



Episode 544 – Mr. Jason Neef | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey there, everybody what's going on? This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio Episode 544. With today's guest, Mr. Jason Neef. I'm Jeremy Lesniak. I'm your host for the show and the founder here at whistlekick. And I absolutely love traditional martial arts in all forms. And that's why everything we do here at whistlekick is in support of the traditional arts. If you wanna know what that means, if you wanna know, more, go deeper, go to [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). Check out everything we've got going there. It's a place to learn about their projects and the products that we make. It's also the easiest way to find our store, and the code `podcast15` will get you 15% off everything over there. If you want to go deeper on this show, Martial Arts Radio gets its own website. And we have creatively named it [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). We bring you the show twice a week. And our goal here with this show is to connect, educate, and entertain traditional martial artists around the world. If you want to help the show and the work that we do, you've got a bunch of options, you can make a purchase, you could share an episode, you could follow us on social media, tell a friend about what we're doing, pick up one of our books or our programs, leave a review, or support the Patreon, [patreon.com P-A-T-R-E-O-N.com/whistlekick](https://patreon.com/P-A-T-R-E-O-N.com/whistlekick). Patreon is a place where we post exclusive content. And if you contribute as little as \$2 a month, you're going to get access. The more you spend, the more we give you it's content that you don't find anywhere else. Today's conversation is an interesting one. It's a conversation with a martial artist, but it's also with someone who works in the industry. We have a great conversation about history and martial arts and how Mr. Jason Neef got started and took a break and then resumed martial arts



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training and found it to be so powerful in his life that he chose to then work in martial arts but not in the way that most people do. In fact, he and I have a tremendous amount in common, I think you'll see that as the episode unfolds. We talk about what he's doing what he's working on, his company, as well as a bit of contextual stuff around COVID-19. Good episode. Heck great episode. And I hope you enjoy it. Jason, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

**Jason Neef:**

Hey Jeremy, thanks a lot for having me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Of course, thanks for being here. You know, we just had a great, we just had a great pre show chat, probably one of the better pre show chats that I've had, you know, it's one of the things that the audience doesn't get to hear them get to hear the the 5, 10 or in this case, close to 15 minutes of us just chatting it up.

**Jason Neef:**

Catching up yeah, you think we know each other a long time.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Why, isn't that one of the interesting things about the martial arts, so is that because we have that, that bind, regardless of that style, and where we are, you know, we can always find something to talk about. I mean, you can you can put pop me pop me down at a party where I know nobody, and inevitably, I'll find somebody who trained for like 6 months, 30 years ago. And that's what we'll end up talking about, you know, it's something that just it's it becomes part of you, even if it's only for a short time.

**Jason Neef:**

Yeah without a doubt, and I make right now in the midst of what's happening in the world, and in our country especially, this martial arts community has never been more important. I would agree wholeheartedly. I'm excited to talk about that today for sure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, yeah, it's, you know, most of the time when we when we do these episodes, we don't spend much time talking about current events. Or, you know, if you ever take a look at, at the episodes, you know, we don't, we don't say when we record it, we don't hide it. You know, there's obviously a date that we publish these episodes, and that's very apparent. But when we put these episodes together, we try to make them the industry term we use as evergreen, we try to make sure that if I do an interview with somebody, today, or five years from now, you really, you really can't tell. You know, the stories may change, some of the specifics might change. But we don't, you know, put a pin in the date. And yet, with



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COVID-19 it's really hard to ignore her. It's hard to not lay that that context on top of it because it's affecting everything.

**Jason Neef:**

Yeah, you're not kidding. Like never before.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How many times have we heard the word unprecedented in the last six months?

**Jason Neef:**

Uh I know. Oh my goodness.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's been in constant and, it's true.

**Jason Neef:**

Yeah. Yeah. That's an understatement right?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

But I will say it's made it easier for me to to get people to have Zoom calls. Because that's the platform we use here you know, the audience, I think probably knows that by now. And six months ago, people say what's Zoom? Or how do I make this work? And now it's, oh yeah you're gonna be my 17th Zoom call today.

**Jason Neef:**

It becomes Zoom now, yeah you're not kidding. And that comes with some, you know, mistakes along the way with Zoom many of whom which have been documented, people jumping on, and I've heard some horror stories. Fortunately, we've not had any personally, but oh my goodness. Yeah, man, the Zoom has brought forth some funny and in some cases, damaging circumstances.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yes.

**Jason Neef:**

It is what it is.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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It is what it is. And this is this is part of why we don't do video very often when we record Zoom is because the joke I make I make when people think, oh, we're doing video? No, no, no, you can you can pick your nose all you want. Nobody's gonna see it. Now, I'm sure it sounds like, it sounds like we could put together a really entertaining conversation here that has nothing to do with martial arts. I mean, here we are we, you know, we just we just burned another three and a half minutes and we're both laughing already. But let's, let's talk about more the subject as you're what we're here to talk about martial arts. And, and I like to start at the beginning most of the time, which you know, maybe it's, maybe it's a little expected, but it gives us the best opportunity to take a direction. So how did you first find martial arts?

