunities for people to find an aspect that really resonates strongly for them and today's guest, her resonance was in competition. We hear about Miss Cross's travels and her adventures, her competitions and her growth along the way. Some fascinating stories in here and I hope you enjoy them so let's welcome her to the show. Miss Cross, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

Julia Cross:

Hi, good morning to you and good afternoon to me. Thank you for having me on your podcast.

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Yeah, thanks for joining us! It's funny when we talk to people, not only is there a time gap between here and where you are and I'm sure, listeners can already guess where you might be based on the accent but we don't know when people are listening to this. When we release episodes, we release at my time at 3 AM so we never know so it's always funny when I talk to the guests about weather or time because you don't know when and where they're going to be. 4 years later, that's still weird to me that people listen globally to this show.

Julia Cross:

It's interesting. It's good that your audience want to wait.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I haven't done it in probably a year but once in a while, I go into our numbers and I'll see where people download from and, as you would expect, it's the English speaking countries primarily. It's the UK, it's the US, Canada, Australia but you end up with these spots, these hot buttons of downloads and I don't know if it's one person or I don't know, a hundred people or whatever but pockets in Africa or pockets in Europe that, for whatever reason we've got a foothold there. Who knows?

Julia Cross:

Africa is a place that's really worldwide.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, absolutely, because of the show I get to interact on social media with people globally. It's an interesting experience, we're talking about, listeners, we were talking about that beforehand some of the people that I've been fortunate enough to talk to but we're not here to talk about them. We're definitely not here to talk about me. We're here to talk about you and I always start off in a pretty basic way. It's the podcast equivalent of jab-cross or jab-cross, maybe, front kick and that is how did you get started in the martial arts?

Julia Cross:

It's always, anytime I get interviewed, it's always the first question that people ask me. My father actually started taekwondo before I did a few years before and he unfortunately snapped his Achilles tendon so he was out for a year and when he was well enough to return training, instead of training in Edinburgh which is the capital city, we decided to go along inside a local club that was open in my area when I was 11 years old at that time and we thought it'd be great for something for me to do. I was a slightly overweight 11-year old, got bullied a little bit at school and he decided that's enough, let's take you along here and get you some confidence.

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Did it work? Did it change you?

Julia Cross:

Ultimately, I've trained for 33 years now. It wasn't mostly an immediate transition but over the months and years it came, obviously had a massive impact on my life, not just in titles or anything but in the way that I perceived myself and the way that I don't want others to go through what I went through in school or bullies and everything like that so yes, it made me realize that every time I fell down or something happened, I would always get back up because the strength that taekwondo gave me or the strength that I gave myself as well, to keep getting back up, I want to install that in, not just my students, but to everybody I meet.

Jeremy Lesniak:

For sure. Starting martial arts at that adolescent age is interesting because there are so many people who transition out of martial arts out of that point. You get the younger children who, they get to 10, 11, 12 and they start to fade away. Anybody who's had a martial arts school has probably seen this. I assume it's the same in your area that it is here in the states but here you are, you're coming in at that time. Were there many other students around your age?

Julia Cross:

No, at that time, we're talking about quite a while ago now, there wasn't many children. A lot of people didn't take their children on but at the age of maybe 10, at first, I had to be able to just train together with the adults and every age group but when the school got busier, then it got separated into under-16 and into the adults but nowadays, people are teaching from 3 years old. I personally teach from 4 years olds so the difference from when I started to now is massive. I'm not sure what it was like in America because I started in 1986 and there wasn't martial arts for children then.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right, I started right around that time and I've learned in hindsight that my school was, certainly not unique but, rare that we had separate children's classes and those classes went up to, depending on the child, 10, 12 maybe 13 before they transition up to the adult class because, and of course the way you're going to teach a 6-year old is very different than the way you might teach a 12-year old.

Julia Cross:

Massively and there are some places, still, here that teach children from 4, 8 until they grew them in but I, personally, don't agree with children and adults in that they all learn at different stages and they all need different things to be able to learn.

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Absolutely. So, here you are, you're 11 years old, at your father's encouragement or maybe even request, you start training taekwondo and your training in taekwondo now, did you take any breaks? Was there any...

Julia Cross:

I've never taken a break apart from when I've had surgeries. I've actually had 10 surgeries. I've actually just had one 3 weeks ago so that was my 10th surgery on the anniversary of my 20th year of winning my first world title. I was in the hospital watching my thumb get up and get it done and it was pretty cool.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think we have different definitions of what's cool. What happened to your thumb?

