



Episode 499 — The Last 5 years | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



### Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello everyone, welcome this is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 499. That's right, were almost there! Today, we're gonna have an impromptu look back over the last five years of content I'm gonna share with you some of my favorite moments as well as give you a little bit of what's going on behind the scenes, should be fun. On the off chance that you don't know my name, my name is Jeremy Lesniak, I am your host here for the show, founder of whistlekick, and a passionate traditional martial artist. Everything we do here whistlekick is in support of the traditional martial arts. If you want to see everything were doing from this show and onward, go to [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). That's our online home, it's our our hub, it's our fortress, it's the place you can buy our products from our strength and conditioning program to, if you're listening to this in the future, some of the other programs we've got in developing right now to our protective equipment, our uniforms, our great shirts, sweatshirts, there's a lot of stuff over there. And if you buy any of it you can save 15% by using the code `PODCAST15`. This show has its own website; [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) and that's where we put up transcripts and post photos videos links to the guest we are constantly revising that website, trying to make it better. As of the writing, well I guess the recording of this episode, you can look up episodes by location, as in where is the guest coming from, what country, what state in the US, what style they practice and soon you'll get a complete table with release date and links to their social media so if you want to quickly find and follow someone you'll have that available. We're hoping how that rolled out the next couple weeks. All that and so much more comes in this neat little package that we release here on the show twice a week and if you want to support it, if you wanna support the



Episode 499 — The Last 5 years | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

goal that we have of connecting educating and entertaining traditional martial artist the world over, there are number things you can do. You can share an episode, you can make a purchase, you can follow us on social media, maybe pick up a book, tell a friend about us, leave a review somewhere or support the Patreon, [Patreon.com/whistlekick](https://Patreon.com/whistlekick) that's the place to go. You can support with as little as 2 dollars a month but if you contribute 5 dollars but you're gonna get extra stuff, extra episodes, things we don't release to the public.

This episode today is completely off the cuff. And I contemplated whether or not I wanted to take some notes, have an outline, which I typically do. I usually have something in front of me to refer to but I didn't want to do that today. Why? Why didn't I want to do that? Because I wanted to be as authentic as possible. You know one of the things it's really easy to do with the podcast is to edit to cut pieces out and I'm gonna work really, really hard as I record this to make sure there's nothing that has to be edited. And this is a good point for me to shout out Julius who has been our audio engineer for three years. He does in absolutely phenomenal job making this show look and sound as good as it can be and I want everyone to know, because I've thanked him publicly but I want everyone to know right now that the show would not be what it is without Julius, so thank you. I appreciate you my friend.

There are other people thank. Over the last year you may have noticed that I've talked about someone else, Lessy. And Lessy has been a huge improvement in connecting and scheduling guest versus what I was doing. I found that I was just burnt out. There are only so many things that we can care about any given day and I was finding that my caring, that's not the right word, my attentiveness there we go, that's a better word, to working with guests and making sure that they were on boarded properly and scheduled well, I was getting burnt out on that. And that was affecting the show in that it was affecting my conversations and so now because of Lessy, she puts in some time every week, she gets great guests and if you look back over the last year of this show, you will see that overall the caliber of guest that we've been getting has been bigger and better. Not to say that were only going after celebrities or anything like that, but we have had a, in my opinion, a more diverse range of martial artists from a broader global perspective and I think that that has really stepped up the show and I hope you all appreciate it because I certainly do. And with her work it also means that quite often, when I talk to the guests that's the first communication I've ever had with them is on radio, if you will, the same time you get to hear them and I love that and I think that that leads to a better-quality episode. I'm gonna drink some tea right now. See this is one of the things that were not going to edit out were not to take up me slurping tea because I want this to be the realest episode that I've done. And yeah so Lessy, you rock thank you. I appreciate your friendship, your counsel, and all of your work. There are other people it do things behind the scenes, we've got Anne, we've got Andrea, we've got others coming on right now who all contribute in their various ways. We've got Andrew and Stacy helping out in the martial arts radio behind-the-scenes Facebook group. We've got Gabe doing what he does. We've got Frank doing what he does with 1st cup which is not martial arts radio but it's still part of the team. There are so many people who help out. Some of these



Episode 499 — The Last 5 years | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

people honestly donate their time. Why they donate their time? Because they believe in what we're doing.