**Jason Neef:**

A great question and I had to really kind of go back because it started at a very early age. And I'm gonna be very candid with your listeners, I would say that I'm more of a fanboy than I am a prominent martial artist. I've always been a fan of the martial arts from an early age. And I started martial arts at 8 years old. And you know, I'm thinking about it, Jeremy, I can't even recall, it was a short stint. So I'll start there. And I don't even recall what the discipline was. I remember where I train, it was just outside of Chicago. But I couldn't even tell you, the instructor, the name of the school, or the discipline in which I trained. So that was my start. And at that age, you know, you're relying on your parents to drive you. And let's just say I didn't necessarily have family that was just committed to it as I was to get me there, different time back then. But what's been cool is years later, I always had this desire to return to martial arts. And years later, a school has opened just outside of my neighborhood. I mean, it could not have been any more convenient. It was Taekwondo School. And I thought, you know, I'm gonna I'm gonna revisit that. I'm gonna you know get back to that, that discipline or that practice that I enjoyed, and really see it through. And so I joined a Taekwondo School and began training under Master Bronson Ko of Ko's Martial Arts were very prominent Taekwondo network of schools here in Kansas City. I'm proud to say that I earned my black belt under Bronson and just really enjoyed my experience. I think I needed that sort of an instructor to really pick it back up, because he's just a stellar practitioner, great business owner, ran an impeccable school. And it just made for a great experience.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Nice. Now I'm curious. Something in that initial stint in martial arts stuck with you. But as you described, you don't didn't remember the style. You didn't remember the instructor. It doesn't sound like you remembered much. But somehow, you carried away a positive feeling that left something unfinished for you.

**Jason Neef:**

For sure, and I think, you know, I'm an age myself or someone, be careful but back when I was a kid, and we'll probably get into some of this, but you know, Bruce Lee reruns around a lot. Karate Kid came out,



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you know, we there was a lot of Hollywood emphasis in martial arts. I always admired martial artists. So yeah, I think it was something that and then I guess, when I consider, you know, my upbringing and the things that I did for activity, I kind of went the conventional route in high school, I played the conventional sports, didn't have opportunity to do martial arts, but always admired martial artists and just really saw that as something I eventually wanted to do. And a Master Ko opened his school. So convenient. It was almost like, this is the perfect time for me to get back into it. And that's what I did. And now it's more than a practice. It's, it's literally my day in and day out job.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah I can empathize with that. First off, how much time passed between that that, we'll call it the first phase and the second phase when you picked up Taekwondo.

**Jason Neef:**

Yeah, now, you're gonna put media into my age, about 30 years.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay. All right, well.

**Jason Neef:**

30 years.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I've got I've got an interview scheduled with someone in there who's who I believe started, you know, in their 60s 70s, coming up in the next few weeks so don't don't don't judge yourself for that.

**Jason Neef:**

Okay, thank you.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think we're on the same page that you know, loving martial arts is really all that matters. It doesn't matter if you took 50 years off if you if you start again today, you're as far as I'm concerned, you're a martial artist. So what was it like I mean, you, obviously 30 years means you're going from young child to full fledged adult with responsibilities, maybe a family, you have some stuff that you're doing, what was it like stepping in day one, after so much time had passed?

**Jason Neef:**

I mean, it's funny, I can remember day one. And then like, anything you do, that's new, you have this level of anxiety, uncertainty. And that's when I go back to the owner on he definitely fostered like,



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accept challenges kind of a mindset. And I think I'm wired that way, I always enjoy new challenges, I do enjoy physical fitness. And for me, it was a new opportunity to do something I'd never done. So I went in with a lot of enthusiasm for it. I had done basketball from the time I was little all the way to college and continued to play basketball, even post college. So to do something like martial arts was exciting, 'coz I could do a new activity that I had never done and always wanted to. So I went into it with an awful lot of enthusiasm and zeal.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Was anything different from what you would expect it or remember? Had you? Let me ask it a different way. Had you built up this? Because you you've used the word admire quite a few times in referencing martial arts and martial artists. So I'm, I'm imagining the possibility that, you know, you stopped training as a kid, not by your own choice, it sounds like and spend the next 30 years saying, man, that's something I'd like to get back to and wouldn't it be great? And, you know, almost wishing for and then it happens and was anything a shock to say, oh, it's so unexpected.