Julia Cross:

Well, what they had to do as I was training for years but just had you would call trigger thumb which means that it bends and you can't straighten it and I've had 3 steroid injections in it over the course of a few years and then, my doctor said no. Enough's enough because for the last year, I couldn't actually bend it at all apart from at the main joint. I couldn't make a fist for over a year so my thumb was just sticking out the whole time so it wasn't the best but now, it's much better now so it's getting better slowly it gets better.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Your 10th surgery. Were the other 9, were they all related to martial arts? Were they all taekwondo-induced?

Julia Cross:

They were.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow, you going to tell us about them?

Julia Cross:

I've had 3 knee surgeries, supposed to clear out torn cartilage. My nose broken once by an elbow. I've had had 2 surgeries on my left hip, 3 on my right hip resulting in I have to get 2 hip replacements.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And would you...wow! I've known people with surgeries and I'm doing the math. You're young for those joint replacements.



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Julia Cross:

I've had my first hip replacement, when did I have it, 2010, 9 years ago. I've had one injury, was training for the world championships in Canada and I just remember thinking this isn't right. I was really flexible, worked hard at it and then, flexibility started to go really fast. I had growing pain so I went to the doctor and he said you get beaten at sports at the Scottish Rugby team and he took x-rays and said, yep, you need a new hip and I said no, I don't. He's gone look at the x-ray. I had a bone spur, I was basically a mess. I had torn cartilage everywhere and he said, right, I can do the surgery for you but you'll have one more tournament after it and I was devastated. I didn't want to retire and I said no. Me being me, I had surgery done, was 2 weeks on crutches and then, I had 6 weeks to train for the European championships and so that being said, I went to the European championships 8 weeks after surgery so that was probably one of my, not to say finest moments because I had to change a lot of the way I sparred but I was so proud of myself for getting back up and having the determination to, when everybody told me I couldn't do it and I said yes I can and I did.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm getting the sense that that's probably a core element to who you are. That sense of rebellion. Am I reading that right?

Julia Cross:

How did you know? Completely. I was a very rebellious teenager. I tried to do everything opposite of what my parents wanted me to do and I've always had the strength the desire to not give up on something I believed in and something I wanted to do. Sometimes it's always not the right thing but it taught me just that inner strength and resilience to always, if things get tough in people's lives is to always be right, okay, keep working this off, if you can get through this, if you need help then get help, don't just try and I used to try doing everything by myself and everything then came to a point where I did have that hip replacement and there were stuff I couldn't do myself. I had to ask for help in a lot of areas.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And has it gotten easier to ask for help now?

Julia Cross:

Massively. I'm still pretty stubborn. I'm an Aries. I'm a typical Aries if you follow star signs. I don't particularly look into it but I'm an Aries, so yes I'm stubborn, very loving and giving and I like to help people. When people cross me, then I'm not so forgiving.

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

I can relate to that a bit. You talked about championships and competing and it seems pretty clear that that's an important part of martial arts for you. How do you go from just this description of who you were at 11, kind of sounded like needing something that could be yours, having this place that you could call your own in the dojang to being so dedicated to competition that you're going to defy doctor's orders and compete just a few weeks and at a high level after major surgery. What was it that you found in martial arts that made it so important for you?

Julia Cross:

I think it was I did a lot of sports when I was younger but taekwondo was just something that like you say I felt like at home, I have this family and I just loved it and to be quiet honest, that was one thing I was really, really good at. I worked hard and I used to swim in competition and things but my mom made me choose you do one or the other and I chose taekwondo and I don't regret it for a second. It's given me, I travelled the world, I've been to North Korea, to Russia, to middle Asia, all over the world. Saw some amazing things, met some amazing people and I just think I have this huge family worldwide. All over the world, we are called really good friends and yes, it gave me a sense of purpose in my life instead of my father's an accountant, my mother's a primary school teacher, my sister has 2 degrees and they kept saying what do you want to do as you leave school and I said I don't know. I wanted to join the police then I wanted to be a firewoman then it kept changing and I said I want to do taekwondo for the whole time and at first, they said no and then they said ok, if you get a job, you work hard and we'll support you but you have to support yourself and that's what I did. Now, 20 years later, I have a fulltime gym. I've taught in the same area for 20 years and a few weeks after my first hip replacement, we built a gym, my students and I. We knocked down this other building and we built the dojang so in a space of a year, I retired from competition for the hip replacement, built the gym and separated from my partner after 10 years so that was big year.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Because one of those wouldn't be enough for someone to face that you just decided to stack them all up, get them out of the way.

