



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello, you are listening to whistlekick martial arts radio episode 520 with today's guest, Kaiden Gad. Who I am? I'm Jeremy Lesniak. I'm whistlekick's founder and host here for the show and if you're unfamiliar, everything we do in whistlekick is in support of the traditional martial arts. If you want to know more about what that means, go to whistlekick.com. That's where you'll find everything that we're doing and one of the things that we're doing is we've got a store. We got some products that we make and if you use the code `PODCAST15` you can save 15% on shirt, or hat, or a training program. There's a bunch of good stuff over there. This show gets its own website, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com and we're bringing you two new episodes every single week all under the heading of connecting, educating, and entertaining traditional martial artists worldwide. If you want to support that work, there are number of ways you can help us. You can make a purchase, you could share this episode, you could follow us on social media, you could tell a friend about what we're doing here at whistlekick on the show. Pick up one of our books in Amazon. Leave a review on Facebook, Apple podcast, google somewhere or you could support the Patreon. If you think the new show worth doing a worth sixty-three cents apiece not to mention all the back episodes, consider supporting us at five dollars a month. You could do as little as 2, you could do as much as a hundred but five dollars a month, that's where most people end up. If you go to patreon.com/whistlekick and sign up there. If you do, we're going to give you more content. We don't talk about this too often. I don't like turning this



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

show into a little bit of commercial but bottom line, the show costs money and if you're willing to step up and help us out, we're willing to give you even more. Today's guest is, well I guess I'll call him a man of the sword. It's an interesting conversation. It's one that doesn't follow a path like we've had before. I know I say that often and maybe it's just because I'm continually blown away at the diversity of the guest that we have, the uniqueness of their experiences. I think you will be too, today. This was a good one and I hope you enjoy it. Kaiden Gad, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio!

Greg Downey:

Jeremy, thank you very much for having me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey! Thanks for coming along. Thanks for doing this. We've been chatting for over fifteen minutes now. It doesn't usually happen this way. Usually, and this is a good thing, you know. Audience, I want to let you know. I was warned at the beginning that our guest is blunt and might not respond with long-winded answers but I have to say, sir, everything that you just said kind of contradicts.

Greg Downey:

Well, I'm thrilled that you feel that way.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You just had a great conversation.

Greg Downey:

How do you feel that way?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I do!

Greg Downey:

And that I'm just certain that you will run into it during this conversation but hey, we will make it through just fine.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We will. It's like everybody's first martial arts class. You show up, and it doesn't matter how many you've watched. It doesn't matter how many people have you talked to about it. There's still a little bit of uncertainty. When you start and the instructor can sit there and pretty much hold your hand and you are still going to feel uncertain but that hour, what a synergy there? You know it's weird. We're five hundred episodes in and I've just picked up on that.



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Greg Downey:

Cool.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, of course, we're here to talk about martial arts. We're going to talk about a lot of things related to martial arts and I found the best way to start, is to just roll the tape back. So, if you would indulge me with probably the most simplistic question, I could ask you. How did you get started on martial arts?

Greg Downey:

I love to fight. My earliest memory of being a kid, being in a fight. My first fight was I simply want to fight with someone and I don't have a lot of peaceful harmony, desire to become a martial artist that other people have had. We'll get into later how it has benefited my life but I wanted to fight. I wanted to be better at it and so, as a kid, it was just something that kind of occurred organically. When I was twelve, I got involved in traditional martial arts. I was fascinated with the sword. When I saw my first sword, it was magical. That is what I wanted to learn no matter what.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you remember the first sword you saw?

Greg Downey:

I don't. Probably on TV. I mean, there were a lot of them around. Probably on TV. I remember thinking that's incredible. You know, that's what I want to have and do but 1981 to 1982, outside of what you heard about fencing. There wasn't really sword school. I started my martial arts career in Idaho, figuring out my way up into sword martial arts but my driving goal was I wanted to win the fight that I was in. So, I started martial arts thinking I just want to be a better fighter.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What did fighting represent to you?

Greg Downey:

Winning. Victory.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Greg Downey:



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

It didn't matter if I was climbing a cliff or going on a hike or whatever I was doing. I wanted not just to be the best out of whatever group that I was in or at the best of what I am doing, I wanted perfection in absolutely everything I put my mind to and I could say, as an adult, that is my every day, to this day. It's this driving state of mind, to really seek that. I've lost as many fights than I've won if not more but I learned so much throughout that process of need and necessity so getting into martial arts, again this is the 80s, so when martial arts hit the mainstream eighty, it was magical, mystical, you believe that black belt was could not defeated. So much has surrounded that. Me being awe-inspired to want to get involved, I was insatiable at that point

Jeremy Lesniak:

That drive for perfection, that's what I'm hearing. I don't know if you use that word. That being the best, it's something that I've seen, with a lot of martial artist. It's something I think that we, as martial artists, don't so much cultivate it but we come in with that attitude. Then we find this thing that hey, the harder I work at this the better I get and then, I can continue to work harder and I can get better. There're still few things to like that in life, the way I'd like to put it, you get back exactly what you put in. Where did that mindset come from? Is that something you learn from your parents? Or maybe encountered to your parents?

