



Episode 496 — Kyoshi Bryan Hayes | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

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Brian Hayes:

Well, it's 6 AM over here so the sun hasn't come up yet.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You're doing this early. I appreciate that.

Brian Hayes:

I don't mind, I don't mind. I have a workshop I'm doing an hour and a half so it's not bad to be up early.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What kind of a workshop?

Brian Hayes:

I teach resilience workshops for teachers using sort of martial arts-based exercises and running it into fantastic social and emotional development concept and I teach teachers here in New South Wales and around the country as well. It's just a fantastic program especially with the rise of anxiety and the pandemic. If I can use that word, the anxiety, that we've got a really workplace program.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's interesting. I never heard of anybody doing that. how long have you been running that?

Brian Hayes:

I was a school teacher and my theme was boys' education and I came across this guy at a national conference for boys here in Australia and the guy is from Netherlands who was talking about the connection between body, mind and heart and I thought, oh gosh, these are things I've been thinking about forever but I didn't think I had permission to teach and ensures about what we like about the way we first and foremost inform our bodies and then that informs the way that we think and the way that we feel and I said oh boy, this guy has got it the right way and martial arts also understand this and I went to his workshop and thought oh boy, if I'd written a book, it would have been this one. You have to make a decision sometimes in life, do you do your own thing or get on board with somebody who's doing it better than you and I'll get on board this and I've been doing it ever since and finally, I left teaching actually to pursue this as well as a full-time martial arts center that became 5 centers and never went back to teaching so I do all that 25 workshops a year so I'm away from home from my family for about 80 days a year, maybe more teaching teachers and counselors, psychologists, juvenile justice workers how to deliver this program to children which has become more than children, has become children, families, I do it with the Airforce and the aged care industry. It's just become a fantastic program because everybody worldwide, I think, understands, that word again, a pandemic anxiety and it really needs to be addressed.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Completely agree and I've been pretty open on this show that anxiety is something that I deal it and I won't even temper it and say from time to time. It's something that's been a challenge for me for most of my life so I think it's great that you're addressing that and bringing it these things that I think we all know can be so beneficial with regard to martial arts but what I'm wondering is, I don't want you to give away all the magic sauce here. I don't want you to give it away in a sense that other people might be able to latch on and do their own thing but can you give an example of something that you work with, these non-martial artists on, that those of us who are martial artists might understand?

Brian Hayes:

Here's the thing and the secret, I guess, I guess this is a bit of a longwinded answer but it occurred to me a long time ago that if I want to be successful as a martial arts teacher, I was a very serious competitors for years and years and years, 15 years of competition at a pretty high level. When I stopped competing I thought what's in it for everybody else and I realized that the mums and the dads and the kids with autism and ADHD and ADD, you name it, would benefit at least as much and more, I guess, than the able kids because a lot of them weren't travelling very well and what I saw is that what martial arts fundamentally does is not really teach kicking and punching. You teach kicking and punching as a vehicle to impart the most important lessons and that's character, that's focus and self-control and self-esteem and regard for others in the sense of your own potential so it's social and emotional development and when I guess I realized that in some kind of a slow growing epiphany that I thought we need to share this with anybody so what if I took what martial arts does and that is we play, we play-kicking and punching and we take care of each other in a nice, safe environment. What if I could take those exercises, those simple play games if you like and try to extract meaningful lessons from them and that's what we do in the program that we call Rock and Water. Rock means taking a hard approach if you like and water means letting it go, taking a softer approach. Martial arts can be either go or ju, yin or yang or hard or soft and so we simplify the exercises so that non-martial artists can do it so we teach simple blocking exercises and then, the simple play, simple wrestling, pushing hands, sticking hands. We call it Chinese boxing, tapping hands if you like and so what does this mean? I feel this in my body or I feel that in my body and if I feel that in my body, how does that relate to my cognitive process and also my emotional processes and that's the secret and there are lots of martial arts teachers, certainly great martial arts teachers that totally get that. I think Dave Kovar is one of them who I think you've interviewed that go lets have lots of games and have really simple lessons about resilience or [00:07:56] or something like that and now, if we could put all that in a fantastic package, now you've got a character development program and the interesting thing, Jeremy, is I'll do a simple game like tapping hands we call Chinese boxing and it's a very popular game but I'll do it with 3-year olds and I'll do it with coalminers and they all laugh, play and look forward to that when I say what does this mean and go, what does it means is I'm uptight. What it means is I feel tension in. my legs. It means I'm not balanced in my body or too much rock because I can't win this game and so forth and then we start talking about



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what that means in terms of your own development so now, it's fascinating and interesting and really easy and I think there are probably lots of programs that do it, of getting the package right is the things and the program has gone berserk worldwide. We got about 70,000 teachers teaching this program. It's just not big in the States. It's probably something to do with your educational system, I think, in the US and maybe the way providers when they roll out their programs, they might jealously hoard what they're doing, I don't know, but it's been fairly strong, really strong in the Netherlands, Australia and in Europe, in Great Britain and in Canada and probably less in the US. Maybe there are a lot of programs like that. I don't know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There are and that's why I'm intrigued. Obviously, we're based here in the US so my knowledge of what's going on in the martial arts world is very US-centric which is part of why I like having people on from all over the world. You're talking about things that are new to me and that's awesome and this idea of a program makes total sense. There's a word, though, that you've used a couple of times that I kind of want to unpack because I suspect that's intentional and that's play. Here we are close to 500 episodes, I don't know that anyone has used the verb play in the context of martial arts and it was funny the first moment you used it, I had a little bit of a reaction.

Brian Hayes:

What kind of a reaction did you have, Jeremy?

Jeremy Lesniak:

A little bit of a, I felt a little defensive for a moment and I took a step back and I don't get those reactions too often and, of course, when I do, they're an opportunity to say ok, there is something here to learn and I'm wondering, and I'm going to guess some of the other listeners might have heard that word, it might have hit their ear a little differently as well so you already confirmed you use that word intentionally, can you tell us more?