Julia Cross:

It wasn't actually my choice, unfortunately but it just happened when you have all the tools. It was when I had my first rehab I was so religious with it. Every day, it's what the doctor told me, every single day because I wanted to get back and be pain-free because at the end, I actually cracked a femur head in my last competition so when I went to see him, he said yeah, you've done it now. Your hip's collapsed and you need it down now so that's what happened.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's a lot to face. It's a lot to face what's going on.



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Julia Cross:

Massively.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When did the competition thing start because you're certainly not a casual competitor?

Julia Cross:

No, no, no. Basically, when I was 11 was when I started. At 12, I got my green belt and when I started doing local competitions at 12 years old and just loved it. I loved the thrill of, I wasn't great at the start but obviously, I just kept training and my first international competition was when I was 17. I went to the junior Europeans in Vienna so that was my first outing as a, ohmygod there's other black belt girls here, there's lots of them. They're everywhere because at Scotland at that time, there were very, very few of us. We had to go to London or other areas to have girls. At that time, we didn't start fighting us girls until you were 16. Before that, you just had boys and girls together.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If I'm hearing you right, you found a sense of community and a sense of you weren't the only female as you entered the competition. You've had examples of other strong women.

Julia Cross:

Absolutely. I always had strong females in my life. My instructor, Grandmaster Sheena Sutherland and she was my instructor all my days and unfortunately, she passed away a few weeks ago and she's sorely missed but she's always a strong, independent woman that taught especially, not just men, men respected her, but girls. You don't have to say over anything less, you don't have to feel lesser than a man, you're not and she taught me so much about becoming a strong woman and she taught me so much about becoming a strong woman.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely. You step out to compete, you see that there are other people, people to compete against, people that I expect were pushing you to get better because, I'm going to take a stab in the dark and you hit that international stage and you're probably not the best person there.

Julia Cross:

The first time I went, I went power breaking and the first time, I got that silver in sparring.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Ok, so you hit the ground running. Not what most people are going to do.



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Julia Cross:

No, pretty much running and yes, I wasn't the best there. that gave me the inspiration that I want to be better than them. I want to just keep getting better and better.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Did you have any rivals?

Julia Cross:

All through the years, I made different rivals at the gym. Got those top competitors, the Polish girls, they were probably my toughest opponents because they did patterns and sparring that the two disciplines, there was obviously different rivals and different categories.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Is that common, from my observations of high-level competitive taekwondo, people tend to pick one of the other. They're either doing patterns or they're doing sparring.

Julia Cross:

Majority. I'd say it's more common now but yes, when I was at the highest level, there was a few girls that did both but not very many. I had 4 world titles in sparring and twice when I won the world title, I won patterns at the same time in the same competition which as the only female in the world to do that. So many times, anyway.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And so, you talked about retiring from competition, why? It sounds like you love it and even by the way you're talking about it now tells me that you probably would still enjoy it. Why'd you step back?

Julia Cross:

Because I had to have my hip replaced. It's not just an easy, I had to take my pelvis removed and titanium molding my legs and I have a sports hip and it's great but the surgeon said to me, you want to compete again, I'm not going to stop you but you want 10 years with a hip [00:19:33] so I decided, after much thought and heart-wrenching decisions that my body and my future to be able to walk was more important than stepping back in the year with the potential that something could go wrong and I didn't want people to remember me as being less than who I was.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Tell us about your school. You opened your school at a pretty young age. It's something that I think a lot of martial artists dream of but not too many people do it. how did it all happen?



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Julia Cross:

It was my instructor that actually prompted me. I was working many job to earn money and it was to live and to go travel abroad, she said I think you should go and get a school so I went to different areas and looked at where it wasn't and the place I've had my gym is a beautiful town called South Queensferry and I managed to get in a high school for many years and I started with 6 students and built it up and eventually, when I retired from competition and had a hip replacement, I decided to take the jump and go full time and get my own premises. It's always been my main job. I did work in the Edinburgh airport for a while for 8 years as ground handler. I was in charge of all the aircrafts and I loved it but again, my hip was getting sore when I was walking and thinking, well, this is not good so yeah, 20 years just past November and my hip surgeon actually opened the gym so that was a very poignant moment. It's a nice thing for him to come with his family because he helped me a lot not just physically but mentally as well when I had to go through all this and so I have this gym and I have a 160 students and I have a couple, well, I have 4 of students who are in the Scottish team. We're going to start eval next week actually for the European Championships and they're all either one of them was twice the European champion, one is a European world cup champion. The girls, one of them's a European champion and one of them is a European medalist and my longest-standing student is 27 now and he's with me since the first day my gym opened.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, that's so cool.