Greg Downey:

Well, both of my parents were definitely driven people in their own regard and I'm very opposite. They separated at an early age. The one is a classic work. You work hard, very hard. Two jobs. You're going to have everything you want for yourself. The other, work hard but was complete. My mother taught me that if you believe that you can do it, you're going to do it, period. Like, if you believe in yourself, and you believe in achieving that dream, then it's going to happen. That definitely is one of the forefronts of my character. I have to say it sticks with me. When you have one side of the family working hard very hard physically and also the other side that believes in achieving your dreams beyond that. I think that I had the best kind of guide in that regard, towards achieving of what I set out to do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Tell us a bit more about your childhood. I think we got some pieces that we want to kind of Lego together.

Greg Downey:

I was going to be then very simple. I've been a daredevil my whole life. I took a fall at age eight and I lost my memory from age eight and below. So, I have no idea what I did before age eight.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay!



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Greg Downey:

Between age eight and age twelve. You know I went to school and I ventured around a small town in Milford, Connecticut, everywhere I possibly could and friendship was vastly put to me. It really was. I made close bonds some bonds that I have. It's going to be impossible for me to make it through our talk without bringing up two gentlemen which is Rob and Joe. There were several reasons. Because I met them when I was around eleven or twelve and then, they were nine or ten and we were all getting involved in martial arts. At that time, and they are still my best friends to this day, until martial arts. So, we have been friends for the same time that we've been studying martial arts thirty-five years and they kind of pushed me. So then, if you fast forward to my childhood, I went to school, I trained, and I went to work. I started my first full-time job at thirteen. I've been working full-time ever since then when I wasn't in school. When I wasn't at work, I would train an hour to two hours a day to outmost of my childhood and half the time was with those two gentlemen. We were outside our dojo. We got a lot of open space for training or sparring and other martial arts. Definitely varying degrees is what we do and I want to say that I perhaps had the best dojo in the world. You know living in Milford, Connecticut, I had a beach, a mountain, a forest, an open area, place to climb, jump, balance, train. It was incredible and we used it. We used everything like it was our dojo. Everything that we could. Any way that we could make it harder to kick, punch, grapple, sword fight. We just did that. Joseph, he was a natural athlete. Eventually, got into some acting and voice over which he does professionally Rob was a gymnast training for the Olympics that time. So, my competitors were two incredibly competitive people who taught the same thing, the perfection and the drive and it was like, iron sharpening iron throughout my childhood to be fit and the world of our friends that exist around us has circled around our drive for martial arts adventure, all the way to my teens and beyond.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's certainly not uncommon for people to end up with some pretty solid friends from their time training but for those people to remain such strong friends decades later and all of them to continue training that's pretty abnormal. So, I'm wondering, was there something you could look back on in the early days that could have foreshadowed where you're all at today?

Greg Downey:

Possibly. I mentioned that friendship was important to me. I think that as I got involved in sword at that time, it's not something that I necessary subscribe to right now. There was an ideal of honor and honor in the sense of, that it was almost something mystical. I believed that this is what your friend wants like they're a brother to you and that was how they should be treated and however, I came across that belief, initially, that it was engrained in me, I made it that reality and then of course, what happened is, there was nothing mystical. We spent so much time together growing up. I mean, we were pre-high school that means we experienced everything you were going to experience through high school and college. We experienced girls, and marriages, and job loss, death in the families, death of our friends, all



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

the same time training in martial arts. These things bound together. Rob has physically saved my life four times. Joseph and I have both saved our lives and not like talk but physically saved. So that's kind of a bond that you formed, and I can say that there's a level of trust that you have. We all have students now. I'm used to training so long. You get to see the people they associate with those people will often become your friends and that kind of bond gets stronger because, instead of moving away, bear in mind I live in the San Francisco area and Joseph lives nine hours away in San Diego area, and Rob lives in Florida and we still see each other regularly at competitions and just come to hang out. You have that bond but also all of Rob's friends and extended family, and all Joe's friends and extended family kind of become mine because the community becomes so tight especially around Kenjutsu. The art of the sword is big now but what we do isn't so big and what we're doing back then in the 80s, 90s was incredibly small. So, it kind of binds you together. All that aside, they are a pair of the two best men that I know. Joe, Rob and, of course, Nick. They're simply generous, and honest. You pick up the phone you say I need to see you. You don't have to give a reason, hang up. You know they're going to see you and. They're that kind of people. They always have been. That hasn't changed in three and half decades.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm wondering, how often you reflect on this? Because when people come on the show, there's a good mix of things. they say things that they have said before and say you know I really haven't thought of it that way. I can tell that you value and appreciate these two men and I suspect that they know that but I'm wondering if you, recognize the rarity of these bonds?