It is no secret, because I don't make it one, that whistlekick is not yet profitable. We've been at this for a long time I will continue to work hard to make this business profitable and I will throw everything I possibly have at it I have invested literally every dollar I have and many more that I don't because I believe in what we're doing and I knew that this would be a long time coming. We figured out a lot of things, were figuring out more and that's part of what this episode is as rambly as it is that it's going to be, it's a recap. It letting you know what's going on behind the scenes and not pulling punches because that's not my style. Some of you may be aware we did an episode talking about it the strength and conditioning program. That came as a result of a few things; one, my love of both martial arts and physical fitness and finding ways to tie the two together, but it was also the recognition that hey you know what we have not had the best track record with maintaining inventory for physical products. That whole side of the business is so much harder than I ever imagined. You would think oh, you save some money or borrow some money and you order some stuff and it shows up and you sell it and you take the profit and you do it again and repeat, repeat, repeat and that's how it should work. But it's not how it works. Because you have things like the coronavirus that steps up and your major sales platform which in our case happens to be Amazon, yes, we sell far more on Amazon we do on your own website because that's where people go. There was a point in time where Amazon said you can't send us more stuff and people stop buying stuff because Amazon was taking forever to ship anything that wasn't masks her hand sanitizer and I'm not saying that they made the wrong decision I'm saying that it impacted our business. And that coupled with things like you know our incredibly picky quality control and some troublesome shipments and shipments getting delayed and all of these things have really made it hard for us to build a financial future on the product side of the business. We're small potatoes we really are, we're a small company. And I can only imagine what it's like trying to manage this stuff as one of our larger competitors. I do not envy that side of the business of what you're going to see moving forward and the current plan is at episode 501 will be a look into the future whereas 499 is a look backwards. But I expect it will be talking 51 were to talk more about these digital programs and how we can put some things out that don't require us to, that we don't have to hope everybody else does their job right in order for us to make a sale.

So, over the last five years of the show, we have tried and failed or at least not succeeded at a number of things. You know I take a look at the audio quality where it is now. You know, Julius has been a huge part of that but so has been this much more expensive microphone. Many of you don't know when we launch the show, I was using a \$25 Logitech headset and that's what we used for I have no idea how long it was it was a long time. Over a year I think. Because I wasn't confident in my ability to stay focused enough and stay close to this microphone. I mean that there's a skill in doing this and I want you to watch something hopefully Julius doesn't fix this part but I'm talking you now and then I turn away and I look over just to the side just no not even 90° to the left and the audio changes that dramatically and if you look over the right there



Episode 499 — The Last 5 years | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

something going on out the window, it happens again right? I get distracted, it happens and by having a headset with that Mike written from my face I couldn't help but speak into it. But now with this big fancy microphone, on this big articulating arm I think we've put of \$500 into this thing total, we get much better sound quality and I'm glad that we do. You can hear with the guests you know there are audio as it usually is good because they don't usually spend as much money on the microphone and that's okay. You know, here's another one, I have another sip of tea, it talking constantly and I need to do this. You see this is stuff you would usually get audio edited out. One of the things that changed early on not only on, one of the things that we did early on was we used Skype for our recording. I would you know, get a guess to sign up and send me their Skype handle and we would have a Skype chat and Skype out of the box didn't support recording the conversation so we had a third-party piece of software that would save the audio and that combination those two programs together failed on me so many times. And the final straw, those of you that know me know that vacation is not a word that I take lightly. I took a week off with some friends in January 20... I think 18 and we threw our motorcycles and a trailer we drove to Florida, you know, 24 hours each way and we rode around for the week and it was great but I think it is day three or four I got an email from Julius saying; hey Jeremy, the next four episodes are silence. The recording software we used actually recorded silence and my check until that point had always been is it recording, yup its recording, but there's no way to stop and check the audios working with the way that we were using and it never occurred to me that it wouldn't work well I got back everybody rescheduled. And trust me this is not the first time we lost episodes, there is one other person I'm thinking of Guro Peter Friedman, I really hope to have him back on the show we conducted a great interview and it was gone. It just wasn't there. And I said you know its time to switch and I looked at what everyone else was doing, I had a few friends with podcasts and they were all using zoom. So, two years ago, before most the world even knew what zoom was, we were using zoom to record because it did everything it needed to do all in one package and for free. And one of the things we're doing now is were contemplating audio quality of the paid versus the free version, there are some circumstances where just because of the way they're doing the recording, it might be beneficial for us to stay with paid version. The only time we paid for the software in the past as if we need more than two people because there's a limit on the free version of 40 minutes if you have, if you have more than for more than two people going and we don't do very many episodes with that but the audio quality difference work considering it.