**Jason Neef:**

Well, I guess the one thing that I shouldn't call it a shock, but it was a, let's call it a wake up call. You know, inevitably, as you get older, you're doing different things with your legs and your joints and injury surfaces. And so I think that was probably something that I was kind of accustomed to certain things with the sports and I had played, and all the sudden I was having to kind of be careful with certain things I did for the sake of avoiding injury. So I would say that might have been probably the biggest surprise. But secondarily, as all of your listeners know, you have your moments, regardless of what it is you're doing, you have your moments where you just don't feel like training. As much as you love it just maybe that day like, I'm not feeling it, you know. The thing that I so enjoy about martial arts is just the commitment, the perseverance, you just see it throughout the entire community. That's where the joy comes, is just continuing to stay the course even when you don't feel like it. And I think that mindset, I believe suits me far beyond the martial arts school, it suits me in my personal life, it suits me in our professional life. It's one of the tenants of martial arts, that I think everyone needs to experience because it suits and suits you in so many different ways.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's, it's almost like it's a it's an anchor, or it's a pillar that you can lean against something to if not construct the rest of your life, which you know, sounds like you and I have both done that to a certain degree and listeners a little bit of foreshadowing, we'll get there. But it's something that is constant. It's always there for you when you're ready for whether, you know, maybe you take a little bit of time off, or maybe you've got a day where you don't want to train 'coz yeah, for most of us, that's real even though it's that kind of the deep, dark secret martial arts. People don't want to admit it, but sometimes you just don't want to train and that's okay. But when you are ready, it's there.



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**Jason Neef:**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

All right. So, you mentioned you earned your black belt and was that an emotional moment for you? Was there there's some kind of closing of the loop and in connection with eight year old you said, you know, hey, we've done this?

**Jason Neef:**

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, if my wife were on this call, she could speak to it probably even better than I could because she got the kind of witness that objective when I was too caught up and all that had to be done to earn that black belt, all the training, all the prep, and I mean, as you know, that's a really arduous process to earn a black belt, especially at the end, when you're going through that testing. But when it was done, oh my goodness, without a doubt, it was without a doubt, one of the proudest accomplishments in my life.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And you continued, right? You're still going, you're still training?

**Jason Neef:**

Well, what ended up happening is, to be fair, is my body started to say otherwise. So I've had to kind of limit some of the things I do in the martial art space. But I had the fortune of still being intimately involved with martial arts, as a business owner in working, visiting, observing, I mean, we're in schools, we're at tournaments. I've gotten to experience martial arts, not just as a practitioner, but as someone that serves, just like you do with this podcast, serves the community. And that has been such a rewarding and fulfilling opportunity for me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well, let's, let's step into that a little bit, you know, we're gonna talk about some of it, we'll probably pull back out and talk more about about it later. But at some point, there was the genesis for you of martial arts being more than something you participate in, but maybe something that you steward or guide or, or serve, you know, depending on on the word that resonates best for you. When did that idea [0:16:32]?

**Jason Neef:**

Well, it was a result of being a student at the school that I referenced earlier. I don't know how deep you want me to go. But ultimately, there was an opportunity, an opportunity for me to participate to join in some software that was being developed back in, gosh, 2007. And back then, software's changed a



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considerable deal. And I was someone who was one of the few students who was experiencing and utilizing it and was eager to be involved, was invited to participate in in this startup moment. And like any startup, those early years, were pretty lean. And the opportunity presented itself could be more than just someone who helped, but someone who actually owned and ran it. And that's kind of where I'm at today.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

All right.

**Jason Neef:**

But as as someone in this position, that's what I'm so grateful for, is we literally have the the fortune and the privilege of visiting with thousands of school owners, just like you get to do, or you get to hear about the joys, the challenges, and everything in between, from coast to coast and literally, as far away as Australia, and as far away as Ireland and certainly mostly in the United States, but it just gives you such an appreciation for the community.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So in a sense, you your job, part of your job is very similar to this part of my job where you're talking to people and you're finding out about them, you're almost interviewing them, in a sense learning about them and your school and what makes them tick. And I'm wondering, are there are there things in your training, or things that you experienced as a student that helped prepare you for being in that role of support system?

**Jason Neef:**

Great question. Great question. And I, I've never thought about that. But as you pose the question, I would absolutely say that my training prepared me for my role that I'm in now. And again, as a student, you're constantly looking to the owner, to understand to, to learn, to take advice, to get better. And I look at it from from a student's perspective, and I reflect on all the different training that I went through and continue to go through. And you just look to that owner and realize he or she has far more to offer you than you do call for them. And I think I take that same approach into my role here with our current company. We certainly make sure we're asking more questions, finding out more about the school owner, their business, especially during this pandemic, to know how we best can be of value, be of service, how we can improve as an organization. So I would say there's an awful lot of correlation between my mindset as a student and my mindset now as the owner of a software company.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I get that, that makes all kinds of sense. It's funny when you mentioned 2007, my initial reaction was you're talking about it like it was that long ago. It's oh, wait, yes, 13 years ago, huh?