Greg Downey:

Probably not. Like most of my friends, I have a line. It's ironic. Because I have friends and I talk with associates of mine and I kind of have a line, you're either you're a friend or you're not a friend, or you're a friendly associate. I think a lot of people will make a mistake. They're friendly with somebody, or they have a mutual connection either through martial arts class or work and they think they're your friend. For me, I don't. If you're my friend, I trust you. I respect you. It's mutual and you've earned it. It's not an easy thing. I'm not an easy person to be around. However, our talk will reflect me in any kind of positive light there is the other side that we might not touch upon. That is incredibly direct with very little empathy and I expect the people that I'm around to share some of those absolute traits. That kind of dedication and honesty, drive, and willingness. I just will not put up with it and I will call it out. I have lost friends by telling them you're not my friend because you show no interest and things have changed and that's it. It's over. Where there a lot of things that just fade away. I don't believe in that possibility and there are times I called people out and we forge an even stronger bond where I realized, Wait a second. This is the kind of person that he is, and he's expecting me to do this. He's willing to do it. He or she, and that happens. I take it for granted in the sense that it is the expectation that surrounds me and kind of the blessing that I've got from other people that I've considered to be my close friend. Rob and Joe are great. I can give you a list of ten other very close friends that operate in the same manner that it requires no explanation. If I needed them, they would be here and sometimes even when I don't realize,



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

they do, they're here. We talk about honor. I don't believe that honor is something that really you can teach but it's something that grows in a person. It's something that is by their action. It's the actions of these individuals that has shown me that I'm trusted and believed in and depended upon. I strongly believed that we picked our friends in life as people that we can depend on. I don't see my friend as somebody that going to hold me and tell me everything's going to be okay. I see my friend that's going to carry me when I have two broken legs. That is going to tell me it's not going to be okay and you need to get off your ass and get back in the fight. That is what I see out of my friends and family. People that help throughout life, friends and family.

Jeremy Lesniak:

This sounds very militaristic. That's not quite the right word but it sounds, I have not served. I did not serve. None of my direct family. I don't have good stories. A lot of my understanding of that brotherhood in the military comes from conversations with some friends and of course, media. What you're describing really seems to line up with that is very high standards and yet this dedication. Did you serve?

Greg Downey:

I was a cop. I was a cop and I'm a bodyguard currently. I also got good friends who have served in the military as well. So, I can see how we can come across in that manner. If you're in a military and you're taking law enforcement or an officer, you're saying that you're willing to give your life. I taught the company that I currently work for. I taught in their defensive tactics program to bodyguards for years and I would always say in my first meeting where, if you're not willing to give your life for somebody you know nothing about, this is the wrong job for you. I believed that. I believe that, that is something that has to be a part of the course. I couldn't teach them how to do that. I could teach them moves, they're even, just like I teach students. I can't make them into a person that will suddenly stop their car get out and save somebody from being beaten to death. That desire. I know that I had that desire growing up. I know that and I respected that. In Kenjutsu, when you get to the point when you're fighting steel even though the weapons are bladed, even though you're in armor, there can be a significant chance of injury and without control, you're holding the life of your partner in your hands. Every time you walk out in a fight and that forms a kind of bond. I've had the honor and the privilege of teaching a veteran that has seen combat and talking in line with what they've seen versus what I saw as a police officer and I realized that you just kind of mentioned that there is that kind of bond. I think that that bond in martial arts isn't dissimilar if you make it that way.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Talk more about that.

Greg Downey:



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

The bond itself or what martial arts brings into it?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Martial arts aspect. I feel like, you could launch into an essay about it. I feel like you're holding back on me.

Greg Downey:

I could. It's like I'm sure we're going to get into this conversation where we'll talk about the Western Circle Sword Fighters and I can't reference one without the other. The group starts you out training with wooden weapons then you reach certain level and then you fight steel, and you fight [22:32] throughout and you'll use sharpened steel and you'll spar with the pre-bladed weapon but there is a very big difference. Western Circle allows drafting even to the face. It's one of the most dangerous things you can do with a sword. A lot of organizations don't allow that. They allow full contact in the fighting and the idea isn't point scoring, but you're there to defeat your opponent or within the rules of respect. You're allowed to use hand to hand combat, you can use daggers. It's not supposed to be fair. If your opponent hits the ground and they fall. You can allow them to get up if you want to but you're expected to defeat that person and as merciless as that sounds, no one is likely to get in a sword fight out on the street but what they can take from Kenjutsu, what I have taken, this will lead directly to the bond, I assure you, is the immediacy of action. I have been in fistfight, I've sparred with gloves and aluminum and I've done hand to hand, some jujitsu. None of that really prepared me for the actual violence that I saw in real life. I always described violence as something that most people that have been in a car crash. It happens immediately and your whole world is crashing around you and you have to act. If you're trained, you're going to act on training. Kenjutsu is the only thing I've seen that does sword fighting. You're standing there one second, sword to sword and then Marshalls will say, "begin" then the bell ring. Then, you're going to fight. That fight often lasts a second or half a second or a second a half. If a few blocks can actually make it through and the steel sword crashes onto you and then it's over. You're realizing that in that mad second your whole world changed, if you're trained. If you do that enough and you know enough about that person, you've gone to events and they have done everything they have to get to that point. That bond becomes natural. It's something that is shared. It's an understanding and it's difficult to put into words to say how you achieved it and then not difficult. Most people that I have fought in steel, I knew that there was a level of trust. The more we fought and the more dedication I fought them the more that that bond formed. If you take that, if that's your core, and I have to sadly admit that ninety-five percent of my friends are martial artists and the other four percent are bodyguards or cops and then the other one percent somehow got involved with me. So, you have that. That's what's you're surrounded by then you add to the fact that you have mutual interests. That you have mutual friends. They are respectful. They are honest. They are reasonably good people. That bond becomes even stronger. I would like to say that anyone that listens to this radio show and considers me a friend knows that I'm that person they can call. That they share that bond and that they know that without question because it's a means of how I live my life every day.