Brian Hayes:

It occurs to me that I'm 62 in 3 days, Jeremy, so I've been doing martial arts for a very long time. I have well over 40 years of teaching it for nearly as long and I thought I don't want to do this for so long if it wasn't fun and I have to say at the age of 50, I took up a 7th degree black belt in my style and we can talk about that later but I took up Brazilian jiu-jitsu at the age of 50 but why would I want to do that and have a 110-kilo, 21-year old sitting on my chest if it wasn't fun and it is. It's a big difference and we have to be careful about this. We take this so seriously and our art so seriously but if it wasn't fun, we probably wouldn't do it for as long so when I do martial arts, I still think lets go play martial arts because it is and if I'm learning to defend myself against what? If you like, I'll give you an example. If you're doing MMA or cage fighting, I don't see it as play. I'm preparing for a very, very serious, life threatening fight but



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when we spar or when we wrestle or when we do our weapons work in Kobudō, it's really play and I think if we took it too much more seriously, we might be, I don't know, being a bit self-indulgent. There you are! That's out there, Jeremy. So when I do martial arts, that's what keeps me training every day is because it's fun and I pick partners and I really enjoy playing martial arts with and we're very serious with our approach or we laugh in our approach and, certainly, something in Brazilian jujitsu which is a fantastic and serious art, it's not fun. A bunch of guys rolling around each other in a room have got to be having fun together, wouldn't you think so, to sustain and program and make it successful?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Of course.

Brian Hayes:

And then we could talk about kids or when we do martial arts with kids and this is a big mistake. I think that we have, in teaching a very serious art, and then trying to impart that to children who, face it, learn by play and that's a problem in the world. Children learn through supervised and unsupervised play and so, if we can create an environment where children are playing and learning, I think we've got it right and we create an environment where we're teaching rigorous martial arts and traditional budo theory to children would have it completely wrong and you'll have a martial arts center like I had in the 1980s with 50 students that all competed together seriously but now that we have, I guess, in our approach that martial arts should be fun and learning should be fun yet rigorous, we've got 1500 students in 5 centers and there's a reason for that. It's not because we're a McDojo. It's because we really understand the nature of kids' play and how they learn.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's an interesting conversation because whenever we talk about martial arts, when we talk about what that verb is, it's funny, I've heard a lot of people and I've heard them say I'm going to go and they kind of stumble over the next word. I'm going to do martial arts, I'm going to practice martial arts, I'm going to train martial arts and we almost need another word and as you're talking about it, you've got me pretty well-convinced. Yes! It's play! Anyone who's ever trained with me, anyone who's ever taken a class with me knows I have fun. I'm going to do my best to have fun and make sure that whoever I'm working with have fun and if you choose to not have fun because you're taking it too seriously, that's your problem. I'm going to have fun just playing. I'm fully on board with the use of this word play.

Brian Hayes:

We can have serious play too, Jeremy. I mean, I've trained with some, Kovar was a good one and if you do a search to Dave Kovar, you'll laugh. He's a funny guy and at the same time, if you turned around and trained with the Machado brothers, they're very funny guys. I've trained with Rigan Machado with very physical and serious martial arts. If I do laugh, it's because he's a funny guy and I listen to your podcast



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and Stephan Kesting's. I love watching his YouTube videos because he trains with a great intelligence, a great sense of humor, very, very serious technique but you can see the guy is having fun and so I'm having fun watching it and I want to watch more often, do more of it because it is. I don't want to overcook this word because I'm a pretty serious trainer myself and anybody would say you, Brian, you're an intense, my wife says I don't know anyone who trains harder than you, Brian. You're so intense with your martial arts. That's because that's my brand of fun. If you're like my instructor and in his broken English once said, ok, I asked him, could I come and train with you? He trains outside in Kumamoto, in a mountain called Katsudo mountain. It's a really strange story and I asked him once, can I come and train with you the way that you train? That took me a couple years of this. It's one of those stories that's ok, grasshopper, you'll have to wait and finally, he said ok, today, let's play martial arts and then, let's play karate and the way he went up the hill to do his training, I followed madly behind him as he swung through trees, ran through the forest, hung off branches and did the kind of training that he loves to do that it was really rigorous, let me tell you but it was play so that was a bit of an epiphany to me and that's how this guy gets up and trains everyday rigorously with a passion, if you like, to try to find the technique of his master who died a long time ago but if it wasn't fun for him, he wouldn't do it either. At least, that's my thought.

Jeremy Lesniak:

As I'm imagining running through the woods and climbing on trees and just, genuinely enjoying that experience, I think we can all imagine that but if we picture it, it might be difficult to picture an adult. We would typically picture a child engaged in play in that way and I'm thinking that there's probably some wisdom in that because when I think of children, children learn a lot of things relatively quickly by some pretty tried and true methods of mimicry and breaking things down simply and trial and error and if we can embody that with the intensity of the play and the mimicry and bring that into martial arts, I would imagine that that keeps people engaged and you're talking about 1500 students and I think you said 5 schools and would we see that philosophy incorporated into classes?

Brian Hayes:

I sure hope so because a lot of my teacher training is around that. I mean, teaching rigorous technique and correct form and so forth and I mean, we have to be rigorous in our training or we don't have an authentic martial art but the art of teaching and maintaining attention is of great interest. To others, it's the idea they're engaged and they're enjoying themselves and that sounds to me like play, if you like, and I don't know if I'm overcooking that term today but I think you might have hit something, Jeremy, because I'm thinking as I'm talking, yes, to be able to engage with people and especially children, have fun. You go into any successful martial art center and you'll see a wonderful atmosphere and a happy atmosphere where students go in excited and leave excited and bubbling about their class. Now, that sounds like play to me than they go out with frowns on their faces thinking about the final lessons of budo theory, if you like. They'll go on saying gee, mum, that was a great class and I see Brazilian jujitsu guys leave class shaking hands, hugging each other saying good to see you, friend, and I look forward to



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rolling with you again because that's what we do. Because when we roll together, that seems interesting, we build camaraderie. We build affection and connection and even in a sort of manly warrior way, it's exactly what we're doing so we continue to train because we think that we're part of a community of people who are moving along a same path and we do that through connection and I think that, to me, is a form of play.

