



Episode 448 – Master Colin Wee | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hello, welcome! This is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 448. Today, I'm joined by my guest, Master Colin Wee. I'm Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host on this show and I founded whistlekick and what is whistlekick? We are a company dedicated to supporting you, traditional martial artists, whether it be through content like this show or through products like our protective equipment and uniforms and apparel and all that jazz and if you want to see that jazz, go to [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com), jump into the store and if you make a purchase, be sure to use the code `PODCAST15` that will get you 15% off and it reminds us, it lets us know that people listening to this show care and they're willing to support what we're doing and we're doing it twice a week. We bring you a guest interviews on Mondays and on Thursdays, we bring you some kind of a topic show. Maybe it's just me, maybe we bring a guest on to talk about something specific but hopefully you find some enjoyment and hopefully it betters your experience as a martial artist. That's why we're doing it. One of my favorite things about this show is that as we've grown, we're reaching martial artists all over the world and we have guests from all over the world and today's guest checks a few boxes. Born in one country, moved to another country, then moved to another country and is now, residing there. Training, teaching and despite a pretty big time shift, we had a great conversation so I hope you enjoy with today's guest. Here we go! Master Wee, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

**Colin Wee:**



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Hi Jeremy! Thanks for having me on the show.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey, thanks for joining me. I appreciate this. We've got a little bit of a time shift. You're on the other side.

**Colin Wee:**

I am. It's now 9 o'clock at night and I have decided to put on some work clothes to sit and talk with you.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Listeners know that very rarely do we have anything involving video. This is an audio show and you know what? I do the same thing. I took a shower, I shaved, I put on, not professional clothes but in my world, professional clothes, actual pants, to talk to you here because it's 9 in the morning. We couldn't be further apart, that 12-hour shift, but I appreciate your time. I appreciate you being here and it's a little bit late for you so thank you for doing that. Always a challenge when we talk to our folks down under.

**Colin Wee:**

Thank you.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And making this work so yeah, thank you. Now, let's start. Let's go back to the root, the place that we have to go to and it's hard not to and it's about your beginning in the martial arts. We're going to talk about a lot of things martial arts related but we don't have our basics, it's hard to really get context so how did you find martial arts?

**Colin Wee:**

I am calling you from Perth, Western Australia but I am Singaporean so when I first started martial arts, basically, was as a kid in Singapore, hooked on a diet of wushu-inspired shows. Green Hornet and Kato and my wife jokes that I didn't have much going on in my life so those were probably the main things that kept me entertained and certainly, if it weren't those heroes on the screen, we just were hooked on them, my friends and I. they were confident, they were strong, they were capable. Everything I wasn't. I didn't actually identify myself as being the hero of the show but I was basically mesmerized and eventually, in Year 7, basically in high school, a friend of mine said hey, would you guys like me have you introduced to my master? I would love to. We took a trip to see his instructor and there was no such thing as oh, ok, let's go ahead and research the instructors. Let's see what we want from the martial arts. What is the goal here? There is no such thing. Basically, he had a link, he brought me along and basically, that's how it started. It's a small group. I was very, very lucky to actually be trained in a very,



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very small training group. It was an eclectic style mixed with Chinese martial arts and Korean martial arts at the time and yeah, I just stuck with it. I just felt the training was appropriate for what I wanted to achieve with myself. It was fun. My friends were doing it. I was doing it. It was great stuff. We would train maybe twice or 3 times a week, come to school, exchange ideas with other martial arts students and basically, it was the most fun I had in high school.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, as you're watching these movies and seeing what's going on, you're building up an idea of what martial arts is. Everybody seems to have these preconceived notions. Some of them are fantasies, some are more practical of what you would experience when you would start training and just in the way you expressed this high school friend said hey, I want to introduce you to my instructor, you sounded excited so it sounded like there was something you were hoping to find when you started training and did you find it?

**Colin Wee:**

When I was a kid, I had a really bad eating culture so I was fat. I was unfit. I was not happy with my physical fitness and obviously, not really excited about the exclusion and the taunts in school. I wouldn't say that I was bullied but I certainly felt some level of isolation. In year 6, basically, I started a portion-controlled diet for myself and I started a little bit of exercise and the pound started dropping off and I started losing quite a bit of weight. The recommendation, too, to the martial art school was just the right time. I actually felt that I could do something beyond what I've always been able to do which was very little and so, as I explored it and I stuck with it, certainly, I thought that hey, there were some days that the training was really tough but, by and large, I look around, everybody was experiencing the same level of difficulty. We had a small group so there was nowhere to really hide in that group. The training was tough but there are some strengths that I had in terms of being able to recognize a technique, learn the sequences, coordinate myself so I don't look so much like a fool so aside from the cardiovascular issues and the fitness level, my, I suppose, my fit into the group was fairly decent and I was really enjoying the training and so, I'm there and I'm looking at the content but I say now, hey, he's training us and we've got 6 students and they're running the gamut of arm to arm combat, throws, some blocks, some weapons and this matches with and places us right at bullying with the other people practicing the other martial arts, practicing Karate or Taekwondo or aikido and I definitely felt that I was gaining from the training. I didn't feel as though I wanted more. I felt that it was appropriate for what I wanted to do and appropriately challenging so as a kid, really, I had very low expectations of what I really want or know what I want and I was really grateful for my first instructor putting in his time and being generous with his skills and growing us up slowly as his young black belts and basically, this is the last class that he actually, his last group he actually trained before he actually retired.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Wow, that's pretty cool. And what about now? We're going to go back. We're going to fill in lots of details but when you think about your training now versus then, what's the biggest difference?