What else didn't go well? Some of you may remember martial arts calendar we put a year into that. We put a year into trying to collate, to collect all of the different events that were happening, we were gonna start with the US and then roll it out globally and I actually paid someone. I think we put in at least \$1500 on this project maybe 2500 across the year to try and get a single spot where you could go and find out; hey are there any seminars in my area this weekend? Where's the nearest tournament this weekend? And we populated all that data, we went to every single circuit that was there and as we did it we were emailing people or letting everyone know and, in that year, we had I think four people submit events. That was it. And I was really down on that idea. It hurt because it made so much sense to me and whether the



Episode 499 — The Last 5 years | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

world wasn't ready maybe still wasn't ready, maybe we did a bad job of promoting it. There a lot of ways that you could look at and say well, here's how it could've gone better. But the point was we pulled the plug on that and took those resources, that time future revenue, and put it in other things. We have tried a lot of things. If any of you, our biggest product failure physical product failure was our belts. Anybody remembers the belts, you may have purchased one and if you purchased one, you got one of the ones that was good. Unfortunately, the factory that we asked, that we vetted, the factories we were working with for other things did not do belts and these folks sent us samples and they were phenomenal everything was great. The order was placed took longer than it was supposed to to arrive, we were short 15% or 20% in what we ordered. The lengths were inconsistent the thickness, was inconsistent, the width was inconsistent. Some of them embroidered our logo upside down, some of them, this was the one that blew me away; I said how can they even imagine this is okay. Some of them in order to get the correct length, sewed two smaller pieces together you could see it in the middle. And so, we took those belts and we threw up on Amazon as a one-time thing and we were selling them I think we tried selling them at \$20 and that didn't work. And in the end because just the way things in Amazon work it was cheaper for us to throw away 50 of them, it would've cost more for us to have them sent back to us and then what are we gonna do with them. So, we disposed of the number of belts if any of you out there have one of those, first and I guess only generation whistlekick belt hold onto it. That if we if we go somewhere, let say that better. When we go somewhere, that we will be worth something. So, save your first gen whistlekick belt even if it's not perfect.

I'm intentionally slurping the tea so you know that I'm still here haven't gone away. What else did we screw up? We got some episodes where I'll be honest I thought the guest was terrible because we don't have any conversation ahead of time with guests. I don't want to do that. I don't want to have to spend more time talking to them for we talked to them. Because then they share all the good stories, I tried doing this early on with some people and they would all your good stories and then when they told me the story the second time they weren't as into it because I knew they'd already told me even though you listeners hadn't heard it before. So, you know we had a few duds but not very many. Out of the 500 episodes I don't think we've had even five so I'm to call it a 99% success rate and I think that's pretty darn good. What also we been successful with? You is a community have kept me accountable. We have had amazing conversation over email, we've had great conversation in the martial arts radio behind-the-scenes Facebook group, and you have all stepped up to send in guest suggestions and tell me what you think and where you're at in the world in your training I love getting those emails. I get a few week every week and have for for years and it continues to be the greatest thing that I take away from this is the connection with so many of you. I have people in this world now who I consider friends I've never met them, I hope to will train with them. You know somebody like Sensei Jared Wilson has become a good friend. We message and tease each other and support each other with our podcasts and we had the chance to train together once, but then you got someone else like Sensei Ando who I consider a friend someone who I would really go to bat for because I believe in what he's doing, he does a great job with fight for happy life. And



Episode 499 — The Last 5 years | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

if you're not falling both of those gentlemen you should be because they they produce wonderful content. I've never met Ando, I want to, I want to want train with him, I wanna hang out with him, grab a beer whatever it is because I think is a really good guy and the numbers of people that I have quote unquote met in that way, man, it's mind-boggling.