Julia Cross:

I know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How has the gym changed from day one to now, what's the biggest change if we ask him?

Julia Cross:

I don't know. I have to ask him that question. Just the difference of how happy people are than training at our own place rather than in a high school were sometime they're having other classes on and not tell you and having to go to another place and nobody knew. There's just that...we have a massive, a lot of people come to our gym and it's just like a massive family community. People feel safe. There's no egos, that's safe. If you have an ego, I don't have one, nobody else does so I think because when a lot of people, they do martial arts, they go, oh, so you think you're tough? Oh, I'm tough mentally and physically but I don't put that on my CV. It's just who I am.

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

We talk a lot about ego and culture in the martial arts on this show and as a school owner who sees a great culture in their school, for people out there listening who maybe look at their own school and say, I've got a good culture but it could be better. What are the things that you do to foster that culture?

Julia Cross:

I think it's the way I've been brought up not just by my taekwondo instructor but my parents and the people I surround myself in because I've never been one for, I'm trying to think about the right words, when people, because when they won one title, they think they're just this superhero where I always teach them you have to be humble in winning and in defeat because it shows a true person, if you lose, it's how you pick yourself back up, it's how you hold your head up high and you get on and I think that's what I instill in my students, not just in competition because they don't have a huge amount to compete. I'll leave it to them, obviously to the children and the parents, it's good to test yourself to see how strong-willed you are. What you want to do instead of being scared of something that you've never done and I think I teach that. I give all my students respect and I think that's important because if you respect them, they respect you and if you don't, then, they have to leave and fortunately, I haven't had to do that. I think it's just a mutual respect but they know who's in charge but they can always come to me. We always say to them, I have 2 female assistants who work for me and I have a couple of really valued helpers who come along, volunteer and without them, I couldn't do it. I take advice from, the older ones who know what to do and then, I'm quite happy to take suggestions on how to make it better and I know I can always talk through 24 black belts and now, there's a good few of them that I class as my closest friends. I know if I have a problem, I can pick up the phone and say can you help me and they'd be there in a second and I think that's a true martial arts community that you give to others and they give back but, in general, you just want people, especially children, to become more confident, to believe in themselves. I have a good few students who are either autistic or they have ADHD. They have a lot of different, it can be challenging at times but the reward of seeing the difference in them and even after a few months and the way they talk about themselves or the way they interact with other children, it's just lovely. I always say to the kids when there's a new student in, you know what we do. Make them feel welcome, you show them how you behave in class and they always do and I think it's a good guidance for them in life, not just in the martial arts world. I always say to them, one of the biggest values of what we get in martial art or any martial art is also the indomitable spirit that you never give up when times are hard. That's when its most important to keep going to find your inner strength.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I would agree. I'm sure through all these years of training and teaching and travelling, competing, you've got a ton of stories but if I ask you for your favorite story that you might share with us, what would that be?

Julia Cross:



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

I wouldn't say my favorite. I have a couple of favorite stories because they're all interesting but my first world championships, I went to North Korea. That was my first senior world championships. Went to North Korea with the Great British team at that time and I just remember we don't know how to go to Moscow, we don't have the correct visas, we all had to run to passport control and then, money was passed hands for tickets with this north Korean guy somewhere in Moscow airport and I'm looking at us and this is like a movie, what is going on here? So we got the tickets with this north Korean airline. I remember there was a crack on the outside of the plane and I was like, I'm not getting on that and my instructor was going get on the plane! Don't be so stupid! It was oh my god! I was petrified and I was sitting on this plane where, at the time, you could smoke on planes and everybody on the back of the plane were smoking and you spend 10 hours on this plane going to North Korea and I thought every minute, I thought I was going to die. When we got there, obviously, it still is but Kim Il-Sung was in charge and everything was staged. There was countries from all over the world there and every time we went on a trip, there were these families sitting in parks, waving, eating picnics. We got taken to this park that got this toy train thing and it was just surreal and every morning, the school children were marching in military uniforms at 6:00 in the morning, these young, young kids. You're looking out the window going what is happening here and the street light went off at 8:00 at night. There was no dogs or cats anywhere to be seen and I mean none and everybody had 2 jobs. One paid and one where you had to work for the government when we watched elderly women laying brick roads. It was just, to be honest, I can't wait to leave and everybody in the team got sick. Some of them got food poisoning so bad that they couldn't actually compete all the way to North Korea and I remember this doctor coming in the room with one of our competitors with this huge needle and giving us these injections with who knows what because he's so old and he couldn't compete that time so that was one of my favorite stories to tell people because you went to where? North Korea! Oh my goodness! That's one of my most memorable, if I can remember it was like yesterday. It's had such an impact on my life coming home and thinking that that's a different world. I've never known of it. I've never had the knowledge of north Korea really and to come home and tell people what happened and they just couldn't believe it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It sounds like a pretty powerful experience. I have very little knowledge of North Korea. Of course, other than what comes through on the news and unfortunately, what you're saying kind of lines up. You always hope things are a little better than what you hear. Have you been back?