**Colin Wee:**

Ok, real quick, Jeremy. You've not read up anything about me, have you?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I haven't.

**Colin Wee:**

Ok, great.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Let me jump in and I want to explain this to you ahead and I want to make sure in case we have new listeners and so, to the listeners, most interviewers research. I don't and that's intentional. It's not laziness and that's because the listeners aren't going to research and I want to be able to give as good an interview as I can and I think that putting myself in the position of the listener is better than trying to be an expert on you so please.

**Colin Wee:**

Let me kind of fill in the gaps for you so in Singapore, I passed out as a young black belt. I did my army training in Singapore and then, I left for college in the US. When I got to the US, basically, I studied at some Methodist university in Dallas, Texas. I joined the SMU martial arts club. I'm the, what was then called, Southwest Taekwondo Organization or association. Currently called AKATO which is American Karate and Taekwondo Organization so I spent 4 or 5 years training under their system of the American Karate before then graduating, going back to Singapore and then, finally getting married and moving to Australia so when you ask about what my current training is like, my current training is very, very different from when I first started. When I first started, it was a very eclectic system. You could think about it as kind of like a Taekwondo mixed with a little Chinese martial arts, some weaponry, some throwing skills. When I went to The States, it was a system called American Karate. My teacher also trained in aikido so I learned aikido and then, from there, basically, I moved then and when I established myself here in Australia, I pitched this syllabus that I brought back from AKATO which is American Karate and Taekwondo. When I took a look at the syllabus, basically, because I was really far away from my teachers, I took some liberties with the training methodology. The legacy in which I received, I basically felt that that was a gift which I received and I persevere and I promote and I preserve it but beyond that, what I do is, I explore the martial art based off of what I feel the traditional techniques are trying to teach us so in my philosophy, there's a structure that's typically used to transmit expert information so we don't want to get fixated on the structure. We want to get fixated on the expertise behind that



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structure so there's a guy who created a pattern set. That pattern set is what I'm told and what I'm doing now is trying to link myself through the pattern set as a lens to go to the experts that are trying to create the martial arts legacy that I'm basically importing or at least, I hope. At present, basically, I run a small boutique martial arts school. I use the word boutique but basically, it really is a very small group in Perth, Western Australia. I've got links with my organization back in Dallas and I've networked really well with quite a number of local schools here in Western Australia plus I'm linked with a whole bunch of martial artists across the world. I have a small practice. The practice enjoys a huge amount of links to other schools, other styles and, I suppose in a way, I am trying to, I'm [00:13:22] Taekwondo meaning but I see that there is a cultural legacy and I feel like sometimes, I'm a museum curator. I take my system and I go hey, there's something that I would love to share and I would love to actually link with other people to share the same passion so I go and hopefully, I represent traditional Taekwondo and the American Karate and Taekwondo organization as well as I can.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, I can't say for certain that you're the first person that we've talked to that has done this but you're certainly in the minority but you started with an eclectic mashup fusion, blended, whatever people used to call it, style and you went more traditional, more specific.

**Colin Wee:**

Much more so, yes.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's a complete 180 and I'd like to dig into why. When did you first start to think you know, I've got all of these things that I'm doing, I'm teaching all of these things that I've learned from my time training in multiple countries, multiple instructors but I want to focus on traditional Taekwondo. When did you have that thought?

**Colin Wee:**

I think the question of why is actually really important and I got prompted to think that way, I don't want to say, I don't want to speak bad about any of my experiences but I am back in The States and I am learning this system and I want to know what we're doing and the question is what really are we doing and that question has been with me for a very, very long time. The first initial interaction was when I, after a year or two when I was in The States, I was learning Japanese there and I figured out hey, the patterns are not kata and are not called like that by a Japanese name that I can recognize. What's going on there? so, I started asking and then, I got told that American Karate is not really American. It's not really Karate but it's traditional Taekwondo that the name American Karate is just a label that's put on the system because people didn't really understand what Taekwondo was. Karate was a term that's for everybody else so American Karate was basically, a generic name for the system that we practice. Fast-



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forward a few years, I'm back in Australia, I have our syllabus on hand and I'm looking at it and from my perspective as a teacher, I'm thinking what am I teaching here? I've got a collection of patterns, I've got grading activities that I have to include. I have kibun which is the basics and when I look at it, I'm like going, this doesn't really reflect all of the training that I received over the years and so, I'm thinking to myself, I'm saying hey, I've got to do better than that. My teachers have taught me so much and basically, this sheet of paper is not providing me the link and I'm curious as to what I could do to improve the teaching of it and this was 2002, 2003. I made a few connections online that, probably, with instructors with probably the same stage as I was and developing the same thought and trying to figure out their place in the greater scheme of things and one of my immediate priorities was, not really to teach blindly. What I wanted to do was to organize and to make sense of a system by using the patterns set as my base syllabus so rather than a list of techniques per belt rank, I saw that the patterns as the framework for what I needed to communicate expertise for students. I'm kind of chortling at myself a little bit but in terms of the expertise and experience, basically, it's an opportunity for myself to try to share a little bit of my insights and perspective with people trying to learn my system. In 2003, I made a switch. Until then, I was actually training my students the way, 2003, I said to myself, I said I'm going to go about this in a very goal-oriented manner, the techniques, basically need to be drawn with the patterns which are set for the rank. When I teach I'm going to be rank appropriate and what I want to do is I want to append skills and insight through the drills I pattern and the changes that I was doing was goal oriented meaning I say great, I need to introduce, for instance, a yellow belt or a belt for sparring. I go well, I don't, just send them to the ring and get beaten up. Basically, I want to be able to talk about the components of what I want to do, build it out from there so they're not thrown blindly into an arena to flounder and that was what I felt my club was doing to improve the training of rank beginners, pulling them up through the ranks in a, I suppose you want to think about it, a gentle and nurturing fashion and as they go through their training, there's certain event horizons which I thought, in my mind, would then identify them and categorize them between what they started off as beginners to when they become intermediate, when they become senior students and then black belts and I went from there. When I look at that progression, basically, my want to use the patterns as the syllabus and the structure was linked to the fact that hey, they were the most cogent or structured way that techniques are organized within the martial arts system. There are some martial arts system that don't have so many patterns or so many techniques for pattern but for me, it's like this is what I have and what I need to do is I need to make the training methodology complement the set of patterns that I got and that's what I am.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You're not the first person to just wholesale and make a shift in the curriculum that you're teaching but most schools don't go through that.