Now the one thing we don't do with the show is release numbers we don't talk about you know, this episodes done better than this episode. But there are couple things that I can tell you, we've been downloaded in just about every country on earth. Last time I looked it was something like 175 countries out of I think there are 254 recognized countries quite a few of them are islands, Pacific island nations where there aren't very many people and Internet is sporadic so doesn't surprise me that there are so many martial artists clamoring to get content that we have been downloaded but if you can think of the name of a country, we've been downloaded there. Of course, it's the English-speaking countries where we have the most traction because the show is in English and having the transcripts for those of you that don't know we do a transcript eventually, on every single episode we we had that the first hundred hundred 50 we didn't have that going so we been slowly going back adding them back in because it takes time if you imagine listening to this whole thing and then writing down every word, that's a lot of work. And then sometimes we get guest with thick accents and that makes it hard for the people doing the transcription but we do everything we can and then once that transcription happens, then we get people who are able to use Google translate or whatever to read it if not listen to it from other languages and that's been great. That's been a lot of fun and I love seeing the download numbers last I knew and I'm in a give you kind of a round number here, if you add up this is to our website and downloads of the episode, and YouTube hits, and everything else related to the show it is well over half-million, it's something like 600 something thousand downloads. Which no, were not Joe Rogan, he does that and in one episode. But in our world and what we do that's been pretty big and we've been recognized for that and I don't want to talk more about that because that I feel uncomfortable, one of the things that I've been working on over the last five years is embracing this odd sort of status that I have. I've had people come up to me and say your voice is familiar, are you the guy with the podcast? Which blew me away this was years ago and I've had people get genuinely excited. I met a women who jumped up and down and she met me. That's odd to me does because to me I'm just me. To some of you out there I represent something more and I don't know that I'm ever going to be comfortable with that but I accept it. I will continue to do everything I can to further the traditional martial arts because they have given so much to me. They have given me a career, they have given me purpose, they have given me friends, they have given me physical skills, and emotional coping skills, I have hinted at it at times but I will say it point blank right now I do not believe I would've survived my teenage years without martial arts, I don't think I would've made it. To say it in an even more pointed way I likely would've taken my life. I don't know that I will ever fully tell the story around that because it's hypothetical I'm still here so I don't want to dwell on that. But when you look at what we're doing and wonder why is Jeremy so passionate, why is he willing to risk bankruptcy and give up his social life and do so many the other things for this company. It's because I feel obligated, I feel like this is my opportunity to leave a mark on the world, it's through the show



Episode 499 — The Last 5 years | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

and through whistlekick as a broader concept and the... I guess this ability to reach people and share some ideas.

Now some of those ideas aren't always met with complete open minds. I feel very strongly that one should not define what a martial art is and is not because none of us have the authority to determine that. Somebody out there will always say that this or this he is or is not a martial art. I can imagine that every single style that we training today back when it was founded, the founder likely had someone telling them you can't do that, that's not right. Who says that you get to determine this is a new style? And the definition of what is and is not a style leads to the conversation around Mcdojo's and my comment, my recommendation there is the same as it's always been; focus on you and your training. Stop worrying about what everyone else is doing. Does it harm the martial arts to have bad martial arts out there? Yes. But you know the best way to make what bad martial artists are doing go away? Create such a gap between them and all the rest of us that no one can look at and think that it's martial arts. Focus on you focus on getting better that is always been my suggestion because it's what you can control. I can't control how any of you hear what I'm saying today, I can't control whether you like me or agree with me and frankly I've gotten a lot better at not caring because if you don't like me and you don't like what I have to say you can just turn off the show. Have we received hate? Yup. Have we had people that get so bent out of shape about something I say that they feel the need to write a long rambling email or comment on a show notes page? Yup! Guess what, if they took the time to do that, It means I struck a chord with them. It means I made them think and if you know me and how I look at the show, my goal is to make you think. I don't care that you agree, I care that you think. If I say something and it sparks some inner dialogue for you and in the end, you are diametrically, completely, absolutely, opposed to what I'm saying, that's fine because I made you think. I don't like when people parrot things back. I don't like when your opinions are forged in the words of someone else. We all need to be able to think for ourselves, we need to be able to train for ourselves.