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**Jason Neef:**

It's crazy. Back then there was no smartphone, believe it or not, I mean, things have changed dramatically.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right. If we were talking in 2007 we'd be on landlines. And I have, I'd have a piece of equipment that the phone handset would be plugged into. And there would be an audio jack off of that and I would be recording that on I don't know if I'd use it a digital recorder or a laptop, but something like that, to record the call. And listeners may get the sense that I have done this before. And yes, I had, I have recorded calls back in the day not not for some kind of clandestine reasons. But you know, I've, I've had to do that. And so much has changed. So without smartphones, I'm guessing this this software was probably not web-based.

**Jason Neef:**

You know, ironically enough, it was one of the first web-based products.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh wow, oh cool!

**Jason Neef:**

And what was crazy about that. It's so funny to think about this, Jeremy. But people had concerns like, oh, my gosh, you're putting all my information in the cloud? I mean, literally, I remember having those conversations with owners to say like, well, it's this the new movement and you're you don't have to worry about downloading stuff into your computer and people, believe it or not, were very reluctant.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm sure.

**Jason Neef:**

Just uploading their information on the cloud. Yeah, for sure. We were one of the first people to do that or company to do that, I guess, in a martial art space, at least.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Back in 2007 you know, here's yet another example of, of where our paths seem to be similar. I had an IT company. You know, prior to whistlekick, I had an IT consultancy. And so in 2007, as you're trying to get people to adopt this new thing called software on the web, or web apps, or whatever you choose to call them, I was trying to convince people to utilize online banking because whether they put their



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whether they logged in or not, their information was already connected to the web. So might as well get the benefit from it.

**Jason Neef:**

Sure, yeah. Time certainly have changed. They don't have that little conversation to put people at ease anymore. That's one of the benefits.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right, right and so you mentioned that there was an opportunity to get started with this company. And I want to know more about that. How did that how did that pop up? And why did you think that was a good idea?

**Jason Neef:**

That's a really good question. And back then, I think I was experiencing it as a student. I had the fortune of talking to a lot of owners and I had a good appreciation for the need. And as time wore on, and as you're someone whose own businesses, for all of your schools out there, small business is difficult, especially in the tech space startups, most of them don't survive. I just saw the value, I saw the opportunity. And as time wore on, it just kind of became evident that this was where I wanted to spend my time. And sincerely, I thoroughly I think what I enjoyed the most about it, where I got the most fulfillment, was just seeing the way I, we as the company could help the industry, help the individual school owner. And I think it's never been more evident than right now, given the this the state of things with the pandemic. And to be of service in these times, especially is absolutely a privilege.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

There's, there's something pretty powerful about service. You know, it I don't know if you ever were I was Rotarian for a number of years, and the slogan or slogan that mission statement, I'm not sure what the right term would be. But in Rotary is, Service Above Self. And so whenever somebody talks about service in that way, it reminds me of that and how powerful that concept can be. Because at the root of martial arts, that's really what we do. How many other industries do you learn, learn, learn, learn, and then you're almost expected to give back by opening your own school or teaching in some way. It's, in most industries, as you work up, you seem to do less. You know, not that the the role of a CEO at a Fortune 500 company is quote, unquote, less. But it's a lot of thoughtful work. It's often behind closed doors or with few people. But as you progress in martial arts, the higher you're standing, the more work you get, and the more public you are, the more responsibility you have.

**Jason Neef:**

Sure, without a doubt, that's for sure. I would agree. And given the circumstances we're in. It's just never been a more trying time for the economy and especially for a small business owner. And



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particularly with martial arts, you know, we've had so many schools that are in difficult circumstances due to COVID and all the restrictions being placed. So yeah, absolutely. It's, it's not easy, but it's also, and I don't want to try to present myself as though like, this is a difficult time without a doubt, but it's also afforded us an opportunity to be of service, of value like never before. And I'm, I just have a lot of fulfillment, knowing that we're doing everything we can to help during these circumstances, and news can't put a price tag on it, all the titles, all the financial metrics, all the things that people you know, kind of stick their chest out about, to me, I just don't care. I gain more fulfillment, with the success stories of owner surviving, getting through these difficult moments. But, you know, buckling their, their chin strap and doing everything in their power to continue to be a business in their community, that so much into so much value to all their members.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. And I wanna go there, I wanna make sure that we we talk about what you're doing. But before we talk about what you're doing, I wanna talk about what your company does, you know, let's, let's talk about that for a moment. And then we can we can move forward. And this is a point where whenever we start to step into these commercial or commercial adjacent conversations, you know, I want to remind the listeners 'coz they don't come up too often. I want to remind the listeners that when we bring somebody on and and we know the conversation is gonna go in this direction. It's important for you all to know that. You know, this is there's no no backdoor deal happening here. Right? You know that? Jason correct me if I'm wrong, you didn't pay me to be on the show today, right?

**Jason Neef:**

Not at all.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

There's no, there's no fancy gift basket, no edible arrangement on the way. There's nothing that greased my palm to say, hey, let's bring this guy on the show.