**Colin Wee:**

No.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What was the response from your students?

**Colin Wee:**

That's a really good question. The students, I've got to say, some of them did come from other martial arts. They did have other training. They were children, they weren't adults and I've got to say that I am very grateful that they were patient with me, that they were willing to play. They did experience difficulty in the growth and the nature of the changes that we had to do like, for instance, if you are training in a classical hard style kihon kata kumite method which is the way that I was actually trained in and then you look at the way that we are currently trained in, it is a huge paradigm shift. We basically, if I were to compare, if I focus on the kihon kata kumite, that will probably make out 5 or 10% of my overall syllabus. 80 to 90% or more of my training approach is very different, very fluid. It focuses on variations, it focuses on skills and drills and we don't necessarily schedule that progression for the whole entire class. We try to look at the individual, we try to look at what [00:22:40] so many times, I look at my students while developing and figure it out with them. I would not be able to experiment. They're actually my pack rats, my lab rats! Sorry, not pack rats. My lab rats and I basically experimented on them and fortunately, thank goodness, we came out with some real golden nuggets and I'm actually really pleased where we've done. We started doing that 2002, 2003 and I would come into class and the intermediates or senior students at that point would then hear me say, ok, today we're going to, for instance, we're going to do a sparring session and the sparring session is set this way. You guys can't attack. All you've got to do is defend and one group of your opponents can attack you with everything that they got and what you can do is you can't attack but you can defend by basically covering, slipping, rolling, moving, controlling your foospace and that's basically what you are focusing on today and in fact, for the rest of the month and really, it was very challenging. For instance, there was one, basically, I came in and I looked at the senior students and I looked at the beginners and intermediates and I said ok, the beginners and intermediates, when you spar, you can only use punches to attack. You can defend but you can't use anything else to attack but then, what my goal there was to reduce the amount of clutter in their head and in my head, in my plan, I saw something with a hammer and I became a nail and I wanted them to be really proficient with close-range quarter punching and long range punches so I set them up in a sparring scenario and everybody gets to use any technique but the beginners and intermediates basically, can only use punches and I was looking at this one exchange and I was going the senior student are actually panicking that the anxiety level has risen. They feel challenged because they know that come the engagement or the encounter, if there's proximity, those beginners and intermediates, all they're focusing on is a punch, right? I was looking at them and I was going holy cow, I've basically discovered something. I discovered that I can actually focus on skills and I can basically get people to learn a specific skill whilst modifying the scenarios which we actually go about in our training. I was like my gosh, that's really exciting! I was sitting back there and I was having a really great time because, as an instructor, I want the best for my students and at that time, I'm thinking,



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yeah, the senior students aren't really having a walk, stroll in the park. They now got to really be careful otherwise they're going to get their faces smashed.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right and I've done some drills like this and I've done some instruction similar to this and come to a very similar realization and I think if it comes from, and I'm curious if you'll agree. We start students off, day one, we give them 2 or 3 techniques and subsequent classes they get one new technique each class or something and we give them a lot of structure, a lot of structure, a lot of structure and then we throw them into something freestyle whether that be grappling or sparring, whatever the context is, and they are so overwhelmed by the options and that by simplifying the options and saying you only get to punch, they end up understanding, ok, I can't punch from here, I can punch from here and it leaves the others, the senior students avoiding getting their face smashed in because even though they know that punch is coming, it comes with so much more intent and understanding because they're not distracted, they're not overwhelmed.

**Colin Wee:**

I think the issue here and it actually mirrors my experience and my insight into the martial arts. Hard style training is very, very difficult. It's hard to actually break free from the structure and in fact, you can see a lot of this in YouTube. You have these hard style instructors, they're trying to do the best, they're trying to showcase their martial arts. They're trying to share applications or skills that are beyond their system but it seems to me, what they're doing is they are trying to justify technique upon technique and the extent in which their lexicon of techniques is huge or filled and brimming with insight and wisdom and I'm like going, they can't be serious. What they're thinking of is the more they know, the better that they are and as they progress, they actually transcend their hard style training and become something like Steven Seagal. But me, I'm going hey, that's not the call of what we're doing. The problem here is that there is a student and the student is human. The human, basically, will succumb to stress and, in a stressful situation, what you need to do is have mnemonics. You need to solidify a simple decision framework. You need to give them with the ability to perform under duress and your system needs to support that ability to perform with a huge amount of non-compliance so, in fact with JDK, really when I summarize what JDK is quickly. JDK, for me, JDK for me is basically means Joong Do Kwan. Joong Do Kwan for me is 3 things. One, is that we train our practitioners or students to deal with predictable, expected attacks. The second is that we want to reuse and recycle our applications and third, we want to be able to basically, counter or recover from when we fail or when we are stopped by an obstacle in front of us so I don't really claim to be all things to all people and sometimes, people in their reflection of my role, of my place in the greater scheme of things, they go, oh hey, Colin, what do you think of this, what do you think of that? I actually hesitate to explain my viewpoint because I want to simplify things, I want to be able to solve problems. I want to solve the human condition and the human condition is that we are able to only think of maybe 2 or 3 steps ahead as hard styles in my training experience. We solve things 2 or 3 steps ahead. Not 10 to 20 steps ahead. We need to simplify, we need to have techniques