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

I would imagine that someone with such strong principles brings a lot of those standards and those expectations into their instruction. How does that manifest? If I was to walk into your school. What might I experience that maybe would be able to? I'm guessing a little different from what other schools might do. Are you stricter? What would I see?

Greg Downey:

That's a great question. I mentioned that I trained in multiple martial arts not very long. I have not had, the two longest instructors I had, [27:04] were no more than a year. Other than that, I haven't had very long instructions. However, before training in the [27:14] Japanese Dojo under Sensei [27:17] I had only experienced, what I deemed a version of an Instructor should be. The good thing around was a lot of fast. You can partner up whoever you wanted to. If you're always kind of worried who I'm going to get in class. You were kind of moved along with it or at the same time, you can rant to somebody. I got into a street fight. It escalated very quickly. I'm bleeding from my mouth. There was none of that goofing around and there's something missing. When I walked into this traditional Japanese dojo and I casually stepped on a mat, I was screamed at. There was no sign, but I was screamed at. I accepted it, and I nearly began to learn on the rules. There was no talking while you're training. Classes were two hours and you had to make eye contact when you spoke and you could only answer hai or iie, yes or no period. There were no uhms, there were no ahhs and any lack of confidence was called out in front of the whole class. There was no illusion and I loved it. This is how I wish I got into training when I was in school. When you walk into my class, whether you are a trainee, and there are seven attainable levels that goes from L-1 to L-7, whether you are level one, or you are level seven, when you walk into my dojo with the same expectations there. You will look me in the eye. You will speak with confidence. You will answer my questions. You will know that if I am teaching, you will do what I say when I tell you to do it and if you don't want to, there is the door. There is a choice and there isn't a choice. When you're learning, you have no choice but do what you're told to do and if you don't like that, leave and don't come back. It's simple because I deal in fact. I'm not going to teach what is my opinion of the universe is or bonds. I'm not going to teach you that opinion. I'm going to teach you what I know to be the truth about that martial arts. I'm only going to teach you that. My expectation is you're going to give me everything that you have. That you're going to pursue that perfection while you're in my presence and that you will, in turn, and grow from it. The biggest thing that the people run into is they will start talking and I will say stop, look me in the eye. I will say stuff like there's no uhm, there is no ah. Those are weak in between words. There's no okay. There either is or there is not. So they're brought into this harsh reality. They are not learning how to hold a sword. They are learning how to walk and how to communicate in a manner that displays them as confident and strong as much as possible. Everything that they need to survive in a fight for, sword fights. I think, the biggest reality for example, the Western Circle is not for profit. None of the instructors, there is five or six schools take any money from teaching. They volunteer their time and they teach. No one just walks into a class, by invitation only. You have to watch for two



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

weeks. Just watch. After you watch for two weeks, then you're allowed to participate for two weeks. Then you're taken aside, and at that point, gone over the website and watch. You've seen the teaching method and you're asked if this is really what you want to do? And if it's not, then thank you, have a nice life but if it is, then you're expected to make it to Level 2. Make that dedication to say that I'm willing to commit. This is my goal. I will do it from the very beginning.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How would younger you have responded to you as an instructor?

Greg Downey:

I would have thought that I could've beaten me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh! Not even close to the answer I've expected. Okay. Wow.

Greg Downey:

I'm sorry I said that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's good! I like when stuff comes out of left field because that means we're going to learn something really big about you. Why? Why would you have thought that?

Greg Downey:

I don't know if you could blame my mother, my father or me. I believe there is nothing that I could do. I have never met a sword fighter I couldn't defeat. There's a first time, but there's never been anybody that I found that I couldn't beat. It was just a matter of time. And so, granted 12-year old me would've lost, 18-year old me would've lost, 30-year old me wouldn't even stand a chance but I would've believed, looking in my eyes and hearing those things, one is that, I could do this. Behind my mind, behind saying [32:40] I would be thinking I will beat you. It might not be today or tomorrow, it's inevitable. That would have been my thought.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And that's the mindset that you've had with everything.

Greg Downey:

To some degree. Unfortunately, yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Maybe it's fortunate, maybe it's unfortunate. The reason I'm kind of poking at that a little bit is because I can relate.

Greg Downey:

Great.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It doesn't mean necessarily you're the best on every day but it means, given enough time, given research, your own intelligence, your own experience. You can devise a strategy to overcome whatever the obstacle is. Is that a fair assessment?

Greg Downey:

It's an exact assessment.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Greg Downey:

I believe that you lose when you're dead, or when you give up. That's when you lose. Because if you lost something, that doesn't mean you should stop. You keep fighting. You keep trying. If you're dead, you're dead. Then, you have an acceptable excuse for losing. Other than that, there is nothing. When I was in the police academy, they taught me a profound thing that stuck with my life. They said that cops have died from wounds that were not technically deadly, from shock, from just giving up. Cops then survived bullet wounds, stab wounds that should have killed them. That just linked up with everything that I believed about fighting. In the western circle, if you fall down and you cry out because you got bruised, you're like I'm injured. My first comment is, are you injured? Do we need to call 911? Or are you just bruised and you're whining? Because if you need to leave, by all means crawl out of the sparring circle and leave. If you need medical attention, we'll give you medical attention. Most people have never been treated that way. They've been treated like, Oh my God! You got a bruise. Let's check it out! They need to realize that if they're in a situation, combat situation, that they have to assess and they will assess and they'll have that drive. I tell people I don't care if you show up at the fight mad, glad, sad. I don't care if you scream in combat providing you're not ever changing the consent of fighting the sparring into motions that you're making an intent to hurt. The same token, if you start crying while you're fighting, go ahead and cry but fight. Fight! Whatever you do, you fight because that is what life deals you when you're going to have to fight or whatever you're going to have to fight for, physical, you're generally not going to pick the fight and you can't stop because you feel something hurts or because you're real sad because it's creeping in, it's part of it and there is that personality where hanging out with Kaiden Gad in the martial art environment is great. Hiking is ok but not so much on a barbecue or you want to stay on