Jeremy Lesniak:

40 years of training, you said. How did that start? Where's the first day of play?

Brian Hayes:

The first day of play, like a lot of Australian kids, we grew up playing football. Football for us was rugby league or rugby union or Australian rules and you talk about rough house play. It was all rumbling and tumbling and hard knocks. I did that for the first 15 years. I started playing football at the age of 6 when everybody did and in the summertime, you play cricket which Americans don't understand.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, we do not.

Brian Hayes:

No fascination for cricket so we won't go there but that's what we did and I was at university, first year, so I started very late and I was at rugby league training and I saw these guys in white pajamas walk past me and like everybody else, I snickered a bit looking at these guys that looked a little bit effeminate, if you might say. We call it sissy and walking past into the gym to do their training but I was quietly fascinated at one, they had the courage to walk past us wearing their white pajamas but also, what are these guys doing? I walked into the gym and I sat down and I watched some Malaysian guy doing the most, it was taekwondo, doing fantastic kicks that I've never seen at such a level of athleticism and I thought wow, I've got to do that. Everyone's a closet Bruce Lee, right? So, I better try that stuff and so, I enrolled and it was enjoyable and it was difficult and it was something I thought, you know what? This is something I could do because I don't have to wait for anybody else. I just turn up to class and train at my pace if you like and find my progress and being a bit fanatic, I go to the park and I practice my kicks because I want to look just like that Malaysian guy and that just started something in me that I couldn't let go and when I became a teacher, I got pretty good at taekwondo. I got first cup or something. That's one below black belt and I went off to a country town as a teacher and I went around looking for taekwondo classes and there weren't any. There was just this karate group so I went in to the karate place and old school, blood on the floor, they all took turns to beat me up and it taught me a great lifelong lesson that one, that's not how you do it. I remember going home thinking, with respect to taekwondo, it wasn't working for me but I need to, now, face this new monster and that's this karate class that scares the heck out of me and I trained for another 3 years and came back to another town



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about 5 hours away. Now, karate is a fairly small organization and I just trained and trained and trained and finally, challenged my black belt and you know, I don't want to do it the way I did it. I'm going to find my way to do it because that was scary because for every person that came and got that, another hundred would have walked out the door going that's not for me and it was really interesting because we would spar and every night, like big brother syndrome, these guys would beat me up one after the other and if I thought, well, I'm going to be stronger than that, I'm going to come back and hit them harder and see what happens. If you did that to a big brother, they just hit you harder again so it wasn't until I got away, 6 months later I went out to compete in a club tournament and I beat all these guys and that was another big lesson for me because I realize, sometimes you got to go away, get your perspective, find out who you are and what your possibility is and come back and have another go and I never looked back. I went from there and opening the dojo and competing like crazy and the story went on and became a wonderful passion. I was always a competition fanatic for about 15 years so I really got into that and it wasn't so nice because I was so great at it because I couldn't stop doing it, was a bit of a junkie for it and it was interesting before you compete. There wasn't a single competition for 15 years, there'd be hundreds and hundreds of bouts, full contact and light contact or the Olympic karate style that I would, just before the match, want to go to the toilet really badly and be shaking and be questioning what the heck I'm doing there and why didn't I just go surfing instead of this because this is too darn hard and soon as the referee says 'Hajime' then all of that goes into the package that's you on the mat. You become a bit of a junkie for that kind of thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You kind of glossed over something that I suspect is important. You went away for 6 months, came back and were beating all these guys. What did you do during those 6 months?

Brian Hayes:

Trained like a fanatic!

Jeremy Lesniak:

But you weren't training fanatically before? I got the sense that you were pretty dedicated.

Brian Hayes:

I think so but being able to go and train on your own terms makes you come back and take a chance. You come back into the competition and have a go at these guys, it's just competition. It's 3 minutes, if you like. 3 minutes of misery rather than the whole night and it gave me the chance to really liberate my own technique, if you like. It's not a big story, I guess, in that it informed me a little bit but it really kills me, I suppose, and I don't know if those guys are ever listening because I respect them but how not to run a club and when I got to the end of my competition alive and started looking a little bit more serious about developing a club, that was one of the thoughts I had. That I didn't really want to do that



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to anybody else. I wanted martial arts to be inclusive because, to think, all those people that turned away from the door, they're the ones that really need to train while I'm ok. What about the kid with autism or the kid with ADHD or the mum or the dad lacked confidence or parenting skills or relationship skills? I really need to make a place for them too and that's probably what really informed a massive change in the way that we run our groups up here and I suppose that explains why we have a lot of students and why martial arts is proliferating in the world because, darn, it's hard so why do people continue to take up martial arts? Because they see a glimpse of that stuff, well, we got to offer it and so we try to make a welcoming atmosphere and if the student is a bit like me then I need to create a pathway for them that is rigorous and tough but it's not for everybody.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And the time period, at least, from the stories that I've heard because I wasn't around, at least, not really consciously with that was going on in the martial arts world back then, but it sounds like you were a bit ahead of your time with how you approached the accessibility of people coming in. We've heard a lot of stories from guests over the years talking about how the pride from the instructor or in the instructor seem to be around how difficult they can make the class, how hard the students had to work simply to show up. We've heard stories about students having to find schools without signs. The door was on the back and there wasn't even a sign. You had to, I always imagine, people crawling through and climbing over and finding this, what we might think, is this mystical oracle of a martial artist and it's a regular old class but the instructors, some of them back in the '60s and '70s took a lot of pride in making it hard to find and hard to do.