Julia Cross:

Oh no, no, no, no. No thanks.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sounds like you wouldn't.

Julia Cross:



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Unfortunately, when the General Choi died, there's a split in the ITF so the North Koreans are no longer in the group there we're in so there's no need to go to North Korea anymore. My other favorite story is the first time I won the world championships in Argentina in 1999. I was the only Scottish competitor to win at that time so my instructor got me another coach and he was in Holland [00:30:29] He totally changed my life and the way I perceived myself to be. I knew I was good but I never had the comfort but you know what? Not in a conceited way but I am really good. Unless I believe it, I'm not going to win and he told me this. Julia, you have to start believing or you won't win because sometimes I lack a little bit of confidence when I got there, when other people are better. I remember training with him when he was actually coaching the Albanian team at that time so I was able, I've been able to train in Holland at that time to train and we were training the day before we were due to fight. I did a downward kick and ripped my hamstring. I felt it just as it came off the bone and I was in so much pain, I was in tears thinking what am I going to do? So, basically sat with ice in it for 12 hours and in the next day, I just said, no, this is not happening. Forget about the pain. Forget that there's an injury and the mental strength it took to do that, to forget about it was, I don't know, is the toughest thing I've ever done and I went there, through all my fights the way I couldn't ask for it to get better and the North Koreans and the Korean girl in the final and I just remember my hand getting raised and thinking thank god! That's all I've dreamt of for years, having it feel when I won the world title and when I arrived at the open tournament, there were all those people were saying to me, well, it's nice you came from Scotland as if to say yeah, you've got not a chance in hell. It's good you came and I went I didn't just come here. I came here to win and I will win and I remember this guy, I'm sure he was from Argentina, he came to me after and went you told me you were going to win. Never doubt what I say and I just remember that time. That was a good time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, not only does it sound like a good time. It sounds like there was a transition in you up until that point, the way you're talking about yourself, I can hear some things in your voice that you recognize your skill but as you said, your confidence wavered at that time but this new coach, it sounds like he found a way to get through to you.

Julia Cross:

Without a shadow of doubt, I got a lot to thank him for. People always perceive me as a really, really confident person. I am, to a certain extent, but it's taken a while to get like that and the self-belief part of it, you can train, train, train but if you don't do equal amounts of work in your mindset and your confidence and your motivation, you can just forget it. That's my belief and I instill that in my students, that mental preparation is a key, key part to winning and some of them don't believe me at that time and now, they all do it and they're all starting to win. I'm not saying this just because of me but the self-belief that I try to instill in them is what I instilled in myself and others to help me believe that I was good enough to get this and if you don't believe it, then just forget it, basically. I'm a true, true believer in that.



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

How do you pass that on to your students?

Julia Cross:

I did a lot of motivational work with [00:34:00] I did a lot of stuff when I was competing with different people to help with this and I think over the course of the years, it's been installed in me and I used to take all these printout to the competition with me to read like a motivational quote like some from Muhammed Ali and different poems about how if you don't think you can win, you won't. Just all these stuff, just all these mindset stuff and when I started going abroad more in big competitions, I printed each of them a pack of all of these stuff that I used to take and so I used to put it in with them and I wrote an individual thing for each of them and how I thought they could help themselves believe in them, that I believe in them and to do mantras if you like in your head, not so much, but if they want. I used to go through the same routine every single competition before I went on. Read the same stuff over and over again. Listen to the same music and then, basically lie down to sleep with 10 minutes going on and then, get up and go. That was my way of doing it and they pretty much do the same when I did with, obviously, different iterations for their different personalities but they all do it and they also get the pack and make sure they take it every single time and they take time to read it before they go on.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Tell me about this taking a nap before you compete. That's a new one for me, I haven't seen that before. I've seen people that zone out with headphones but it seems to be more intense and sounds like you're describing it as relaxing.