There is a tangent that I was not expecting to have with this show. Maybe I should've video this one.

Where we at? We get closing up on 30 minutes. I'm gonna keep going, who knows how long this is going to take. If you go back all the way back episode 2, we had a guest on Mr. Glenn Stafford. Friend of mine. Someone I think the world of, love him dearly. Glenn was supposed to be the host of this show. Most of you don't know that I think we've talked about that once. Probably talked about that on his episode Glenn was intended to be the host the show, we met we talked about it, we worked on format, we talked about tech, we had all worked out because I was can work on other things. If you take a look at the way I run this company I try to get other people to do other stuff so I can go on to building another thing and then handing off to somebody else, that methods work pretty well. But as we were getting ready we weren't far off from planning our first few episodes, Glenn had a stroke at 45 years old, nearly died. Was according to the story I have heard probably within 30 minutes of dying had he not reached the



Episode 499 — The Last 5 years | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

hospital in time. The only reason he did is because Glenn's fiancé, wonderful woman named Debbie is a nurse. Glenn started feeling some symptoms called Debbie she said you get your butt to the hospital right now. As soon as he was good to move, they moved him to Tennessee where he lives now. He's mostly back, he is pretty darn close to a hundred percent 98-99% he's recovered well. But that meant that we had this idea for the show and no one run it. Who was left? Me. So I reluctantly took the helm here. Now if you would know me five years ago you know that I'm not really a big fan of being front and center. I like getting work done, I like making an impact, I've never been a big fan of being the person out front, the person with the microphone. If we were in a band, I never would've been the lead singer or the lead anything. But in growing the show it became very clear that I had to learn how to work past that, how to put that aside. And I think I've done a pretty good job of that. I am not the same person now that I was five years ago. Jeremy now coming up on 41 is very different from Jeremy at 36. And I assume next year and the year after that I'll continue to grow and get better because you know, just like martial arts training I'm trying to grow, trying to be a better person as we make the show better and everything else we do. So, while I am sad that Glenn had to go through that and I wish it had never happened. The outcome I think for both of us ended up okay. I know he's happy with his life, would it have gone exactly the same? I don't know who knows when he would've moved. I was fortunate enough to attend her wedding they're a wonderful couple I love them both dearly. But I would've had this opportunity for growth and those of you who know me personally, you've likely seen a change. Nobody's told me me as I say that nobody's told me but I don't know how often people tell you that youth grown. Certainly at 5'7 seven on a good day, nobody told me growing up I was growing... I stopped growing up pretty early.

I think back to the guests that we've had, the people that we've talked to we've lost too. Hanshi Jim Smith who I was fortunate enough to meet a couple times when we had the whistlekick tournament in 2016, I invited him I said please come and compete as my guest. That was great competition. We had 6-8 10th degree black belt competing that day and Hanshi's episode was early on, it was in the first 30 maybe even the first 25 and when he passed away I reposted it somewhere and had a few people write to me and say thank you. You know the stories of this man that these people held dear they're now preserved forever and that was one of the goals. You know one of the other people that we've lost that I was fortunate enough to talk to was Grandmaster Jhoon Rhee. I mean that's just about as iconic a martial arts name as you get and his episode if you listen to it was odd, it wasn't a lot about martial arts but it was about him and what was important to him at that time which you know as a man who was, let's face it sick, and we could probably say now in hindsight dying and knew he was dying. He said the things were important him. So, we have the stories from these two gentlemen and for all these other wonderful amazing people and these stories are available forever. When we launch the show people would tell me; oh well, you know what it you have the first you know, make the last 10 episodes free and if they want older ones they've got to pay. No. That was important to me not to do. I don't want any interviews that we ever do to be restricted by money. I want the stories of these people tell to be made available all over the place. Some of you know that we've started taking some of the interviews and turning them into books because there are some people who