Brian Hayes:

I know, isn't that funny? It'd be like finding a martial arts teacher is about the same as finding a drug dealer or something. Somebody whispers down the road.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think it's harder! I'd say it was a lot harder based on the movies and the music that came out of the '60s.

Brian Hayes:

That's right and the mythos of Bruce Lee, of course. I think I was about 15 when I saw The Way of the Dragon. I'll never forget that because of the great poster of Bruce Lee in the fight scene holding nunchucks and that's the one where he fought Chuck Norris. I think of him trying to kick letterboxes off the stands and doing what other silly things that people do at that age so probably prompted a thought. I thought this is very secret stuff. Where do people do martial arts and yeah, I think I really hit it there and I remember an instructor saying you realize, Brian, that not even 1 in 100 people are going to get their black belt so if you get your black belt, you're a special kind of guy and I thought that's a funny



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thought. I'm a teacher. Before I'm a martial artist, I'm a teacher. I've been a teacher since 1980. That's what I do and so, I thought that's not how I teach. You teach and you say welcome everybody, the doors are open, come in, you can do this. I even went to the States some years ago and my wife and I said we're going to do this fulltime. We're going to go to the best centers in the US and see what they do that we don't do and I saw these signs everywhere saying we are a black belt school. What does that mean? We are a black belt school. I know what it means. It means we teach the principles and the rigor of black belt but also what I take out of this, I'm going to take you and support you all the way to black belt, however long that takes you to get. That's my take and beyond black belt and so, when you sit in here, when I say we are a black belt school, then we're not going to, we're never, if you come in here and you don't give up on us, we're never going to give up on you and boy, oh boy, that's been the truth. You can say it takes 4 years to get a black belt, no. It takes some people 10, it takes some people 20. I got a guy with me that's a 2nd degree and he's been with me now for 35 years and he just keeps on showing up because he feels he belongs and it's an inclusive place and he can't kick higher than you need anymore because of arthritis and deteriorating hip and so forth but that never stops him from coming because he knows it's not important. What's important is that he keeps going and that's a big difference to the way that we saw it in the '70s of what we thought were special, esoteric group of people sneaking around the back alleys if you like and if you know in the States, it has changed massively because now, we teach in professional studios and we've moved from the smash-repaired black box if you like to up market venue so martial arts has transformed and I watched that happen here in Australia. I think I was one of the 1st, I know I was the 1st person in Newcastle. Newcastle's a large city on the East Coast, north of Sydney. We've got about a great area of about 600,000 people so it's a great capacity for building martial arts schools but there were no fulltime centers and 1989, gosh, or something, I rented an old picture theater and we had to level the floor out because it was still at an angle and all of the students came and climbed. We got under the building and we changed the foundation, we lowered the floor. We made it sort of flattened and we rented this old building out and ran our first fulltime martial arts center. We had no idea how to do it, oh gosh. We made every mistake that you could make in trying to run a fulltime center but darn it, we did it because we wanted to make it inclusive and have a place where people could park their car, get out and walk into the studio and a nice sign that says welcome to our martial arts center. It's been a big change and there's been other wonderful people around me in the industry. A handful that's start increasing now to develop martial arts into something that is respectable and inclusive.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When did you know you wanted to teach?

Brian Hayes:

Oh, teach anything or teach martial art?

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Teach martial arts.

Brian Hayes:

Not by accident. When I moved back to the school I was in in Newcastle as a brown belt in karate, it was this school and kids were pretty tough and one kid said to me, oh, sir, I see you do karate or I heard you do karate. I said that's right and he said well, teach us and I go I don't want to teach you. I teach history and English. No, no, no. We need to learn something. We have nothing to do after school so this is a wonderful story so I said who else is interested and all these and he said I'll let you know and all these kids, I guess, would like to do something after school so we went up to the community hall and said can we have an hour here once a week or twice a week to do karate training and that's how it started. There was such a desire from people to do it. Next thing is all my students, all my history and English students, next thing for 20, 30 or 40 people in the class and away we go so it sort of back to front. Not teach you how to teach and then, open the center. It was like I opened the center and worked out how to do it and my wife makes a joke and said most people go ready, aim, fire but I always go ready, fire, aim and so I said, we're going to do this. What are we going to do? We're going to do this Monday and my stuff will go what? We're not ready and I'll say well, you will be because we'll do it on a Monday. They got to work out how to make it happen and that's probably the way I've pretty much always done things because I let the enthusiasm go first for fear of losing it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, you've mentioned your wife a couple of times and I get the sense from the context that she also trains and maybe is a part of these schools?

Brian Hayes:

Oh, I've lived for a long time, Jeremy, so I think I was going through a divorce and lost and lonely and drowning myself in the martial arts and this is a good story too and I went through a separation when I was 27 and I thought what am I going to do with myself? What am I going to do with myself and I thought in my desperation and angst, I jumped on a plane and I went to Japan and it started a journey. A marvelous journey in my life and then, my style called Shitō-ryū and it's a pretty esoteric little style that's really big around Kumamoto where the founder have lived. Left Okinawa in the '20s and never came back and there's something good about that because the family and the art survived the war if you like and the background's kind of intact and when they start doing is oh, this is interesting. This is a combination of Naha-te and Shuri-te, if you do karate. I didn't know that people do it together. Well, before there was Naha-te and Shuri-te, there was just this and somehow, I found my way into that kind of style. I was very excited about it but it was really big in Canada so we have a group in a world championship and I went over to Canada and there was this lovely lady that I thought gee, if I could only find somebody to be like that and she was with somebody. Figures, doesn't it? I came back and I was with somebody and she was with somebody and we had a great friendship going for years and finally in