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

the trail when you're hiking or there is that thing that you don't want to do and you believe we absolutely have to do it and we have to do it then and it has to be perfect and there's the drawback of that personality.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Have you ever pushed yourself too far? When you look at this attitude. This attitude, where I'm going to set this up, I've got a feeling of where you're going. I understand this. I think you and I are similar in this way but not all of the audience is. So, when you look at these really high standards, this drive to be the best. Sometimes, that can lead to some unhealthy patterns. It can lead to some damaging events and I'm wondering if you got any of those you might want talk about.

Greg Downey:

I'm sure that the people who listens to this that know me would be raising their hands for a whole bunch of time. Having been around me at times where I push myself but they are incredibly rare. There are two, and they are more recently that I can assess. One is you going to have to put up some of the things that have had a background. In the Western Circle, there's seven levels of wood, seven levels of steel, and a lot like other martial arts, you have to do things. You've got to learn moves. You've got to have timing. You've got to have a certain amount of matches, you have to know some katas. You actually need to know these katas. I helped found the organization. I've done it all. All, but one level of steel. I've done every proficiency. I've done every level and then there are other levels. The Western Circle respects three levels. Black way, black chain, black ring and then there are things that are called training contract and these contracts are a lot like a college semester, so to speak, where you get a course, coursework for 6 months. Let's say, they range from 3 months, 6 months, a year to 2 years and the average is just 1. You have this contract, it's written out. generally by your Kaiden. You sign it, you try to achieve these goals and practice by this week, 500 matches, make 10,000 circle cuts, practice 10 hours of cutting, workout 3 days a week with your endurance. It's made up of things that you don't get in class because in a class, they go to class, they receive 2 hours of sessions and the other Kaidens say great, I want you to train at least 2 times a week outside of class and you go and do that. The average time of somebody practicing kenjutsu and that's it but then there's other people, they want to get better. They have contracts that they take and, since I have completed all the Western Circle requirements, other requirements and other organizations, I am constantly seeking other ways to push myself and so, I seek training contract and some I'll write myself and give to other instructors that I respect and they'll add to it and they'll be my mentors and they'll hold me accountable so that I pass them and recently, last year, I created a contract and the contracts are named and I named this The Way of the Evening Blade and it was all about fighting. I believe, you should spend approximately 60% of your time training to fight and about 40% of your time sparring or competing and you need to have that balance and I want it and I believed that for a very long time. I wanted to see if maybe I was wrong and if you just spar, that you would get good enough. The western circle has a competition each year called the best of the best. It's a competition fighters come from all over the country and they fight to see



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

who's the best fighter and they have to fight everybody. Everybody gets to circle so if I'm in the circle, I fight the other 15 competitors and I step out and if the circle comes out and I fight them once at their circle so roughly, 35 matches and the winner is the one with the highest victory percentage and that's the person that has won the most so 3 months prior to that, I designed a contract that was 1,000 matches in 100 days and I thought oh yeah, seems possible and it was unreasonable. The amount of training that I had to put in, the amount of sparring that I had to actually do in the art of the sword was incredibly intense and at the end of it, I remember thinking this was too much and I actually printed up the contract, which I do in the dojo, I have a library of my contracts and every contract, everything I've taken, I actually put a lock on it so that no student will open it and be like wow, this was a great idea. That was a terrible idea. It was completely off balanced. It was focused on one thing only, sparring. It was dangerous because I kept thinking I have 50 matches, I'm exhausted. I need to do 25 more. That's not why. If you're exhausted, you need to stop so you don't get hurt and you don't hurt someone and it was just so heavily focused on victory and fighting that threw out the window the core structure that you need to be practicing and constantly move and the only thing that I was practicing because I was fighting people was better moves to use in combat, specific moves and then [42:08] and then beyond that, I took a recent challenge and try to make 100,000 cuts in 30 days and I wound up tearing out part of my shoulder muscle and was convinced by 2 very close friends that it was time to stop. That was obviously too much. Other than that, can't think of any other single time in my life that I pushed myself too far. If anything, not far enough.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's talk about that 100,000 cuts. I just did some pretty quick maths and there's not a lot of time to sleep in there.

Greg Downey:

It's 4,000 cuts a day and what I was doing is I would get up, I'd make a series of cuts and while I was working, I would set a timer so I would step aside and then I would make some more cuts.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How many at a time?