**Jason Neef:**

Sure. No, without a doubt and the thing I would say is, I don't have any interest in promoting my company. It's hard for me not to explain what what my participation in martial arts without giving that context? So that's the only reason I offer that...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Exactly.

**Jason Neef:**

But in no way am I interested in any promotion.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure. It would be like somebody asking me well, what do you do or talk about your life. I, my life is so integrated with what we do here at whistlekick, just as I'm sure your life is so integrated with what you do, and we're gonna hear about that in about 12 seconds. So I get it. And I'm sure most people out there get it. So what is it that you do? What is it, tell us about the software, this company, and the name, etc.

**Jason Neef:**

Yeah, and I'll keep it brief, just so everyone understands what Kicksite is. Kicksite, in a nutshell, is a software product that makes the lives of our school owners easier. And we do that by giving them a tool that allows them to keep track of their members that communicate with their prospects and membership, to build them just to kind of manage all the back end. We've been doing it for 13 years. Unlike a lot of software companies, we're exclusive to martial arts. So we don't serve all these different verticals. We've been doing it a long time, and we're family owned, so we don't have the the struggles, the challenges, the pressures that come from being owned by some big company that is pressing us for profit. But we've had 13 years of success. And we get to do things on our terms and really bring this conversation full circle. Right now, our terms are not about making a buck, signing up members. We're all about doing everything we can in these circumstances to help our owners survive. It's that dire of a situation. We've had as you probably realize, Jeremy, so many schools that were hanging on by a thread and couldn't go months without members coming in and paying them. We just had a lot of schools that have gone out of business. It's heart wrenching. When there's also some fantastic inspirational stories that get me out of bed in the morning. We had an owner if you don't mind me sharing, do you mind if I got to share an example?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Please do, there are a lot of school owners listening and so anytime we can have these positive stories, to give them hope. Let's do it.

**Jason Neef:**

If there are school owners listening, and I wish I could look at you eye to eye. I just want to tip my hat to you. I want to absolutely continue encourage you to stay the course. We know how difficult these times are. There's one individual that does stand out and I could probably tell 20 other stories just like this one, but the week that kind of COVID hit, I think we can all recall is mid March. And that following Monday, it was like the whole entire country went on lockdown and quarantine. And we were fielding call after call, oh my gosh, you know, pause my account, you know, those sort of conversations. And I hope she doesn't mind that I share her name. But one owner who had been with us almost from the beginning, Lauren Kennedy, out of Central Karate in Louisiana, she called us in practically in tears. Now, keep in mind, she's just outside of New Orleans, and they still hadn't really entirely recovered from when Katrina hit, their economy had really been impacted by Katrina, they were starting to come back



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from all that. So their economy hadn't even completely returned to its normal form from that natural disaster. And boom, COVID hit, and she just she was despondent, and she was on the phone, practically in tears, you know, apologizing for having to close her account. But just saying, you know, my husband and I just don't have a choice, we were hardly able to make it before. And now, it's beyond what we can do. You know, it was a difficult conversation with that very first week. Few days go by, and we wish her well. And we asked, is there anything we can do? And she said, she'd be in touch and few days go by and she reaches back out. And she says, you know what, my husband and I are considering changes we can make, we're looking at different ways we can downsize, reduce some of our expense. I'm happy to say Jeremy that not only have they moved and pivoted and adapted, but their business is actually not just surviving. And I don't want to use the word thriving, because we're not quite to that point yet. But they have adapted, and they're surviving and they're continuing to be a value in their community, with so many of their members that need them right now. And it's just an inspirational story that we've seen repeated time and time again. And that's what I'm so proud of our industry for doing. Our industry has adapted, it's continuing to to be a value. And you're serving a community that's in desperate need to get healthy and to also be a part of a community. Given all that's happening with this pandemic, people are people are beside themselves and martial arts has never been more important. But Lauren Kennedy and countless others just like her, they're heroes.

#### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

They are, and she's not alone. You know, as, as the pandemic rolled on, pretty early, we put out a couple episodes, a couple bonus episodes that based on the numbers, not too many of you listen to and that's okay. But one was for school owners, and one was for students and talking about, you know, how to move through this. And it's it's funny that one of the things that you brought up earlier, when before we were even talking about your business was one of the things that I laid out to school owners, I said, if there's one thing that you do to survive this, it's this. And it's talking about martial arts as a pillar, a anchor, whatever you you call it, some kind of unyielding stability point in the community when everything else is going awry, when everything else is changing day to day. And we have restrictions and conditions for schools that are sometimes unclear and even conflicting. If you can simply exist, and show confidence that martial arts and the principles of martial arts are unwavering. It becomes a lot easier for your students to trust you and stick around. And for people in the wider community to say, Hey, what's going on over there? When everything else is unknown, martial arts is something that you can build from.