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1992, I was asked to run our world championship in our style and that made about 2 or 300 Japanese people are going to come over and I thought I couldn't speak Japanese for nuts so I called my friend in Vancouver and I said what are you doing? And she said nothing much. Would you like to come and translate for me for this tournament I'm doing. Oh, ok and she came out so I've been with her since 1992. I tell her I stole her passport and never gave it back. She was in the Canadian team and I was in the Australian team so we're both loving our martial arts journey and she thought I was this crazy competition fanatic so, I'll do this too so they allowed her into the New South Wales team, illegally, I might say. She was Canadian so she didn't qualify but we slipped her into the New South Wales team and we had this wonderful journey for the next few years competing together and it was just fantastic. She was a teacher and she had also, she gave up teaching for me to help run our fledgling martial arts center that was headed for broke really fast, I might add, so she thought she'd better look after this and when I took a year off, I got to be a vice principal so it was pretty full on and said look, let's take a year off and get some perspective. If we're going to do that, let's see what the best is and that's why we made the decision, that 2005 or 3 or something, to go to the US and look at all the best martial arts center and to see what we could do and come up with a business plan that did not compromise our enormous love for the art so I'm just one lucky person, Jeremy, because we do it together. Our kids grew up in the dojo. They're now teaching. My daughter is in the New South Wales karate team. They go to Okinawa with me training and they're now teaching classes and I'm already looking at the next generation so my wife and I are trying to step back a bit and watch our daughters do their thing and it's fantastic. I'm lucky. It's the idea of the family. We say the family that kicks together, sticks together. I've been blessed to be able to do this but I couldn't have done this journey if we weren't doing it together. We talk about karate widows. It's a bit of a joke. A lot of guys love to train, their wives are sitting home and going why aren't you with me, why are you training? Not understanding the journey he's on but when you can take the journey together, oh my, it's a good run.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How has training enhanced your relationship with your wife?

Brian Hayes:

Gee, I'll go back to play again. The idea that you're doing the same things and you're on the floor and looking across each other and this is a good thing because here we are doing the same thing and I guess, it's challenging. Anybody who goes into business together, you got to know when do you clock off. It can be 11 o'clock at night, you're still talking about retention rates and students on hold and this parent's doing that and that parent's doing that and you go, just a minute, stop, what are we doing so it's pretty hard to clock off but I think the benefits far outweigh the challenges. I could not have done what I have done in the martial arts if I didn't have the support because it means a long time away and a lot of time training by yourself. We don't train together. I worked out a while ago that we probably need to find our own training pace that we're both doing it. She comes across to all the black belt classes and all this part of leadership. She is Shihan in a dojo but that doesn't mean we throw each other out the back and



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asking a bit. We find our own training pace and our routine but come together often so yeah, it's been fantastic for my development but more than anything, I suppose, for me to be able to explore my possibility with somebody's whole-hearted support. How lucky am I?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sounds like pretty darn lucky.

Brian Hayes:

Yeah! She's not listening either, man.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Not right now. I bet she will later. I wonder, there's something I'm hearing that might be worth digging into and I don't know. You've talked about when the school wasn't doing so well. Let's take a step back and get some perspective and you used that word and that idea when you talked about going from taekwondo to karate and it not working out. You not being able to, it sounded like in your mind, perform at the level that you wanted to so you took some time, you took 6 months and you gained some perspective which, I'll be honest, that stepping back seems almost contradictory to the way you described yourself as a being a ready, fire, aim sort of person.

Brian Hayes:

Yeah, I don't step back from anything. My wife said gee, you're a fighter. You run to conflict. Stepping back means stepping to the side, stepping into another direction. I'll tell you what happened. When she came out in '92 and I was running this fledgling fulltime martial arts center and we didn't know anything about billing. We had people paying \$2 at the door, it was crazy. A great idea with no business plan, just passion. What I've got, the only thing I've got is tenacity and that's, if anybody asks, Brian, why are you successful? Because I hang on by my fingernails when other people let go and she said how are you running this place? I was earning my teaching salary and half my teaching salary was going to paying rent for this fulltime dojo. Why are you doing that? Because I have a dream that this is going to work one day. Well, it sure as heck not working now. I was down at the supermarket with a calculator. Take that back, take that back, we can't afford that and it was like that and when people look at success, you got to have a look at where you came from because we were dirt poor and she came out and had a look and she said I can see enormous potential in this. I like this tenacity. This idea that you never gave up but she could help me with a good sense and a business plan. She has a degree in international finance so there you go. I really married up, Jeremy. I was really lucky and I thought you got to remember where you came from and those hard years and the same as, I think the same as developing a deep skill in martial arts, I say to students, there's 2 or 3 of us, I think, who have a particular standard in my group that the others don't seem to get near and why is that? Because it doesn't matter where it is, surfing, my other passion, we can talk about that or playing a guitar or doing martial arts, you've got to have



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those years where you do the crazy training and that's where you train so much that you go beyond the norm if you like and if you do that and I think a lot of your podcast would be talking to experts who, at some time in their lives, they did that crazy training that gave them that breakthrough that made them special, that led towards that type of mastery if you like and I suppose, the attitude there again is tenacity, something fills them that says I'm not giving up. I'm going to do it more and then I'm going to do it more and then I'm going to do it more again and I guess that's my attitude that I had in martial arts that gave me some abilities in martial arts and in competition but also in business that says no matter how hard it gets, you'll never give up and also, that stepping away. Not stepping back, stepping aside is probably the right thing to get perspective. I mean, right now, we've got to go through this. We're all got to reinvent the way that we teach martial arts. Right now, all our centers are going to close down in the next few weeks because of the virus we have and instead of saying well, I'm going to work this new training app out or this online training system out in 3 months or years, no, you're going to work it out in 3 days and so that requires, again, a certain amount of tenacity or grit but also the ability to step to the side and say we got a crisis. What are we going to do with the crisis? We better come up with a solution or we'll just go under and that's probably my attitude all my life. Does that answer your question at all or did I digress?