Julia Cross:

Yeah, basically, I do the same for patterns and for sparring. I do my warm up. I do stretching as the competition drew, the timing of things are much better because sometimes you're sitting about for hours and hours not knowing when you were on but now it's very different. So, I do my warm up, get stretched, get ready so I was ready to go on, don't get me wrong I don't just go up and go on the mat, I get up with a certain amount of time to prepare. I was fully ready, just lie down, listen to music and just try and visualize how it's going to feel to win, how it's going to feel to perform and just get into a really relaxed state so that I wasn't tense for hours and hours that I lose too much energy and my coach would come in and say, right, ok, up you get and warm up again and then, that worked for me. I've not seen it work for everybody. I just see people, even now, warming up for hours and hours before and you're thinking, you've done all the hard work, you're not going to get any better. All you're going to do is make yourself tired for going on so I make sure my students do a similar thing. They're not warming up for hours and hours. To me, it's pointless. Yes, warm up enough so you're not going to injure or you've run



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

through your stuff so you feel mentally ready so that you step on the mat and just raring, if you know the word, just raring to go. It's a Scottish word. It means you're just ready, you're on fire.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Julia Cross:

You get the adrenaline pumping so that when you step on that mat, you just feel your adrenaline rise from your toes to the top of your head and I teach them to do that so I used to stand up off the mat and as soon as I step my feet on the mat, I would just make myself have this adrenaline that I was ready.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Adrenaline can be pretty powerful, for sure.

Julia Cross:

Massively. I think that's how I got through a lot of my really bad injuries and because adrenaline is a wonderful thing. It can take that pain away until the next day until you can't walk.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But the job's done. Maybe you don't need to walk anymore.

Julia Cross:

The job's done. You can just get carried about.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You've acknowledged a few people as we've been talking today. Instructors and coaches, who's been the person that's had the most influence on who you are today as a martial artist?

Julia Cross:

That's a tough one because I have a lot of people outside the martial arts world that helped me and I think people can guide you to be the person you are today but they can't make you the person you are. I think that's something that comes from deep within and sometimes, it just takes a special someone or just a few words from somebody to bring that out in you so I couldn't really say that there is one, only one person or one set person. I think everybody in my life has a different chapter who's helped me in different ways. My best friend still in taekwondo, we've been best friends since I was 16 and she's been a massive influence on the way I am and the way I perceive myself to be when she didn't have quite a long career as I did but she was always so supportive after she stopped and was always there for me and I think she's probably had one of the biggest impacts in my taekwondo life.



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

I can certainly understand not being able to name one person or even a few people when I think about who I am as a martial artist. I'm a quilt. There's just so many people who contributed and you pull any one of them out and the whole thing seems to kind of fall apart so I get that but what if we were to include somebody in the list that isn't there. if you can train with anybody, anywhere in the world, anywhere in time, for some listeners this is their favorite question, who would you want to train with?

Julia Cross:

I think if I had another time to train with General Choi, that would be incredible. Obviously, he passed away a good few years ago now but when I got to do some seminars with him, I just, I found him just humble and the way he spoke and the way he held himself, I was thankful enough he awarded me my first world title and I remember him coming off and saying oh, the Scottish rose has won. That's how we say it because I remember that, also, we have Grandmaster Lan in our group. He is just, he reminds me a lot of General Choi, the way he conducts himself. He's very humble and spiritual and he manages to pass on a message without having to say too much. It just shows him the way he holds himself with what he does say is meaningful and kind of Buddha-like, can you understand that, and I just find it very calming. I have a massive amount of respect for him.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's shift gears a little bit. People in the martial arts tend to either be very passionate about martial arts movies or they don't watch them at all. Where are you?

Julia Cross:

I'm the latter. I don't watch them.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Why?

Julia Cross:

I never found them, they don't interest me to be quite honest and I was watching John Wick the other night and the fight scenes and that and I think I like the fight scenes more than the actual choreographic martial arts if you like. Might sound a little bit strange but that's the way I am.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes and no. It's strange only if you assume that all martial artists love martial arts movies and one of the things we've learned over the last few years is that not everyone does.

Julia Cross:



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

I don't like it. I did like Kung Fu Panda. That was pretty fun.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Fun movie, for sure. There's a little bit more philosophy than maybe great choreography and I think things that I watch, I like them to have a meaning so I've watched a movie or something and I go hmm, that gives you fodder for thought. How about books?

Julia Cross:

Yes, I'm reading Michelle Obama's autobiography. She's a very inspirational woman and I just love watching her. She's so motivational, not just men, obviously especially women and I find that really interesting. I like to read autobiographies or just read a silly chick lit book because I can just take myself away and not even think about life so I have two things the same as movies. I don't like fairly funny movies or quite John Wick or see things like that like crime and thrillers. Very averse taste with pretty much everything else in my life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What's the martial arts, I guess I'm going to use the word scene, for lack of a better word, in Scotland because I'm wracking my brain and apologies to anyone if I'm forgetting them. We've had a lot of guests. I think you're our first guest from Scotland.

