



Episode 473 — What Makes One Martial Artist Better | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello, you're tuned in to whistlekick martial arts radio episode 473. Today, we're talking about what makes one martial artist better than another martial artist. I'm Jeremy Lesniak, host for the show and founder here at whistlekick. Everything we do here in whistlekick is in support of traditional martial arts. If you want to see everything that we do, visit whistlekick.com. That's our digital hub. It's also the place to find our store and if you use the code `PODCAST15`, you can save 15% on everything that we make from uniforms to sparring gear to, well you name it, check it out. You'll see a lot over there. Martial arts radio, this show, gets its own website, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Yes, we keep it simple. The show comes out twice a week and the entire purpose behind every single thing we do is to connect, educate and entertain traditional martial artists throughout the world. If you want to help the show and the work that we do, there are plenty of ways you can help. You can make a purchase, share an episode, follow us on social media. We're @whistlekick everywhere you can think of. Pick up one of our books on Amazon, leave a review or support us on Patreon, Patreon.com/whistlekick. That's the place you can go for that. You can support us for as little as \$2 and if you spend \$5 a month, you're going to get access to even more content. Content that we make exclusively for Patreon supporters. There's a little bit of rasp in my voice, maybe you can hear it although I'm trying to keep it out but I wanted to talk today about, arguably, the most subjective topic in the martial arts.



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What makes one martial artist better than another and here we are, we're getting close to episode 500 and we haven't done that yet. Why? Because it's really hard and it's taken me a long time to wrap my brain around how to even talk about this.

Now, you might think Jeremy, I've been listening to the show for a while and I've heard you say that all martial arts have value and that one martial artist is not better than another, aren't you just going to say the same thing about martial arts in comparing martial artists? No, I'm not. In fact, I think you can make a claim that one martial artist is better than another but that's a little more complicated than just pointing a finger. Let's get into it.

Now, I'll be honest. I really dislike the whole idea of comparing one martial artist to another because, to me, martial arts is about growing personally as an individual but we've got to do it sometimes and I don't just mean in competition. Competition's just one aspect. Maybe, depending on the competition, it's a few aspects but really, does a competition take into account everything that makes one martial artist better than another? No, certainly now.

What is it that makes a martial artist good? Forget about the comparison for a moment. When we say someone is good at martial arts, what are we saying? We're offering a perspective of their overall skill. The things that they are able to do in a variety of areas and that includes their physical skills like their speed, their power, their accuracy, maybe their dedication, their emotional strength, knowledge of their art and ability to demonstrate their physical skills when called upon in a variety of ways whether that's competition and testing, classes, maybe an unfortunate but real self-defense situation and I think an ability to demonstrate the things that are inherent to their martial art. The things that are different across their martial arts.

For example, if we were to evaluate 2 taekwondo practitioners, the subject of kicking should come up in the conversation whereas if we're talking about 2 boxers, assuming you consider boxing a martial art, and I do, we're not going to talk about kicking because a boxer that's kicking is not really addressing their art. Maybe they're kickboxing but I'm digressing.

When we're evaluating, it's this overall assessment. This broad check of all the different things that we decide are important. Now, if you know me, you know that I highlight the things that are subjective and this is where we need to identify that. The things that we're evaluating are incredibly subjective. We're going to talk about that in a moment.

When we evaluate, we all have things that we're better at than others. We have strong aspects in our martial arts, our skills, our expression of martial arts as an individual and we have weaker things. Ideally, we're going to work to preserve the stronger things and improve the weaker things. That's how we progress. We can't just pick one thing and get better at it and let everything else fall by the wayside.

When we talk about these comparisons, it's relatively simple to compare people from the same school, same instructor, same curriculum, same everything and we can look at them and say this person is a



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better martial artist than this person and, most likely, the person that's better is of higher rank. We tend to see that pretty easily within a single school but what about when we're not talking about people from the same school? It's a little bit harder to do that.