Jeremy Lesniak:

The question I ask don't matter. It's just to get answers. I don't know what I'm looking for when I ask. I just follow my gut and my gut told me there was something there and there was! Let's talk about surfing.

Brian Hayes:

Thank you, yeah! Have you got another hour?

Jeremy Lesniak:

The reason that I want to talk about surfing, not just because you brought it up but because I know enough about surfing and I have friends who surf and I don't know too many people who surf casually. Surfing is something that you do or you don't.

Brian Hayes:

That's exactly right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And you could say a bit of the same about martial arts so my gut tells me that we're going to find out some more stuff about you and martial arts as we talk about surfing so let's go there.

Brian Hayes:



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I guess, a good way to introduce it is my daughters all surf. Whenever I go and do my resilience workshops, we do get into circles and say what do you love and every time, I don't say I love martial arts, I love my family, I say I love surfing with my daughters. It's the thing that gives me the greatest joy in the world and there's a reason for that because there we were all sitting out beyond the breakers, if you like, in a fantastic symbiosis, if you like, that's connected by the water and by nature and I invested those years from martial arts to teach my children how to surf and sometimes, my daughters are now 21, 19 and 16 and I'll say I hate travelling and one of them would look at them and go I'm not doing so well, Dad, what's up? Look, I just need to surf, ok? And so they know that things might not be right in their life, they have to settle their shit. To settle this shit, they need to go surfing and get their balance back which is very similar to martial arts. It's that way, that harmony, that connection between body, mind, heart and spirit that you get from surfing that you get from rigorous physical training like martial arts and so there's a real close connection to them and neither martial arts nor surfing are past times or hobbies. I say that to kids, with minimum training, time with us, when you first join up, the only contact we ever have is the 1st one and that's 6 months and there's a reason for that, because I don't want to waste their time. I say we're here for 6 months because after 6 months, you'll see whether this is something you want to do for a black belt or not that they'll have made significant changes in you or your child and you'll be able to assess it better because martial arts is not a hobby. Martial arts is a way of life. It's a program that's going to change you so that's my take on that and surfing does that for me too so there's 2 things in my life, I guess, when one escapes from the other if you like. It's a marvelous experience to be living in the east coast in New South Wales and you hop in your car and 10 minutes away, you're in the water surfing and we are quite blessed here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Your worst injuries, martial arts or surfing?

Brian Hayes:

Lately, surfing but I've been doing some crazy things, you could say. I get into Indonesia surfing and their pretty nasty coral reefs, I got a few really good tattoos with surfing, let me tell you, from being hauled across reefs. It's my fault for being an old guy trying to surf like young ones do but now, I've had plenty of really serious injuries in martial arts. ACL injuries and major ligament tears and most of them occurred later in my life. I decided to go kickboxing although I don't know enough about kickboxing. At the age of 55, I made 5 trips to Thailand doing some pretty serious kickboxing and you're in the ring with other young guys and you take a chance so it really tore my major ligament badly and these things can be a wake up. I've had injuries to my hip and a hip resurfacing that I thought I wouldn't be able to do karate and I wouldn't be able to surf again at the age of 58 but now, I'm back wrestling, training and surfing so I'm really lucky that I live in a modern age but the injuries really mounted out but I think you got to take the fall and you got to keep moving because I watched people around me who stopped because of injuries they have and things just never get going again. My trick right now, until further notice, is just don't stop moving. Keep on moving and keep your joints, greased if you like, lubricate it and you'll



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probably be alright so I'm still 62 in a few days and I'm still surfing and still doing martial arts and still doing Brazilian jiu-jitsu, still doing Kobudō and loving it all so I thought should I slow down? No, I don't think so because these are things I love doing and yeah. I hope that answers that question.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It does, yeah. The guests that we have on who keep going, who seem to, at least in some sense seem to defy normal aging patterns or normal life patterns, they all seem to have what I call a white belt philosophy. You just told us about 3 other things that I'm going to learn how to do this, I'm going to learn how to do that, I don't know much about this so I'm going to go do that. Did you say 55, you're stepping into the ring for the Thai fight?

Brian Hayes:

No, I mean training. I went to Thailand training and they put me in the beginner's and they said ok, you go up to intermediate, ok, you go up to the fighters ring and try and I thought you're kidding me, man. I'm 55, 58 and the next thing I'm in the fighters' ring with these guys but it was hard. It was fun.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I would still imagine that the sparring matches in that context are a bit more intense than what most of us experience within a dojo. They're hitting!

Brian Hayes:

For sure but that's ok. I really enjoy training that hard if the body can do it but you got to be careful and try to be kinder to your body. I don't want to stop. I'm taking up kite surfing this year, Jeremy. You got to keep moving your stuff.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Keep playing. There's that, I'm getting that sense that that's how you approach everything? Is that fair to say?