Episode 499 — The Last 5 years | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

don't listen to podcasts and you know they could read the transcript for free but maybe they want it on their Kindle. We sell for \$0.99 and some of those people maybe they want to hold it in a paperback book and we sell this for 3.99 because when you add everything up, we barely make any money on those .99 cents is the lowest we can charge for a Kindle book and I think that the 3.99 is I think we're making like \$0.20. If you know how retail work some things it .99 [00:32:49.18].

If you made it this far in the episode you probably really like the show because I can't imagine anybody listening to these ramblings unless they find a lot of value in the show and my words. And to those of you still listening I want to say thank you I appreciate you. If you've written to me, you likely know that something I'm fond of saying is without people listening to the show I would just be a crazy person talking to a microphone. Because without an audience the work that we do the things that I do with this microphone they're kind of a waste of time. But because of you, this matters, because of you I have a responsibility and I take that responsibility very seriously. I try really hard not to step on what the guests say, I try hard on Thursday episodes to express my opinions in ways that I've really spent time thinking about. I never want anyone to blindly accept anything I say or do and I hope you don't, I hope I continue to receive respectful emails because they overwhelmingly are, email, social media, etc., challenges to the things that I think in and say because that's how I get better. And we can correlate that out with sparring we trial these techniques but it's when we work together with them we find out where do these fit, are they useful? Oh, it's useful in this situation but maybe not this. And this is how I develop my definition of martial arts, it's how I've arrived so many of these quotes that you might see flying around social media, on our social media. If you purchase the martial artist handbook you see some of those quotes in the text and in the chapter headings and I'm honored and humbled that people care about what I say and it's never been about me. I think this is where we'll end it. And if you know me you might believe what I'm about to say, if you don't know me, you may not believe and that's okay cause is it doesn't change the truth. I have goals and goals for whistlekick because I have goals for martial arts. Our business model here at whistlekick is very simple if it gets people into or keeps them in traditional martial arts, we'll do it. Because I believe that everyone is better with at least a little bit of martial arts training. Where would the world be if everyone trained in some form of traditional martial arts for six months? It is the only thing that leaves those lasting lessons. I don't know too many people who reflect fondly on six months of soccer as a child and say you know that really, I'm glad I did that, I want my kids to do six-month soccer. But I've heard many, many people say I did karate or tae kwon do or whatever for six months when I was a kid and it really helped me a lot, I want to make sure my kids do that too. I want everybody to train, I want everybody to have the opportunity to train and I want martial arts to continue to move forward and if there was a magic wand I could wave that I'd fade away in figurative or literal way and those goals would accomplish, I would do it in a heartbeat. Because I love martial arts and what is done for me and so many others that much.

This is the point when we wind down the episodes I usually go into my fancy closing, see I've got my sheet here to make sure that I remember everything but I'm not going to do that today.



Episode 499 — The Last 5 years | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

There are times when we recorded an episode where the importance of that episode and the words that I'm saying, it feels hollow to follow them with something like that. So, I'm not going to do that. I am gonna ask you for a few things though. I'm going to ask you to continue to have an open mind, to continue to train, and to continue to look for ways to become a better person inside and outside of martial arts because and maybe even despite martial arts. Martial arts as a pursuit is only as good as we are as individuals. The more jerks we have participating, it brings martial arts down. So, if you love martial arts the way I do, the best things you can do are be as good of a person as you can and spread that good through martial arts. We're all the caretakers of this thing that we love so let's treat it with respect it deserves. Until next time, train hard, smile, and have a great day!