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that can be applied whether or not we control a left attack or a right attack or if you guessed that you have thrown a left attack and unfortunately, the right attack has come, you can actually recover from that problem and then, basically, hopefully shut it down and get the hell out of there or if you start, then you need to then have the skills to bring the person back into your game where you're playing to your strengths and you're either taken down or you neutralize a threat or basically get out of there. For me, Joong Do Kwan is not all things to all people so when I actually do go teach in seminars, when I do cross-training endeavors, basically, I am trying to talk about a concept. Sometimes what I show may not actually gel with what you understand. What you need to do then is use what I have as inspiration to lift your game instead of, basically, following me and with what I have, basically, it may not actually even fit what you think of the world and solve the issue that you think you have so that's where I come. It's always, for me, whether or not I can answer my students' issues and when I talk about, for instance, basics as opposed to fundamentals. I talk about the basics of my system and when I talk about fundamentals, I talk about what are those things in my system that are popular with myself and my students because they're easy to do, they fit amongst the circle of skills that we usually work on, right? So, therein is a slight difference between, I suppose, what I'm doing out to try to expand on the legacy that I have and, I suppose, try to be honest and obviously, sincere to the legacy of the patterns that I basically have with traditional Taekwondo.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

For the people that are listening, when you say traditional Taekwondo, where do you track that back to because we got a pretty hard fork in there.

**Colin Wee:**

So, 1956, 1955, 1956, GM Jhoon Rhee, Grandmaster Jhoon Rhee brought over a Joong Do Kwan lineage from South Korea and he basically set up shop with Grandmaster Allen Stein just about 5 minutes away from where I trained in Dallas and he trained Joong Do Kwan which is basically classical Japanese Karate. Joong Do Kwan would have forms like the cheong-ans or the hae-ans or they would correspond to what Joong Do Kwan practitioners would actually train in today so they would have the 5 hae-ans and they would have black belt forms like [00:34:26] and they would have [00:34:31] then in the late 1960s, General Choi, as he was training in the US, convinced GM Jhoon Rhee to adopt Taekwondo as a name rather than using American Karate or Karate or Korean Karate so from the late 1960s, basically, they converted to using American Taekwondo as a way to identify what they were doing and then, in the late 1960s, which I believe is 1967, General Chae converted GM Jhoon Rhee's students and I believe it was, my grandmaster [00:35:16] helped convert his school to using the Chang Hong patterns set which is basically the early Taekwondo patterns that General Chae was touring the US with at that time. The system in which we practice have those forms. We train with forms that would probably place us around the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Dan level that ITF Taekwondo uses today. We also have some old forms from the Joong Do Kwan lineage like tekki which we call cho-ji and we also have bassai which is bassai dai. We also have



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this form called sip-soo which is basically, ji-tei or the temple kata forms so within our black belt level, we actually have some leftover legacy form from [-45:27] base.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's a good answer. It's interesting how forked martial arts can be and even if we look at something that's, in the grand scheme of martial arts, a bit on the newer side like Taekwondo, there are a lot of offshoots. For anybody who's interested, we did have Grandmaster Rhee on the show years ago before he passed away. It's episode 180. Anyway, for anyone who wants to check that out.

**Colin Wee:**

I think the issue here is I did actually mention before, I felt like a museum curator so when I actually received these forms, basically, they were given. They were a part of training. I thought they were a part of training when I started.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Just those forms or all forms?

**Colin Wee:**

All forms, basically. Why do we want to actually do this? It's such a waste of time. For me, basically, the forms eventually became my link to a rich heritage and that heritage can be traced and in fact, they were brought over to the US in the mid-1950s which basically places me with a lineage that is basically older than the ITF and WTF organizations so, often now, I face remarks that say hey, that's a really good variation of that form and I go that's not the variation, mate. That is the formal or the original version of the form from the 1950s. certainly, I don't claim legitimacy. I claim it's an interesting snapshot and it's a great story to tell and my experience with traditional Taekwondo or what I have received through the American Karate and Taekwondo Organization is a gift because the people that gave it to me and trained me were such inspiring and motivational people, instructors and for me, basically, that is the most important thing. I can't say that I share, the book *The Killing Art*, I can't say I shared any of that experience. That book portrays a somewhat negative view of Taekwondo and its history and I never experienced any of that and for me, it's like I have a really good space in my heart and say hey, these forms were brought to me by partners in the field of Taekwondo as it started in The States as the father of Taekwondo brought it over from Korea and certainly, I don't hold on to, obviously, the nationalistic difficulties between Korea and Japan, I don't have anything to say. I do respect that they have a very difficult history. The more I understand of it, the more I feel as though it is my responsibility to represent this Korean heritage and I suppose an American heritage as best as I can as opposed to hey, I got a link with Japan. That's not my heritage. I say my heritage is quite close to Korea and America but then again, also, it links me very close to Japanese Karate and then, a hop back to Okinawan Karate and for me, I am here in 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia. I'm not in the outback but basically, I have a system that was gifted to my