#### **Jason Neef:**

Yeah, yeah. And, Jeremy, if I may, especially if you've got owners listening, I don't want to miss an opportunity to impress upon all of your listeners who own schools, the opportunity that you have at this very moment. And what do I mean by that? There's a few things we know about COVID. Number one, we know it tends to have a more dramatic impact on those that aren't healthy to begin with. If you've got underlying health conditions, there's a good chance you're gonna have some very difficult



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circumstances should you contract COVID. So getting healthy has never been more important. Another piece that I think is often ignored is what's happening to our nation from a mental health perspective. We have been socially isolated as a country and are continuing to be isolated since March. If there's a single contributing factor to depression, it's isolation. And so one of the things that our martial arts schools offer in addition to getting healthy, which is obvious is the need for community. I just sat in yesterday with the program director for the National Association for Mental Illness and it's called NAMI, the program director for the state in New York. New York is the largest chapter for the National Association of Mental Illness. And this gentleman, his name is Matt Shapiro, he spoke in front of the governor about the mental health situation in New York in particular. They are seeing skyrocketing numbers and suicide rates and depression rates. We mentioned, unprecedented times they are seeing unprecedented numbers. You take a country that is isolated and you give them no outlets. This is the result. So what I want to impress upon your listeners, Jeremy, particularly those that own schools, we need to be presenting to our communities how martial arts is a solution like never before. We talk about this, this martial arts community, right, we've said that word repeatedly. You and I have trained in martial arts so we know it's more than just a community feel, it's a family. And you go into a martial arts school and you train with people, some of the people I trained with back in the day, they work for me now at Kicksite, I mean, you bond with these individuals, right. And so this is the one of the tenants, one of the aspects of martial arts training, that we have to be reinforcing to our communities, 'coz our communities are isolated, they're looking for ways to be with other individuals, martial arts training, the community aspects, the family feel of it, it is more than just a nice thing to have. It is mission critical right now. And if you listen to some of the experts in mental illness, they are telling us that we are having skyrocketing numbers of suicide rates, depression rates, because of the circumstance people are in. Martial arts is absolutely a solution. I get pretty passionate about this topic, because it's so important. This is beyond just oh, I have a small business, you have a solution that you need to be letting your communities know about.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. So let's unpack that a little bit. You know, you're you're working with schools, you're supporting them. What what are you seeing that people? Let's, let's let me ask it this way. Give me a few things that schools are doing right. And the few things that schools are doing wrong in your eyes in this current time.

**Jason Neef:**

Sure, um, well, let me start with what schools are doing right, I use the word adapt. I mean, it has been amazing to see the way schools are adapting. I used one example earlier, but I could give you 50 others. And I probably won't even be doing them all justice 'coz the adaption by our industry has been phenomenal, whether that be Zoom training or online courses. I mean, we see schools doing training out in their parking lots, we're finding all sorts of innovative ways to continue to be of value. And again, to a population that needs this right now, we're not, you know, making sugar water, our industry



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doesn't flip pieces and we provide health and wellness, both physically and mentally. And we're finding unique and innovative ways to deliver like never before. So I would start by the positives, the things that we're doing well, is being of value during this time. And adapting to the circumstances that everyone is in depending on their state. That's the other part part of every state kind of has its own restrictions. I'm gonna be careful here, but an area that I think we need to consider and a way we need to adapt further is a lot of schools are still kind of using the same way to market their schools, kind of the historical way of marketing their school. And I'm not diminishing the value of this message. I know it's important. But a lot of times the message is about character development, the message is about anti-bullying, the message is about, you know, just your ability to set goals and be a leader. Those are all important. But what I'm saying is in the environment we're in right now, we have to change that message, because candidly, the population at this moment is not concerned about putting their child in martial arts or putting themselves in martial arts, because they're being bullied, or because they need to learn self respect. What we need to be communicating to our communities is why martial arts is an ideal solution and the advantages that the advantages it represents are over some of the more conventional sports like soccer, and baseball, and football, all the things that we always compete against. We have an advantage over all these other activities right now, in the midst of this pandemic. And that's where I think owners need to consider what they're telling their communities when they position their business.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I agree. I agree. We've put out a number of resources and I'm sure you have to and we're not the only ones. I mean, there are lots of people out there saying similar things about the opportunity for martial arts. I'm a firm believer in any of the work that I do. If you look at it in the right way, any negative can be a positive. I think we're going to see over the next few years as we look back that if, in some areas and for some schools, this will be the next big enrollment period. You know, we think about the Ninja Turtles in the 90s and The Karate Kid movie in the early 80s and Bruce Lee films in the 70s, you know, this is the next pay for schools that are willing to capitalize on it. And I don't mean that in some kind of insensitive way. I'm not suggesting that, you know, you be callous or or, you know, a jerk in your marketing in some way. But there, there are ways that you can convey just as you've articulated, that martial arts has advantages over other options, and in some ways, is the perfect puzzle piece to fill the void with what's going on.