It's only a little more difficult to compare people from, let's say, the same style, the same lineage or similar lineage but different schools, now their curriculum is roughly the same. What is valued should be roughly the same but maybe we've got different people teaching it. What about when those people that we're comparing are of the same style but from different lineages? Maybe it was 4 or 5 generations of martial artists ago that their instructors, their great- great- great instructors, that's a fun term to use, we'll come back to that another time, train together or under the same person. Maybe they were of the same school but they split. You know how people are. They start to do things a little bit differently. So, comparing that becomes more challenging and the worst, or the most difficult, is people from completely different styles like, again, taekwondo compared to boxing. How do you compare that?

You create a broad assessment like I said above. What are all the things that matter in the comparison and this is where we get subjective. I can't tell you what is important. We can make a list. We can make a list of all the things that might be relevant. Forms and sparring and what about sparring and all these different ways and self-defense and physical skills. we talked about some of these in a few minutes ago. We can make this massive list, this crazy evaluation form and we could score things but it's still subjective. Most of those things on there are subjective but then, how do we weight them?

Even if we can get an agreement on yes, this is how we score someone's speed. This is how we score someone's forms. How do we decide what's most important? To some, the ability to perform at a high level is more important than other people. To some, the ability to perform self-defense under stress is the most important thing but certainly not in every school for every person. Am I here to tell you what matters? No. Only you can do that but I think it's important that you decide what is most important.

We've talked about this idea of finding your why in a number of episodes. Identifying what is most important to you about martial arts and then making sure that that is the core of your martial arts training. If your idea of martial arts and what makes a martial artist good or great is not consistent with where you're training? Maybe you need to find a new place to train or maybe you need supplemental training.

To me, a better martial artist is someone who is broadly skilled. Basics and forms and self-defense and has grown through their martial arts. One of the things that is challenging about these subjective ideas is that we can look at them and say yes, that one, not that one but how do you help others get there if you don't know, if you aren't able to articulate it. the ability to unpack this and decide what makes one martial arts better than another for you, I think, is an important thing to look at because I think it says a lot about who you are as a martial artist and, likely, how you were raised in the martial arts and, unfortunately, there's going to be some bias based on the things that you're good at because it's human nature.



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Some of you may listen to these episodes, see some of the social media that includes some quotes from things that I've said or written and you might say I think Jeremy is biased on that subject. Guess what? I am. I try not to be but I see where I am at times.

To me, a better martial artist is someone who can learn a variety of things from a variety of people and step in to any situation and have some competency. That broadly skilled diversity versus mastery. That is an episode. That is what's important to me and what I value most. Do I travel around and train with a variety of martial artists because that's most important to me or has that become most important to me because my opportunities to travel around and train with a variety of people came to be?

I don't know. It's a chicken and egg. I don't know what came first but I know that it works for me and I know that, as I've considered it and sat with this philosophy, it makes sense. It works for me and all I'm telling you is that its important, I think, that you do the same thing for yourself.

We've done a couple of episodes that might help you in that process. Episode 207: Why there is no right way and we've talked about this subject a little bit and also episode 447: Finding your path. If you haven't checked out those episodes, you might want to do so. They might help you as you noodle through this idea.

If you're willing to share what makes a martial artist better than another martial artist, if you can boil it off simply? I'd love to hear it. I want to know what you think so head on over. This is episode 473, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Leave a comment. We don't get too many comments on the website. People tend to comment in other ways but I wish we had more of them in the website because then, they're there forever for people to see and read and engage. Dialogue is important.

While you're over there, you can check out all the other show notes and everything that we've got going on. Sign up for the newsletter and all that. if you're willing to support us in the work that we do here at whistlekick, you have a number of options. You can make a purchase on whistlekick.com, don't forget the code `PODCAST15`, that save you 15% off any of our sparring equipment, uniforms and whatnot. You can also leave a review somewhere, share an episode, maybe tell a friend. There's plenty of room for us to have more guests and listeners, certainly, or, of course, Patreon, Patreon.com/whistlekick. We want to hear about your guest suggestions or just general feedback for the show. Our social media accounts, they're all over. We put a lot of work into them. They're @whistlekick and my personal email address, jeremy@whistlekick.com. Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!