Brian Hayes:

I don't know. If others would hear this, gee, you're an intense person and I take everything very, very seriously but for me, fun. The fun is in going hard and I think listeners would agree, that the fun we'll get is in feeling ourselves doing the very best we can and wringing the best out of our bodies or our minds and that's when we're having fun because that's when we're on fire, we lit up. Sounds like Top Gun in here, doesn't it? There's something else here too. When you get older, the importance of still continuing to train is you haven't really reached your peak in your possibility because your martial arts is hard and soft and if you're looking at the development of all your body's potential. I think it comes much later when your testosterone, hopefully, gets a little bit less and instead of hard power to do everything, you



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start to look for soft power and soft power and internal power and I think your listeners will understand this, particularly those that do kung fu, tai chi and so forth and understand the importance of soft power and internal power. Some of us are doing hard power in this life. Next thing I'll find by acceptance, and this is really important, by acceptance of self and letting go, you relax and when you relax, all of a sudden you find power you've never had before so it's interesting that every time I had a serious injury, my instructor, all wise and strange and eccentric kind of a guy, that not many people could follow but I do because I get him and I forgive his differences but every time something happens to me and I think Sensei, I don't know if I can do this anymore, he'll go that injury is really good for you because you learn something. When your hip is no good, you will learn soft power. When your shoulders no good, you will find the power from your center. You'll find things you never found before so I talk about a guy that keeps turning, making lemonade out of lemons because every time something happens, he sees a possibility to explore another concept in your body. Isn't that a beautiful thing? So as you get older, as we get older, we can truly find the potential in our bodies that we've left out before because of doubt, because of ambition or too much determination but as we find acceptance in ourselves, we relax a little bit and we can do amazing things. I hit harder now than I did when I was 35, let me tell you, and it comes from relaxation and integration of all these energies and the connections. The connections between mind and body and that's the thing because when you're young, it's all body. As you allow your mind in and you find the connection between mind and body, I think you really get it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's look forward. You mentioned kite surfing. What else is coming down the pipe for you? What are you looking forward to? What are your goals, what are you hoping for?

Brian Hayes:

I suppose with my age, I've been doing it a while as I've said, we've built it up into 5 martial arts centers and I look at what's the next thing and the next thing, of course, over martial arts and our business is trying to build something that is sustainable without us. Now, that's what everybody wants to do. We've been doing this for a long time and I'm lucky that our daughters are doing it but there's no guarantee that they're doing it for a long time. They got to find their way too and by the time they find their way and come back to it, I might be too old. I don't know what will be there. I've really got to build a system that can take care of itself and that means building a leadership team from the bottom to the top so that's my fascination right now is teaching teachers and you got to look at when it's time to step back and see what kind of team that you've got around you and so, at our centers, leadership is the biggest deal. We've got volunteers at the bottom, we've got kids at 8 doing little kids' leadership and we've got teenagers doing bigger kids' leadership and we got adults doing leadership of how to lead the teams and so forth and then we got volunteers and we got part time instructors and we got team leaders and building a system where if I'm not there, if I'm nothing but a picture on the wall, the system sustains itself. That's my challenge now with the number of students we have and the size that we have and to do that, I need energy, relaxed energy to do it and that means probably a little less time teaching classes



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and a little bit more time watching teachers and giving them feedback so I'm excited about that but it also means more time for myself to explore other things that I might like to do whether it's surfing or kite surfing or going back to wind surfing or doing things for fun. Again, play is a big thing and I want to come back to that in your older age but now, building a really successful center that has a legacy, I think is really what I want to do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I imagine that the school owners that are listening are hearing your numbers and saying oh, that's really impressive and I'm not going to ask you to share everything or even, anything in particular but would you offer one tidbit? What's one thing that you found really transformational for what you're offering?

Brian Hayes:

If I can, if you'll indulge me, if you want a 10-step plan to success and a lot of people would say this, the most important thing, if you want to be a really successful dojo, first and foremost, you got to be a martial artist. You got to be a serious martial artist and so, you have to love what you do because charisma is nothing but your passion coming out and if you've got passion, then people will catch some of that. They'll want some of that and you get that because you're a martial artist and so, you got to do your own training. It's the hardest thing for my fulltime teachers to do because they didn't do the hard years that I did that fueled that ability, if you like, or that passion to see the big picture so I think the first and most important thing is you got to love martial arts and you got to be passionate about your training and then you can build a good group around you. The other thing that's really important is you can't do it by yourself. You need great people. I've got to say, there's people in this country and I think what really needs to be interviewed is Kyoshi Liz Mahler from Central Coast because when I was talking about getting my martial arts in this game, she was doing it at the same time, maybe even slightly before and there were times when I watched this lady who lives about a hundred kilometers from me. I thought hang on by her coattails and you're going to go somewhere because she really understands how to do it. Now, she's a great competitor who has built a fantastic system, network of martial arts centers. I've watched people like that so what can I draw from that and that can save me years of individual thinking so sometimes I say and this is what teachers do, pull great ideas from other people until you don't need that idea, until you morph it into your own idea and then go for another idea so you've really got to model great people and I think the 3rd thing, where you really get your systems in shape and talk shop so that you have a really good system from I say the door to the floor and back again and get it right and that sometimes mean subscribing to other systems that have done it better than you until you can vet your own, you can vet your own computer, the systems overall and customer relation software, they might move around but we were able to do these ourselves but at the start, we just bought into other people and I think the other thing that's a point forward would be you inspect what you inspect and inspect it again and inspect it again. I say I want this teacher to teach the class and I better see what that teacher's doing and keep on checking and give them some feedback so that person, that's where you are in one of our 5 centers, you think you're in the same place and that's really important. That's