Greg Downey:

It would range from 100, to 2 to 300. I would say that would be the range of what it would be. Granted that it didn't last very long, in the sense that I started in June 17th and I started on June 20th, completed 12, 200 cuts during that time period before it was obvious that I was just damaging and re-damaging my injury. In my mind, it seems reasonable and then it was like not reasonable. I was thinking I'm going to switch to my left hand and do it one handed and then, very close friends were thinking or saying no, you shouldn't do that. I do have a rule and one of the rules is that if 2 good people in this world you trust the



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

most tell you the same thing, listen and I listened so I started to switch to my left hand, trying to force something that I shouldn't. I stopped doing something I said I was going to do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How did that feel?

Greg Downey:

At first, it felt like I had failed and then it felt like I had succeeded because I also did the other thing that I said I was going to do. I took the advice of 2 people I trusted. It's a contradiction but I'll tell you what really pulled it together, the other 7th of swords and Jo, Joseph, who I mentioned earlier had heard about this, had heard about my decision about a week later and he's told me that he was impressed. He said Gad, for you, completing a contract or doing something, that is a part. Quitting, or giving up, that is hard and you did that. I felt a little better at that point because for me, there was not a whole lot between failure and success but there should be because there's life and hearing a respected swordsman like himself was many accomplishments. Both in martial arts and in life because I respect the accomplishments in life say that, it really meant something.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's powerful. One of the things, I think, that folks with very high standards, type A, I will overcome any obstacle sort of personalities suffer from is knowing when it is advantageous to step back. That there are times when a retreat might compromise ego but be beneficial in every other way, even the ultimate goal, and that's something that I'm getting better at. I'm not even going to say I'm remotely good at it but it's something that I'm learning as I age through stories that are similar to the 2 that you just shared so I'm not surprised that you're also developing that as you age.

Greg Downey:

Trying to.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, it's hard! We talked a little bit about your school and I'd like to talk more about it because you're doing some things that are really interesting and not that any one of them is unique but the combination of all of them seem to be pretty unique so remember, you're speaking to martial artists from all over the world, all different styles, some of whom are going to be roughly familiar with weapon work, with sword work and I'd like you to offer up some comparisons and I don't mean in a pro/con way in any means but you've talked about the initial entry point might be, you've got to watch and there's a conversation and then you get to play, so talk to us from that angle.

Greg Downey:



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

No problem. The Western Circle of Sword Fighters was founded approximately twenty-five years ago by myself and few other martial artists. There simply wasn't a lot of sword fighting there. HEMA wasn't doing much. There wasn't any league of nation. There wasn't a tremendous amount of bokken schools out there. There's the STA, and we, of course, trained in that. In the STA, there's a lot of really lovely kind people in it but the sword fighting itself isn't incredibly accurate. I understand that they have a hundred of thousands of fighters. They strict insurance regulation. They have done well with rattan for years. For us, it wasn't close enough. Having a taste of traditional Japanese martial arts, there was a void. The Japanese are very strict in lineage when they started training. One of the things they've always lacked is they would spar with a bokken, a wooden sword with no armor with control or they would spar with armor with a bamboo sword, a shinai. There was almost no between and steel was unheard of. We wanted to sword fight, to steel fight. The organization was designed for the ultimate goal to get you to the point where you could hold a real steel sword. The edges de-bladed, the tip brought down to one inch and wear an armor and to be in a fight not for the purpose of getting a point. You win a match by striking a sword into area if a person was not wearing an armor that would be illegal. Again, this is another area where we differ. It's full contact but it is not as much about the force you used, it's where you hit. You don't win a match because you hit somebody in the neck. You win the match because your sword will sever the carotid artery. You don't win a match because you severed somebody's upper arm. You win a match because you severed their brachial artery. Same thing with the leg, you hit somebody in the leg and that's not how the match end. No, you use the right angle, and you sever the femoral artery and they have loss of blood pressure. They're incapacitated. You've thrust in the aorta, the heart or any massive blood vessel or an organ. Therefore, you achieved incapacitation or death. The organization quickly formed the means that a person could safely get to the point where they could train that way. You come into the Western Circle, starting with bokken, obviously because you have to learn what even a wood sword, as you know, being a martial artist or anybody listening. You can take a wood sword of any kind and strike it on somebody's neck or head. It can kill them instantly probably using mid-contact force. You take a person and you start them learning the techniques, learning control, and you put them in an armor and they start by fighting an instructor, a kaiden, and then they will learn what is and isn't a killing blow and they move through that. Then, they move through the ranks starting at green grade, then a white rope. At red rope, they have about a year or two years in Western circle. They're allowed to training in steel and they get safe lessons and it starts over. They have matches with an instructor and they begin to fight and then the world opens up to them because what a bokken can't really teach is yes, it hurts a lot and you can feel the mass of it when it hits you, armor or unarmed spot but the sword, with the rebated edge, even hitting you light contact in some armored areas, you feel through your armor. Mid-contact, you feel and full contact is devastating even the very hard, hardest part of your armor and it opens your eyes to just how deadly the sword is and how realistic that can be so a lot of organizations have tried to do the same thing. They tried to put a weapon in somebody's hand, prevent the other person from dying and get as realistic as they could and in some cases, that's points and in other cases, it's called armor-for-armor factor like the STA where you get hit and the person determines if you hit them hard enough or the league of nations where the person throws you to