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from the late 1950s that links me all the way back to 18<sup>th</sup> century Okinawa and I go back and say that's a really compelling story and one in which I can actually share and I say hey, we can trace our lineage backwards. We have skills that we learn and we innovate and we actually grow today and it's not that as it goes, it dilutes itself. That's not it. It is as we grow, we enrich it and as we enrich it, basically, this thing becomes this own animal. It basically takes a life of its own and it grows as we grow and I think that that is very important to me because, very often, in this world, of course, in the US, people are always asking hey, why do you actually practice what you practice when you know MMA would kill you or the latest trend. Krav Maga will kill you. Back in the day, in my estimation, hard style martial arts were the Krav Maga of that day. If you fixate the training, obviously, it fixates the type of thinking but I'm growing it. In terms of where I see the training, I see the relevance is that there's a richness in this heritage that many organizations, including MMA type of organizations are not able to deliver, because as a traditional instructor, I'm not only just focusing on the technical level. I'm not just focusing on a striking skills based form for my students. I am looking into the whole entire individual. Our intent is to understand the history, the philosophy, the technical skills, certainly, the legacy; obviously, the tactics as well. I am happy to actually say I'm not everything to everybody. There are skills that I have skills, there are skills that I lack but in the end, basically, I know as a 49-year old aging martial artist, I am actually a well-rounded individual. My martial arts is actually really fairly good. It places us in a good stand and I actually have something to offer and I think that as we actually look at the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are people out there who need this training, who are desperate for this training and who say, who basically don't have that nurturing from other organizations that you typically face as you're growing up in the world. My analogy, typically, I know I have young children who study with me and I go, hey, that tennis that you do in school, that tennis is just basically only want to optimize you for tennis. If you get injured, you're going to fall by the wayside. They're not going to be able to actually rehabilitate you. You come to martial arts training, I'm going to teach you more than just what you're going to get from that sports organization. Obviously, that's simplifying it. I was joking a bit. What I mean to say is that I am concerned for the individuals to grow. Not only from a very narrow bandwidth of skills, I want them to actually take those skills and grow with it. I want them to actually become, I suppose, as well-rounded a practitioner as possible and that's what JDK is to me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

When we hear people talking about being well-rounded or the personal development aspects of martial arts, we tend to see people start to bring back in or at least, to have had a change of heart around their opinion on forms. You talked about how originally with patterns, you weren't down with it. That it seemed like a waste of time. Now that you've gone back and now that what you're teaching, what you're trying to build up in people is not simply fighting ability; now, forms come back up and I find it interesting that that seems to happen every time. I don't know of a counter example. I mean, there's probably somebody out there but, at least, overall, the majority of people who are trying to make people better people use forms in there somewhere.



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**Colin Wee:**

I think modern day practitioners and instructors, they look at forms as drudgery. I certainly was there and I basically experienced that and, in a way, if you are using the forms as only a way to create your students, they lose a lot of the appeal after you learn it because you don't get any utility out of the form other than a new belt. For me, basically, I have the want to take that form as an inspiration for what I need to actually attain and to develop. Many other instructors will probably say hey, when you actually do that skill, it needs to look exactly like that form so in a video example, I would actually have many examples on YouTube and when I'll come on, I'll go hi, this is Colin Wee from JDK. Today, we're actually doing an application from one heel-point stance and the technique sequence looks like this and then I go ahead and do this application which looks nothing like the form and myself and my student will have a talk a little bit and what people don't actually see is everything that goes behind the scenes to bring us to that point where we say that inspiration that we got from that form has led us to play with it, to experiment with it, break it down to different skills, put it together and then come up with an application that hey, is attended to that form at that place at that phrase but doesn't always look exactly like the form and I think people get confused because they're waiting for deliverance and then, the deliverance doesn't come very easily and people often ask me, could you please tell me exactly where that form comes from and I go, oh, I showed it to you. I'm going well, I showed it to you but what I showed on video is only what I choose to show to you in that 3 to 4 minutes. There's so many years of experience and insight and obviously, of development that we've gone through that we haven't actually been able to communicate in that short amount of time so that's the one thing that's basically the disadvantage of having a video medium in that it doesn't reflect what I bring to the table when I actually take a form and the biggest thing about form, for me, the pivotal moment, was when I happened on this quote from Choki Motobu. Do you know who Choki Motobu was?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No.

**Colin Wee:**

Choki Motobu was, I think he was a 19<sup>th</sup> century...was it an early 20<sup>th</sup> century...sorry, sorry, he's an end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, early 20<sup>th</sup> century Karateka from Okinawa and he was a contemporary of Gichin Funakoshi which is the father of Japanese Karate and what Choki Motobu said was all he needed to fight was neihanchi or tekki. Basically, a form that I practice called cho-ji and cho-ji is infamous because it is the simplest form that I know. It's got a very simple [00:49:03] which is a floor plan. It's got a maybe, I don't know, 5 or 6 moves each side mirrored and for years, I practice this form with this phrase from Choki Motobu that quote saying hey, neihanchi was the only form he needed and I'm thinking to myself, how can he say that? yeah, for me, as a thinking individual, I'm going how can the guy say that and Choki Motobu was known as a fighter. He is basically known as a tough nut in Okinawa at his time whereas Gichin Funakoshi was known as a very upstanding gentleman, a teacher and Choki Motobu was known