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branding but the other thing that's really important for us is we bought most of our buildings so I'd always say, if you want to be successful in martial arts is you get tired, you might have changed the way you spend your time and you have bought your martial arts building and you bought yourself your own legacy so when you're tired or hurt, you've got an investment then so we figured early on, it made us really sick to the stomach paying lots of rent for things rather than where we could have been paying to ourselves so we were so lucky now that we bought 3 of our properties and we rent 2 of them, we'll probably buy some more and I think that's been the best thing we've done because every time we bought a building, we'd say that mortgage is really hard but after 3 or 4 years, it was less than the rent we would have paid as rent would keep coming up so every single time we did it is a great investment and I think another really important thing, apart from building a really good curriculum and you got to evolve it and that curriculum but we need to build a curriculum that's inclusive. That allows everybody to get somewhere so you can allow the good to be great and the people not travelling will not be travelling a lot so I think that's really important. That might cover it. Be prepared to reinvent yourself so the business we have now is very different to the business we had 10 years ago and different than we had 20 years ago. You barely recognize them. I think it's terrifically important to get the lay of the land. Look around, feel the market and say if I'm self-indulgent and say my martial arts is so important you should all come do it and you always have 30 or 40 students. That's what you want to do. If you want to be a great competitor and have a reputation for being the most competitive club around, you'll always have a small club and good luck to you because that's what you want but if you want to be a successful business you got to open the doors and take it a little bit wider and that means sometimes reinventing yourself or even getting a 3rd party to take a look because sometimes the biggest impediment to building a martial arts center is the chief instructor himself or herself because they're so full of their own idea of what important martial arts should be that they forget that you also got to make a successful business and that might be another important point, Jeremy, and that is when it comes to business, I have to say, when we change to make a business more modern, it's dog fights with consultants to come in and say they want a change and I'd say get on your bandwagon because you're not doing real martial arts. You don't know what you're talking about until I realized that that just doesn't cut it. Sometimes a 3rd party is going to tell you. I had to do this. That means rebranding sometimes and reevaluating curriculum and reevaluating your business approach and so you got to be prepared to change. Be flexible. There's another one and I think, the most important one is to look to your family because if you don't have a good family to back you, you don't get anywhere so we already talked about how blessed and lucky I am and it could have gone the other way and I'm so lucky to have family that supported me in doing this venture because if they didn't, it's bit of a lonely, it's a pretty lonely path, martial arts. I'm sure we're all in that we're lucky we're at this stage, we're all in so it's been a wonderful journey for us.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's great stuff. If people want to find you, your school, social media, websites, email, any of that, where would they go?



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Brian Hayes:

Yeah, if listeners are interested in looking at what our martial arts centers look like, sound like, feel like, if you go to www.huntermartialarts.com.au because it's an Australian website and you can see what we're about and get lots of our intro videos and that kind of stuff and say ok, how does this place operate and you get a feel for who we are and what we're about and they're most welcome to have a look and I think it's really important to share our best ideas around our martial arts community so that we all prosper together. It's interesting too, you know what's really interesting, I thought we'd spend an hour talking about my style of karate, its founders, its teachers, its techniques. You know what? We've talked for an hour, we haven't even talked about it and I think that's a healthy thing and we don't even say oh, we at [01:04:51] and nobody cares and people don't say hey man, I want to train with you because you do Shukokai martial arts. They don't care. They're all stories. Somebody rings them and say hey, I'm looking for taekwondo, do you do taekwondo? Well, yeah, sure we do! It's kind of Japanese taekwondo. Come on, have a look because they don't know what they're looking for. They just want a place where they can belong and that's what you got to create and sometimes, I think now in the world today, the style is not nearly as important as your ability to teach martial arts so I think that's a bottom-line so I think it's interesting that we don't talk about style, we talk about martial arts generically.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Of course, anybody who's been listening to this show for a while knows that I've said many, many times that different styles, I don't care if you're talking about the most fluid, soft tai chi variant versus some hyper rigid Okinawan style, they have more in common than they do separating them.

Brian Hayes:

Absolutely! In the end, they kind of look the same. If you saw my kata now that my teachers teach me, they call it the koryu kata, the old kata that were taught to his father in law and it looks like Kenpō, it looks like tai chi and we do Okinawan martial arts so an earlier kata would go a little bit more like Shitō-ryū or even Shotokan but I've seen the kata look like tai chi so it's interesting. There's many parts to the top but in the end, they all pretty much look the same and that's a really interesting point.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I leave it to the guest for how we go out. That can be some parting words or final thoughts, whatever you would call it, how do you want to send out your episode here?

Brian Hayes:

Oh man! You've got me! I love talking, Jeremy, as you can see.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I can tell, I can tell. We've got a great conversation.



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Brian Hayes:

Yeah, we have! I don't know if I have something with all of those thoughts you've given me from watching the first Bruce Lee movie if you like to today. I'd just say to enjoy the journey. That martial arts is a fantastic journey and full of humor and funny stories and good memories and you've got to make it that so I suppose I take myself very seriously in martial arts but my advice would be don't take yourself too seriously because, and this is the beauty of martial arts, and probably why I do it. It's that you can never, no matter how good you think you are, you look over your shoulder or to the right or to the left and somebody is doing it better and it keeps you humble and it gives you good reason of doing it because you can never say you've actually really got it and so, doesn't that make it, like surfing, doesn't that make the journey then, a marvelous thing to do? I can hang my life on that because I hope that as I go out, I'm still lying in bed or whatever going, how's that kata go again? What's that move? So I'm still learning until the day I die and if I do that, it's a life well lived.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We've got a great track record of Australian guests on the show and it just makes me want to go visit. It's a big country, though, so I'd have to go for a while and it's in part due to guests like Kyoshi Hayes who talk about their passion for the art but their passion for life. When I think about the guests that we've had on the show, everyone has a passion for their art but not all of them has such a passion for life and that's one of the things that I took away from today's conversation so thank you, Sir. I appreciate your time and hope we get to meet and train at some point in the near future. Check out whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for the show notes. Every episode has a page all to itself with links, photos, a transcript and sometimes, even more. If you're up for supporting the work, you've got some choices. Make a purchase at whistlekick.com and if you do, use the code `PODCAST15`. You can also share an episode, leave a review, tell a friend or contribute to the Patreon, Patreon.com/whistlekick. Remember if you see somebody out there wearing some whistlekick stuff, make sure you say hi. There's something growing here and you're all part of it. Our social media accounts, lots of activity, lots of fun stuff, we put a lot of work in them and you can find them at whistlekick. If you've got a guest suggestion, I want to hear it. Email me, jeremy@whistlekick.com. I appreciate your time today and I hope your well. Until the next episode, train hard, smile and have a great day!