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

the ground or beat you to submission. The western circle has chosen the path that say we are armored to protect ourselves but you're fighting somebody that's unarmored so what would happen if you took your sword and you made it true. Not every blow is killing or incapacitating, it's not. The blade turns where your hit is vital in that same second so they're taught to be very accurate with what you're doing, how they're targeting and you're told you can strike as hard as you like with control. That means that the armpit is not a very well protected area so it shouldn't be an area that you target with a thrust, with a steel sword and if you were to continue to do that, you'd be warned of that. One area that we never targeted, the back of the head and obviously, it's where the brain stem is, the cervical vertebrae and there could be a [53:20] helmet and the armor and even with a bokken, there is no room for area. That's probably the one place in the western circle you can't hit. Otherwise, based on level, based on thrusting, striking to the hand, everything is legal and accepted in fighting and if you are a big guy, you're fighting a small guy that's better than you, like a sword, you just lock up with them, you pick them up, you throw them down and you can use hand to hand or your dagger. It's about strategy and overcoming that so in the western circle, it doesn't matter if you're 70, it doesn't matter if you're a girl or a guy or what your experience is, it comes down to what you can do and what you can't do with a sword and what you want out of it because not everybody wants to be the greatest swordfighter that ever lived. Other people want discipline. They want the structure. They want to get that kind of training from class and I think the western circle does that great because I believe that the instructor doesn't teach the class, he teaches the individual because you asked what I would be like if was in the class, if I had to teach me, I would know that that guy needed to be constantly pushed. He needed contact, he needed extra work. On the other hand, another person might need just to get in better physical conditioning or another person just really wants that once a week balance and they're getting something out of it and then somebody else moves into the business professional world and they want the confidence to be able to speak with their boss or other executives and the sword, it builds that and the class, it builds that confidence in you that you can accomplish things and it's not that you should believe in yourself, you must believe in yourself because you're going to be called out. Your weaknesses are going to be right there in front of you and every kaiden teaches in one of harshest way. You're not very kind or thoughtful when somebody makes a mistake. It's not oh, you need to correct your cut. That was the worst cut I've ever seen in my life. Now, do it right. That was terrible. Get yourself off the concrete and get in the fight or get out of the dojo and again, some people are kind of shocked and then they realize, wait a second, everything he said, the way he moves, the way he looks at you, the way he talks, it has a purpose and that purpose is to help me improve. It's not to degrade me, it's not to beat me down. It's to say that in this kinds of environment, there is no in between and so, in the western circle, you will and you can check out the website, westerncircle.org and click down all of the physical requirement, how many moves you need to know, the katas that you will learn, the amount of matches that you have to fight in between the different levels, what levels you can fight steel and that's the basic outline of what you would learn and you join one of the classes and they'll take you through those requirements. You're guided through it, you're given basic training on what to do, what to do training on your own and it progresses from trainee all the way up to 7th fellow which is roughly a hundred participants, 2 different



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

states, most of the dojos are actually in California and then throughout the year there are events, like tournaments that are held. Tournaments are for people that get together and fight other schools and as I mentioned, one tournament per year is the tournament who is the best fighter in the western circle. That's the basic breakdown of how it will work. It's a non-profit organization so instructors don't make any money, they volunteer their time, they generally will train out of an open space or they will have built a dojo. I have demands as the head kaiden and there's accountable swordfighters that accept the requirements of the western circle that I'm a part of and my requirements to kaidens is that it can't be a backyard. They have to, if they're going to use their backyard to teach, it needs to be devoid of debris and anything with physically interactive training, it should be corded off so nobody can walk in and out just like you can walk in dojos that has mats and you should inspire others and so, in doing so, you create a space that is both safe to train in and as a student looks around, they would think this is where I want to be. That stems from my training in Shinkage-ryū is basically, their dojos were mostly outside than inside. There's inside portions for certain trainings but they prefer to teach sword fighting outside. That training space was a training space but that is vitally important. I'm not opposed to somebody going to a park and training with a sword, not at all, especially if that's how they can train, that's what they have and they're going to make the best of it but in western circle, we really strive to say if you're going to dedicate a section of training and if it's a rented space downtown or if it is a portion of the property that you own, that portion is dedicated to training so taken seriously from Kaiden all the way down to student.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right on. Sounds like a great place and no surprise, I wish I was closer. I'd be there. It sounds awesome. Imagine if we did a follow up to this conversation 20 years from now and I ask you, what happened since our last talk? What would you hope you would be able to say?

Greg Downey:

Only that things remain refined and the martial art grew and adapted. I believe that you should honor your tradition. They can remain but if there is better armor, better swords or better way to do things, that council will rein this in, that martial art would adapt to be more efficient, be better, that we grow in that regard. Doesn't matter if there's a hundred people or a thousand people or 50 in the western circle, it would just matter that the core ideals and tradition remain the same and the art continue to become refined, better for everybody's sake.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I like that. You mentioned the website, is there social media, is there any other way people might follow along with what you're doing?

Greg Downey:



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Western Circle has a website and they have an Instagram account that will post photos and so forth and it has a means of contact at westerncircle.org. You can ask questions and see if there are kaidens that have moved and unfortunately, I don't think there are any that moved to your area but they might have mentioned there's a guy in Florida, there's someone at Washington and Oregon that may have moved and are looking to take on one on one students to stay in contact in that regard and I think that's really it. My personal Instagram is surrounded around my book so people have reached out to me because of sword fighting pictures from there as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Talk about your book for a minute. People might want to know.