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as a person you don't actually mess around with. So, I'm here, I was thinking as a young lad, I'm thinking I've got a really huge amount of skills. I believe I was hot stuff then. I got this form but nothing corresponds to my understanding of this form and that has plagued me for at least 2 decades so when I started from 2002 to 2003 looking and analyzing my form, I kept looking at one form and one of the key things that happened to me very, very early on was that there was a symmetry to the form. Obviously, it was very simple movements. It's mirrored basically on both sides and for me, I was saying there's a huge symmetry in the movement and when I take a, when I kind of squint and took a jaunty squint at it, I'm thinking that symmetry looks as though it could be applied to a strike that coming from either the left or the right and I go, crikey, mate! That's something you wish I never thought of. I'm able to now defend myself with this technique and in fact, if I guessed wrong, it basically corrects itself and I was like, man, that is so cool, isn't it and from there on, I go where else in my patterns is this reflected so that set me on a huge paradigm shift. Prior to that, basically, I was trying to append my skills to the technique and I had a spreadsheet, I started listing it out and eventually, basically, it was a limiting thought because all I could list was the stuff I already knew. I couldn't take inspiration for the forms. The forms wouldn't inspire me. I feel at that point, when basically the form, as a mnemonic device said to me, hey, I'm trying to show you a way of analyzing the world. I'm trying to show you a way to make it easy for you and that was when JDK was born. JDK wasn't born by me setting up a club and pulling people in. JDK was born for me saying crikey! I've got ways in which to help my cluttered and confused thoughts and I am able to share ways in which to think that could actually probably help people with their ability to defend themselves which is such an amazing thing and I said certainly that's something which I need to use as a way to help me with my search in explaining what the forms have for me and a decade or two, basically, made me, right now in 2019, what I do is when I look at the form, I'm not really looking at the form. I'm trying to look at the person behind the form prompting the whispering to me saying hey, there's better ways of doing it. We are just human. We have some skills and we are trying to make those skills work for us and many other people that I know do much better work pulling together used books, explaining the simple forms and how they work. For me, basically, sometimes, I, as a lens trying to justify the forms, basically for me, I talk in snippets. I try to pull together and make sense of the world in my estimation and I have kind of a nice support that I don't think that I overly touch my students. I have this idea that the hard style martial arts were the Krav Maga of the day. They have some strengths. The strength are in blitzing. Their strengths are in a narrow bandwidth of solutions to shut down an opponent. Beyond that, we have quite a number of holes in our training and there are things in which we have to do to actually perform [00:54:30] that's a sophisticated way of saying hey, my top 10 popular techniques are this and the way in which we do it is like this because our training makes sense for our training to actually link together some techniques and this and that and it makes sense for us as practitioners to then pull it together quickly and flow with it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, I mean, you just unpacked a tremendous amount of stuff and stuff that I suspect some of the listeners are going to go back and listen to again which is phenomenal and before we start to look



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forward; one more question about the past. Because, again, we have someone on the show who's done something differently than most, I like to dig in a little bit and you've been teaching for a little while before you went back to this kind of simplified approach, this more fundamental approach. Can you speak to the progress, the effect of progress to your students before and after that transition?

**Colin Wee:**

That's a good question. I have actually been reflecting on this quite often because I do cross train with a number of different schools and, in fact, one of the instructors who left for holiday asked me to take over this class and when he came back he goes, oh, hey, Master Wee, my students love you! They love your classes they have so much fun and I go, there is no chance that I'd be able to take over your chance for a good amount of time. I was actually really struggling. What I did was I focused on your syllabus, your techniques, I used your blackbelts as examples. I tried to basically make the class fun but really I was trying to train them with your techniques in mind and with their ability to follow those techniques. In my training, basically, right now, we follow the pattern. We do some kihon or kibun work. We do some line drills but from there, the drills, basically, take a life of their own. We do what would be mirroring, kind of like a collaborative sparring. We look at two-man drills. We look at application. We basically look at playing around, adlibbing often so when I first started training, the students I produced were hard style practitioners that were great with punching and kicking. Some takedowns, some ability to recover when they're in a clinch but, by and large, really where they find advantages in blitzing their opponents in that posing. Currently, one of the things I do greatly is a randori that I call super light. Super light is a non-contact, and I don't want to diminish the semi-contact or the non-contact or the hard contact environment or scenarios which we open up in sparring but the randori that I use, basically, is a non-contact sparring encounter in which the level of collaboration and understanding between the 2 opponent. It is still a striking based closed quarter type scenario but we try to use it in a way where we can use lethal techniques in a very safe manner in which we're reducing the speed of our techniques. They are still moving around. They are still almost touching the opponent but what we're trying mostly to do is we're trying to deal with an opponent that's actively non-compliant and stopping us at the best of his ability at maybe a 60 or 70% speed. The whole idea is we want to focus on the technique. We want to focus on new techniques or stuff in which we want to fine tune and at the same time, we want to be able to understand what we need to do whilst the opponent is actively opposing what we're trying to do so saying that, we focus in on a lot of sensitivity. We're focusing on a lot of distancing, the centerline. We look at slipping, probing. We look at, it's not dead zones but blind spots. We look at coverage and rather than a quick gap closing strike continue to a blitz type technique, what we try to do with this randori approach is to continue the techniques and basically keep continuing. There's no winners, there's no losers. Basically, the only opportunity is to learn and with that, that is a part of the inspiration we use to then, we turn back to the application and say what exactly has our insight shown us with the application we used? Is it still correct? Is there still new things we can come up with? Does this application still hold? What happens when we block? Can we recover? How do we recover? What are the things we actually need to do to recover? Certainly, it's very different from the