**Jason Neef:**

Yeah, and let me make a comment on that. And I'd agree this isn't about capitalizing. I would say it is and I, when I say our I mean, the entire martial arts industry, it's our duty, right now to be sending the right message 'coz a lot of people don't even realize the opportunity that exists in training in the martial arts school. So if you don't mind, let me just give you the three reasons why martial arts is the ideal solution. I started with the need to be healthy, we all know COVID is just wreaking havoc on people that are healthy. We got to lose weight, we got to do something about our diabetes and heart disease, and all the underlying health conditions, they're gonna put you in a bad spot should you get COVID, you got



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to get healthy. Most people know that. So that's one, martial arts offered the ability to get physically healthy. Two, you get to be part of a community, right? We know how important it is to be a part of a group, to train with people, to feel that camaraderie. That's number two, that martial arts offers that a lot of activities don't. And three, the martial arts space, the martial arts school, may be the most conducive to cleaning and social distancing. I talked to a school owner and he kind of laughed, he's like, I actually we routinely keep six feet apart. I had to go to 10 feet just so people felt like I did something. But this industry is accustomed to there's not a lot of equipment, so there's not a lot to clean. We're always pretty much six feet apart anyways, unless we're sparring. We have the perfect solution to get people healthy, to bring them into group training, and to keep them distance. I would challenge this audience or anyone in this community to tell me there's a physical fitness activity that can even touch what martial arts provides, in terms of the regulations that we need to adhere to, to avoid COVID. So that's my elevator pitch but I mean it and I believe it. And it's true, and our owners need to be preaching that to their communities right now.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Absolutely. I get it. All right. Now, one of the things we haven't really talked about, and I wanna make sure that we do, 'coz we've danced around it is more specifically, the offerings that your your company has, you know. If, if we were to call this, you know, an actual commercial for the next couple minutes, you know, what, be specific 'coz, you know, at this point, I would guess people are either into this idea or they're not. And so we'll keep it short, and then we'll move on. But, you know, what does Kicksite do?

**Jason Neef:**

Thank you for the opportunity to express this. So I talked about the reasons, the things, that the the moments that martial arts offers advantage. If you're an owner out there, you're probably thinking yourself, where do I begin? How in the heck do I begin to communicate these advantages? Well, the great news is we started a campaign about two months ago, we call it our win initiative, and win ultimately is just the mindset. We believe our industry, and I recognize with with some of the challenges of COVID, we've got to be considering the ways we can win, how we can win as a community, how we can win as an industry. And so our win initiative is entirely designed to equip owners with the resources that they need, that they may not be ready to prepare themselves. So what do I mean by that? Well, I was just talking about the advantages martial arts school provides with a person's mental health. Well, today for those that are part of the win initiative that have opted into this this campaign, if you will, that we're embarking on, is we're gonna be providing an article today that speaks to how a martial arts school offers an advantage when it comes to mental health. And within that email that we'll send today, there will be a sample template that they don't even need to recreate. All they have to do is use that sample template, they can replace their name, or excuse me, insert their name, you know, insert their their martial art, they can customize it to their needs, but it's gonna get into the studies, the statistics, and how martial arts helps with mental health. This is something that they can go out then copy and paste and send out to their communities. This is one of a number of different resources we've created to





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position the martial arts community as a fantastic solution to a population that usually what what are the 2% of the population, they say does martial arts, it should be 10%. And now's the time. So the win initiative is designed to give owners the tools they need to change the narrative, to be of value during these times in a way like they've never been before.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sounds great. Sounds great.

**Jason Neef:**

So um they can in terms of how to opt in, you can go to [Kicksite.com](http://Kicksite.com), you can engage with us there. And then we can opt you into the win initiative and then of course, you know, they'll start to receive those materials. Or I can give you a link to that let them opt in right away, and you can put it in.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, send me that. Let's go drop that in the show notes. Yeah, that's great.

**Jason Neef:**

Yeah, will do.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

All right. So now that we know what you do, we've got plenty of understanding about why you do it. And I'm sure that that's, that's clicking for everybody who's listening because, yeah, Martial Arts has made an impact on your life, in my life, and, and so many lives. And, yeah, whether that number is 2%, or 3%, I mean, it, you want 10 I want a 100. I mean, that's, that's one of my drives in life, I want everybody to train for at least six months. That's just that's what I'm looking for.

**Jason Neef:**

I like it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So let's, let's talk about the other side of COVID. Let's talk about the future. You know, if we look at, you know, here's a, I'm gonna ask you a question that I don't think I've asked anyone else. We often talk about the individual, when people come on the show, but it sounds like, no matter what direction we that I really tried to take the questions, it came back to you as, and I and I get this because this is how I feel, you know, a component of the martial arts industry, it's hard to separate Jason from the martial arts realm. So instead of trying to pull stuff out, let's, let's lean into that a little bit. If we were to get back together in, let's say, 20 years. And, and I said, you know, how do you feel about the martial arts



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industry, globally, now, versus when we talked last? And it was exactly what you wanted to see, describe that perfect future for the martial arts for me.