Greg Downey:

I'd be happy to and I can't talk about my book without talking about the sword. Writing the book has been one of the hardest things I've ever done. It's discipline of writing so I directly used discipline from training in the art of the sword to sit down in front of my computer and write and finish a book. The book is almost in complete contrast to everything that we have discussed. It's a story about a warrior and a vampire. It's a fantasy novel and it's fun kind of adventure story. I will say that the sword fighting is incredibly realistic and terrific and that the writing moves along at a reasonable pace. It's called *The Curse Raven's Rose Keep* and it talks about a warrior who's done fighting and he receives a lordship and castle. He moves into the castle and he has, as you read the book whether you had the fortune or misfortune of reading a female vampire and where did that whole adventure take him and it's, of course, available on Amazon but unfortunately, I don't have a lot of time to read. So, I love audiobooks. I'm always listening to some regard of some kind of audiobook so I had the book made into an audiobook so people have the option now to listen to it voiced by a terrific voice artist and you can download it and look into 13 hours of talking about the adventures of this warrior and travels and I will say that through my profession as a bodyguard and in my life, my desire to see the world, I have travelled all over the world and I brought that into the book so like the scenery that you will either read about or listen to are from different parts of the world whether it's a forest in England or cliffs in Ireland or mountains in Scotland, they're from actual places that I have been so writing it, I brought it into it just like sword fighting. I wanted it to have a sense of realism and a sense that you could go there or you could be there and experience these things and then I put in things I always would want secret passages and castles, for example, and adventures. Things that I personally, I'm the author, I'm going to insert this in there and it's not a training manual in the art of the sword and although some martial artists might find some of the strategies and combat interesting, it's probably not your average martial artist that they think they're going to get but it is a fast-moving adventure story and for me, it has represented that I've taken the sword and I've taken martial arts and that's given me the drive to write this novel, become an executive in the firm that I work for now and purchase a house, travel the world, I think that, and I believe that, martial arts gives back to you. You put into it and it gives back to you. It gives you that drive, that discipline so the book represents a kind of like an achievement in the art of the sword and on



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

the other hand, being an author, I'll say this. It's rare that I suffer from any kind of imposter syndrome. My ego is too vast for that but I wrote this book, a lot like I do anything, I finished it and it published and it's been around for a while but I never felt like an author until I was at a small book signing I was doing and I was sitting there and I have a book and a high school aged girl comes up and she says can you tell me about the curse of raven's rose keep and I do and she's like I want you to know, I'm an aspiring author and could you give me advice and I want to say don't because most people don't finish and it's really hard but I'm not Kaiden Gad. I'm an author, I'm a person and I shouldn't be crushing people's dreams like yeah, I could give you some advice and to my surprise, she opens this notepad and she has like a series of questions and she asked so many questions of what was the hardest thing and I told her writing. You write a page everyday whether you use it or you don't use it. How do you do that? How do you make the time? Yeah, I have school, I have homework. I'm like go to bed 10 minutes later. Get up 10 minutes earlier. You can make the time. What about the ideas? What happens when I don't have an idea? What should I write? Think about the thing that you like the most and write about that. When you can't write about anything even if it's out of line, that's not going to happen for ages in the book, write about what makes you the happiest and that will help get you through and then reach out to other writers online and at the end of it, the conclusion was I felt like for the first time, I have accomplished something outside of the sword in that regard and that might touch the person and might become a writer and whether she becomes famous or not, she'll write and she'll finish a book and a dream will be achieved because to me, whatever that dream is, whatever it is, it's never too small, it's never too big. You set your mind to do it and you do it, you should be proud of it. You should be proud of accomplishing that dream and for me, certainly writing the book was a dream and I was very glad that I could accomplish it, make publication, get it into audible.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Awesome, awesome! This has been a great conversation. I really enjoyed talking about the wide world that we travelled around is and, as our listeners know, we go to some interesting places and based on our kind of pre-conversation, pre-interview, I had no doubt that this would be another one of those. So, I just want to ask you for one more thing as we head out, as we set up the outro as we record later. I want to leave it to you. How do you want to close out this part of conversation? Give some final words, or wisdom, some whatever. What do you want to leave the audience with?

Greg Downey:

I would say, believe. Believe in yourself. Believe in what you're doing. What you want to accomplish and don't be afraid to allow people to help you achieve those goals.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Some really good stuff in there today. Combination of experiences and stories, and I guess spirit. That's pretty uncommon and possibly the first time we've had anything like this on the show. I hope you



Episode 520 — Kaiden Gad | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

enjoyed it. Kaiden Gad, I hope you had a great time on the show and I hope to talk to you soon. If you want more, head to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Every episode has a page all to itself with the links and photos. We put a transcript up, and sometimes there's even more. Go, check it out! If you want to support us, if you're willing to contribute what we're doing, you got some choices. You can make a purchase, using PODCAST15 to get 15% off on whistlekick.com. You could also leave a review via book in amazon.com or help with the Patreon, Patreon.com/whistlekick and if you see somebody out in the wild wearing something with whistlekick on it, it could be a shirt or a hat. Say hello, talk to him. Make a new friend. If you have suggestions, including guests let me know what they are. Email me at jeremy@whistlekick.com and on our social media [@whistlekick](https://www.instagram.com/whistlekick). Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!