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hard style where, for a lack of a better term, it's kind of like a point-sparring system where you're trying to nail the opponent with strikes very quickly, trying to back away and trying to repeat that. Whereas in the randori, the farther in which I need to understand the application and to work backwards from there, the technique sequence and the patterns that we have. It's like a cycle that we have in our practice. That application may be a fairly good lesson beginning of 2018 but at the beginning of 2019, maybe it has modified a little bit. It changed slight because we've actually experienced other insights. We tend to use other things so basically with the fit that it has, we tend to see it in a different way and obviously, also, it's influenced by the people that are training with us. If the student group is less skills, we focus on different applications, we focus on different level of unfolding and unpacking that application so therein is a huge distinction between my early students and the students that I train nowadays where my students before will actually be trained fairly similar with the way I was training and currently, I think that the practice that we have allows me to more fully immerse myself with the lessons that were given to me by my teachers. I don't say that I'm doing something that is totally alien and foreign to what I've learned in The States or in Singapore for that matter. What I'm saying is I feel as though I'm maximizing the concepts, the skills and really, the insight that was shared with me when I was younger and I'm trying to unfold it to the best of my advantage or to the best of my ability.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right on.

**Colin Wee:**

Sorry, am I losing you a little bit? It's just going on and on a little bit.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Not at all. Not at all. It's just great stuff. I told you upfront. It's the best part about this show is when people start to wander around. That's when we get to the good stuff but let's look into the future now. If you look out over the next however many years. 5 years, 10 years, 40 years, whatever you want to look out; what's coming down the pipe? What are you looking out for goals, for motivation, for you and your school and everything else?

**Colin Wee:**

I'm taking a big breath here. The big breath is because my goal is basically don't stop at 5 or 10 years. Basically, I have projected all the way to the time with my martial arts and the reason being is that it will always be with me and I'm sure the listeners and yourself will probably be understanding this as well. It has been a part of my life since I was young and even if I get my legs blown off or if I get debilitated in some way, I can still engage with the martial arts in different roles and different ways and basically, the layers of the audience are still there for me to enjoy. My retirement plan is basically to hopefully travel the world and to provide seminars to like-minded martial arts schools who would like to understand a



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little bit about the approach and the analyses to the forms and to play around with the different lens to traditional style training. Joong Do Kwan basically means school of the middle way. School of the middle way meaning that we are situated at a crux between the precursors of our art and the innovations in the modern era. I want to not fixate myself on a traditional system to the mutual exclusion of innovations in sports sciences, for instance. So, where I come in, basically, I don't want to be so one-eyed in saying hey, everything old is great. What I want to say is at this moment in time, what is of greatest relevance to traditional Taekwondo? What is important for Joong Do Kwan to be and I'm not afraid to actually change or shift it almost so as retirement goes, I want to obviously, hopefully, fingers crossed, be in a business which allows me to travel the world, meet up with friends, do what I like and basically hang back and enjoy this passion that I have, really living the dream. Beforehand, I see JDK continuing, JDK under me will continue to be a small practice. I don't see it growing. If it does grow, it grows because of the auspices of my students. I have got a few black belts and associate black belts. If they take up the mantle, if they set up a retail school, I would love to support them. I would love to see them grow and do something which makes sense to their plans but, for me, I have benefitted with smaller classes. I know that's not how one would start out would. When I started out I thought hey, I would love to have a really big-sized club, I'd like to grow it. Maybe even chain it and use it as an opportunity but it hasn't been that way that it has unfolded for me so JDK, I think, continues to be a small group of, a mix of students and what really it does, it performs a role in my community that it gets together other martial artists, other schools, other students in cross-training opportunities, in seminars, in social activities. Certainly, there are opportunities and things in which I'm trying to build up right now. About 20 years ago, I met up with Stuart Anslow who is a Taekwondo instructor from the UK and he inspired me to join this organization that he was starting, IAMAS which is International Alliance of Martial Arts Schools. IAMAS was basically a student support mechanism where students who are travelling were able to train for 2 weeks at any participating member school and long story short, I have taken the mantle and I'll probably run it to the ground a little bit but IAMAS still has representation in Western Australia. We still have a fairly quick [01:08:38] here. Next year, I'm planning a fairly large conference for IAMAS schools. We are looking for practical workshops during the day. We're looking at industry representation and we're also trying to use it, it's still in the planning stage but since I'm the one planning it, I can actually say what I want to do and what I really want to accomplish is to use it to promote health and wellness. Basically, mental wellness in the community and seeing the role that martial arts instructors can have in being the front face of kind of the first phase of dealing with mental health issues. Basically, a support system whereby there are people who are stretched by the 21<sup>st</sup> century by business needs, by their financial expectations and what we can do is we have training, we have practice, we have a support mechanism that is able to go beyond doing kihon or competitions or sparring. I mean, we can be more than that. Organizations are more than that or what we would like to do is we would like to call people to actually encompass this approach so that they know in our community, we are not just martial arts schools that are in competition. We are not trying to steal the students. We are standing up for something bigger than ourselves and we can come together as a community and do good things and accomplish things that we couldn't do singularly. Certainly, I would like to actually say that if you occupy





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a small corner of the world, that's what you experience. You need to stretch yourselves. You find that there are other individuals with the same passions, same like-minded, obviously, the same fears of meeting egomaniacs or meeting difficult people in the industry and certainly, there are those individuals but they are, in my experience, very small part. They should not be an excuse for us holding ourselves back and not sharing what we love with the community. All martial artists and beyond of potential martial artists.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Absolutely. When people want to find you online, how about websites, some social media and all that?