Julia Cross:

Well, I'm the first female world title holder from Scotland as well. That makes two titles of first ever.

Jeremy Lesniak:

One of them, I think, is a little more significant than the other.

Julia Cross:

No, I've done a couple of radio shows before a long time ago but I always liked doing these things because you realize what you have achieved and you get asked sometimes from America is a great honor for me. I've been fortunate when I retired, I was asked to do seminars in Canada, Philadelphia, Norway a lot of times. I've been fortunate enough to be asked to these places so that was another good stepping stone after I retired. It filled the void after a bit, if you like.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And are you still teaching seminars?

Julia Cross:



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Not so much. I've not done so much after my second hip replacement, to be honest. I have been asked. It's been my choice with a full-time gym, travelling quite a lot for competitions, I have decided that, not that it wasn't for me anymore but I wasn't enjoying it because I wasn't able to do physically what I wanted to do. I mean, I can still do a lot but I have to be pretty careful into how much pressure I can put on the hip. I like to do more, motivational speaking, that side of it to help people realize it's not just physical you need to work on. Not just in taekwondo. I've been in talks to various communities and girls about how to be a strong woman, how to be confident and not to put up with bullying. That's one thing I'm quite passionate about is bullying. I had helped a lot of my students who had been bullied or are being bullied at school which I just can't comprehend how people can treat other people the way that some of the stories I've heard and what I've been through myself in the old day.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right, I was going to connect that back that you said that you experienced some of that yourself.

Julia Cross:

Yeah, I had a horrendous time especially high school and primary school when I was 11 and I was a little bit overweight and got taunts from the boys and that affected me really badly because I didn't even think that I was overweight until this boy, he was actually overweight said to me I was and I went home in tears to my mum and it was just awful and then, training, lost weight and went to secondary school, I still don't know why I got bullied and I got bullied because I was quite dark skinned and black hair and people used to call me racist names and things but I'm Scottish through and through and then, because I was quite popular, they didn't like that either so they just relentlessly picked on me all day every day. Mostly, it was the name calling. It wasn't so much the physical side but a lot of the time, I think, the mental aspect can be more harmful than the actual physical.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, absolutely. It's a challenge everywhere and it's a challenge that we, in the martial arts, seem to have some really good tools to address and I'm glad to say that there are a lot of schools that are addressing it head on and it makes me really happy to see.

Julia Cross:

It's strange to say this but I've also been bullied in the taekwondo world over the years because obviously, I have a high female profile and everybody around the world knew and some people, unfortunately, weren't so keen on that and they tried to make my life pretty bad in a lot of ways that caused a lot of stress. It's pretty much over now but I'm always aware of these people that I don't, I just try to stay away from, don't have much contact with.

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Unfortunately, it's something that does continue to exist and we've heard stories. I hate to call it adult bullying but I call it that only because when we talk about bullying, people tend to think of children but bullying, unfortunately, continues and sometimes the impact of it is a little more subtle and sometimes, far worse.

Julia Cross:

Couldn't agree more and not many people know the whole situation of what happened here. Like I said, that just works so hard with people and my students and my colleagues doesn't happen with anybody else and if I can do anything to help, I will absolutely will. The first time I won the world title, I know I keep going back to it because I got so much publicity on it and papers, radio, everything, I was quite well-known and I hate to say it but males were pretty jealous of it. I remember coming back when everybody mostly went oh, you're great, I'm so proud of what you've done, then these two guys came up to me and say you won it once, you won it, did you? Yeah, I did. Instead of saying congratulations to me, they said well, anybody can win it once and walked away from me. I was gob smacked. I just thought, right, I'm not going to let it just ruin my celebrations and I remember seeing them years later and I had won it 5 or 6 and I think it was 5 times by then and I saw them and I went straight up to them and said is 5 enough for you now and I just walked away and they were just gob smacked. They don't even know what to say and I thought yeah, you won't put me down that way again.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How did it feel in that moment?