**Colin Wee:**

They can search for Joong Do Kwan Western Australia on Facebook. They've got the ability to find me under Colin Wee on YouTube. I suppose on Instagram. I do have videos that I put up there but otherwise, I'm actually really quite online. I'm quite accessible. I do have a website, they can send me an email. There are people who communicate with me very often. I am linked with IAMAS. I am linked with The Study of Taekwondo which is a club, sorry, a secret Facebook group of Taekwondo instructors throughout the world so I do have a good place amongst various online groups and when I do travel, sometimes fairly often, I actually meet up with them when I go around the world so I do have instances where I have started conversations up online and then eventually meet and train and/or socialize with people around the world which is a lovely experience. I haven't met yet a crazy serial killer online. Hopefully, I don't ever but the martial artists I've met online have been great. It's very easy to tell the good ones from the bad ones. I do have the difficult part of asking for certification. They do ask me for a letter of recommendation so they can get a visa into this country. I do have people who basically want something from me like a rank certificate that I can't actually give them without a face to face interaction but for the experiences I have online, it's really been quite easy to spot those people who are really curious about what I do and also happy to share and I think those are the instances where I join the post where people basically send me messages where they say hey, I love what you've done. I've done the same thing and I want to show you what we've done and those are amazing. It puts a smile on my face. It calls out a shared understanding. Certainly, sometimes it's not from the same lineage but because the lineage is very easy. There's no similarities or dissimilarities within the martial arts especially when we talk about hard styles. When we talk about soft styles, that's where variances occur a bit. I've been finding less of the compare and contrast but with hard style martial art, I find really great similarities even with Karate practitioners and with some Taekwondo practitioners while looking beyond the kicking skills that we have. If you want to know why the patterns have them, why they're actually interpreted this way, why don't you actually interpret it another way? I go hey, I do this because of the positioning framework or I approach it this way so if you actually consider that and then, consider with what you have then actually, you can play around with an array of different things and come up with similar results or very similar results and results that, in fact, maybe dissimilar but maybe benefit your



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practice as much as what I've done benefits mine so yes, they can find me online. I'm happy to chat and I'm also happy to meet other people that I know to meet and continue the conversation there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Awesome. I appreciate your time and I would love to ask just one more thing as we head out the door. Why don't you seen us out?

**Colin Wee:**

Sure, sure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What parting words would you give to the people listening today?

**Colin Wee:**

My parting words would probably be the first lesson that I would give a beginner. I welcome a beginner to my dojo or my mat space and we bow in at the door. We bow in at the mat, then we come in on the mat and one of the key lessons is etiquette. Basically, Karate always begins with a bow. The first tenet of Taekwondo is courtesy and I go what is etiquette? Etiquette is a list of rules that we set so that you comply with it and then you can't forget it. we basically set it so there is an opportunity which we can, at the door, when we bow, we leave our worldly baggage outside. Step into the dojo or dojang, ready to actually focus. When we bow in to the mat, we come in, we acknowledge that training and respect that training area for more than just the physical location it occupies and what that allows us to do is it helps us optimize our space and our role and our position within the training environment which I create. The environment that I create is important because I want to optimize their ability to deal with stress. Obviously, when they grow in my system, they basically grow as individuals that deal with stress and optimize their technical performance with it and these lessons basically are beyond singular techniques. They're beyond the rote learning of patterns and I think this is the most important thing that I would say differentiates us from other organizations that don't do a combative sport or a traditional martial art training and I think in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I would say that this is the way to level up. You have students coming to you. They have stresses in their life growing up, dealing with performance, anxiety, stresses and these organizations are not able to deal with their needs as individuals and their ability to deal with stress, their ability to succeed in life and most importantly, balanced individuals and I think that, in terms of advices, we got to stop thinking solely of the system. We've got to stop being in the corner of the world and focus on the needs of the students. That is what really defines what the martial arts is to be. It's not longer, hey, it's not a fight. Obviously, we want to learn fighting skills and if you want actually as a test me, sure but it's a very, very narrow way of defining ourselves. There's stepping up towards the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There's many things: screen time, health, wellness, financial issues, all of these basically are, I would say, non-sustainable. You have these stresses and you're not able to deal with them and



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then you get suicide, depression, poor health, sedentary lifestyles that don't prepare you for aging whereas the martial arts has a huge amount of potential to look at the person and say what can we do to level this guy up? I think anyone in their right minds would understand that that's where it's at for us. We've got a passion for the martial arts. You stretch out to like-minded individuals and say what can we do for the community, for the individuals who need that helping hand. We got answers that other organizations can never communicate or can never transmit and I think that's a lovely way to actually end of this interview in that it's not what happened in the 18<sup>th</sup> century or the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It's not in Japan or Korea. Let's not talk about what happened a 150 years ago or 200 years ago. Let's talk about what we need now. So yeah, that's my take on things, Jeremy.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I really appreciated the things that Master Wee had to say. We got into some stuff that, let's be honest, we haven't heard before. I'm both surprised and not that here we are, 448 episodes in, that we're still learning new information from our guest and that's why we keep the show going because there's still more to learn. There's still different perspectives and I appreciate hearing from all these different people. We certainly could have spent longer talking and actually, we did talk for a bit after we closed the show so thank you, Master Wee, for your kindness and for talking to me and coming on the show. Listeners, if you want to know more, go to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). Find episode 448 and check out everything we've got from Master Wee from photos, to link, to everything else. Sign up for the newsletter there and if you want to show your support, share this episode, make a purchase at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) or on Amazon or leave us a review somewhere. Thank you, thank you, thank you. If you want to email me, I'm [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com) and our social media is @whistlekick all over the place. I'm done for now so until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day.