Julia Cross:

I felt ecstatic because I remember the feeling I had the first time when they said that to me because it was in front of other people as well. It wasn't just me and I was embarrassed. I lost my tongue and I didn't know what to say so I didn't want to seem argumentative or conceited so I just didn't say anything but it always stuck right in the back of my mind. I always find it funny because Scottish and British mentality, I think, is I'm very distant from the likes of America and Canada. If you have somebody in your country that does something that nobody else has done like you win the Olympics or a world title or whatever, it's like they want to put them down instead of build them up and I just can't understand that mentality at all so I don't understand that because I've never been like that. If somebody wins and they've worked hard and they deserve it, I'm the first one to congratulate because I know how hard it takes to achieve your goal or your dream and to get put down or not get the accolade that you think you possibly should have got, it's really hurtful especially in your own country.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, absolutely, I can see that. Let's switch gears to the future. When you look out to the next year, 5 years, 20 years, what do you hope to accomplish?



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Julia Cross:

Firstly, I hope I'm still alive.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's a good step one.

Julia Cross:

Yes, since retiring and building the gym, the last couple of years, I've done a lot more travelling for myself because I spent so many years seeing countries that I never really saw. The sports center, hotel, when I became single, that was a long time with my ex-partner, I decided to start traveling myself and my friends were married, they can't go on holiday so the first trip I went on myself, I went to Thailand myself for 2 weeks and I hated every single minute of it. The country was beautiful but I was alone. I didn't join any groups. I tried to go on trips, there was all couples and they weren't interested. I came back from that thinking what can I do to meet new people, like-minded people who want to travel the country, gone on various trips now with a group called Intrepid Travel which is Australian-based that's worldwide and you basically go on this trip. The first one I went to was Borneo and they have a guide and you see the whole of the country in 2 weeks, saw the rustic side of and I've met some amazing people who have actually, one from Australia, one from England who I went to Sri Lanka with and Guatemala and this year, I was in Costa Rica and Panama and that now is probably my biggest passion apart from, obviously, my school. I tried for so many years in international competing for 20 years, I figured it's time for myself to see the world and get out there because I love cultures and I love countries. I love snorkeling, I just love nature and when I do trips like that I feel free. I don't feel like Julia Cross, I don't feel like Miss Cross, the instructor, I feel like Julia, that's who I am. The people I've met on these trips, I've met some of the best people out of taekwondo who've taught me a lot about life. Everybody has their own story and I find other people's stories fascinating and it's always funny when they find out what I do because I don't ever tell them what I do and what I've achieved until my friends decide to tell them after in between beers and then, they find it amazing but I'm just that person that I don't want to feel special with them, I don't want to feel, I just love just being me and having fun and like I said, just being free.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, if people want to find you, they want to find you online, social media, your gym, anything like that, where would they go?

Julia Cross:

Facebook for South Queensferry TKD, South Queensferry Taekwondo and we have a website southqueensferrytkd.info. They could find a lot of stuff there. With my private life, I have a private Facebook page that, to be honest, people really can't find me, they can google it so I can get friends to



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

create a smaller world pretty much every day and I'm very one that I don't know somebody, I won't have them in my private page because that's for me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

As it should be.

Julia Cross:

Yep, I'm not huge one for spreading my life about what I do. They come to the Facebook page all the times and post stuff about what we're doing. For example, we had a quiz night on Saturday to raise funds for the European world championships and we had about 50 parents and our students came up and one of my other students ran it. We raised about 250 pounds to help towards expenses and that's gone back to the family unit. They all support each other in everything we do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's great, that's great. I appreciate you being here and I'm going to ask you for one final favor. I ask every guest this. What parting words, what final advice or wisdom or whatever you want to call it would you offer up to the listeners today?

Julia Cross:

To never stop believing in yourself. If you have a goal, make a plan. Start to put that plan in place and never stop until you achieve it but also never be scared to ask for help and I think that's an important one because you can't do anything alone. Believe in yourself, believe in other people and if you fall down, don't stay down, just keep getting back up and if you fall, you get back up because the people who get back up the most, I think, are the true winners in life whether it be a gold medal, whether it be getting back up after hip replacement, but just not giving up on yourself and I think that's the most important thing to remember.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There was a lot in this episode for me to unpack personally. The idea of pushing yourself, the idea of finding the space to remain humble and know who you are despite success. These are all things that really clicked and resonated for me and I hope they did so for you so thank you, Miss Cross, for joining us on the show and sharing so much of your past. If you want to learn more, head over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com episode 442, find the transcript, the photos, links, all kinds of stuff for this and every other episode we've ever done. If you want follow us on social media, we're @whistlekick everywhere you can imagine and if you want to support the show, you can make a purchase. Use the code `PODCAST15`. You can share this or another episode. You can leave us a review on the Apple iTunes store, Facebook, Google, all over the place, anywhere you can leave a review, we'd appreciate that and



Episode 442 – Miss Julia Cross | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

if you want to email me directly, jeremy@whistlekick.com. I thank you for your time, I thank you for your support. Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!