**Jason Neef:**

Oh, wow.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Let's let's dream.

**Jason Neef:**

What a question! Yeah, 20 years from now? That's awesome. What a great question. Well, I think I share the same goal that you have that a 100% of people are doing martial arts for at least six months. I mean, we both understand the value immensely. So if I had to fast forward 20 years, I do believe that this is a very difficult time. But I also believe this can be a pivotal moment and use a few moments throughout the 70s 80s and 90s that absolutely helped the martial arts industry advance. This is one of those moments, I believe it is one of those moments. While it may not seem like it, I think if we approach this in the right way, with the right mindset, this could be a moment where we can advance martial arts to the community that large that for the most part kind of stuck us in this oh, well, that's for self respect. That's if my kids not paying attention in school, blah, blah, blah. We can expand our value so that I think it's realistic to have 20% of the population training consistently in martial arts. So yeah, I guess if I fast forward, I'd like to think that we utilize this moment, this challenge that we were faced with, we adapted, we evolved, and we took this industry to high sell. It may have never seen otherwise. So that would be my wish, if we were to have a conversation in four years.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That sounds pretty great. But yeah, I mean, that that's the dream, isn't it? That, that, martial arts, grows and expands because I think it's the easiest way to move the world in a positive direction in so many different ways. You know, we have a lot of initiatives in this world, political, non political, or I should say governmental, non governmental that encompass every aspect of life. And if there's one common thread, I think you can you can connect those dots and see that you know what, martial arts lines up for just about everything.

**Jason Neef:**

You know, I've got an ambitious goal, and I was reluctant to bring it up today because...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh let's do it. Let's do it.

**Jason Neef:**



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Okay. Well, it's early it's early stages so I'm just gonna qualify with everything I say with. This is an ambitious goal. I'm putting forth, we're all here at Kicksite putting forth the effort. But I do want to just speak to kind of some of the things we're in the midst of doing with our win initiative in communities and beyond. So this is only in an effort to kind of help everyone understand just how ambitious we are approaching this opportunity right now. In my humble opinion, I do believe martial arts is an essential business. And if you're in a state like California, New York, I'm not sure exactly what the circumstances in Vermont, Jeremy, but a lot of states are just not allowed to have students and they're in their school. It is restricted, and they're fined heavily for doing so. And so we are in a very ambitious effort as we speak, to see legislation passed, or maybe even a resolution passed to allow martial arts to be considered an essential business for all the reasons I just highlighted. So if you've ever done any work in government affairs, getting legislation passed, especially in an election year, very difficult to do. We are putting forth the effort, we're meeting with the right people, Congresswoman, we've got a Zoom call this week, as a matter of fact, with a Congresswoman who is on the committee for small business. And as luck would have it, she's also a MMA, a former MMA fighter, so she knows the value of martial arts. But we're taking this opportunity and putting full force behind getting a resolution passed to make martial arts in the central business so that every single state can take that to their legislators, to say, live business deserves to be open for the sake of our communities. So that's, it's an ambitious goal, but you better believe I am coming full steam, as is our team to do everything we can to have that happen.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's powerful. And not only do I hope that it happens, if there's anything that the general public can do to assist with that, let me know, because we will put our foot behind it in promoting it. I mean, right now I can, I can think of a handful of people that I'm friends with on Facebook, some some rather prominent people from the martial arts community. You know, over the last bunch of years, I've gotten to know quite a few martial artists with followings. And I could reach out to all of them and say, hey, I know you're mad that your school is closed, let's get this fixed. And I mean...

**Jason Neef:**

I love it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You could have tens, hundreds of thousands of people chime in on this pretty quickly. I think?

**Jason Neef:**

Jeremy, I'm gonna take you up on that. And this is the first time I've publicly stated anything about this effort. It's pretty early stages but one of the approaches, and we have a three-pronged approach to this effort. One of those approaches is community outreach. You know, we want to go to every martial artists, whether you're an owner, a student, a parent, we want to go to every constituent in every



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district, throughout the country to get their support for why martial arts should be deemed an essential business in our country. So, absolutely. I appreciate your offer. I will absolutely take you up on that. When the time's right, is we would love nothing more than to get the word out and just get out in front of all these legislators the importance of making martial arts in the central business. The more the merrier.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. Yeah, I listeners, you know, I've shared this a few times over the years and Jason, I certainly shared this with you in the pre show, if it gets people in or keep some training. This is this is what we do. You know, this is what whistlekick is about. So even though it's not our initiative, I don't I don't care. I don't care. I'll do whatever I can to help with this 'coz it's, it lines up.

**Jason Neef:**

Awesome. Thanks to you.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Thanks. Thanks for your willingness to share that. Oh, of course. You're welcome. You're welcome. Good stuff. So I'm gonna I'm gonna ask, we don't typically start to wind down in this way. But here's one that I've got a feeling we're gonna take a hard left on this because we've talked about some heavy stuff. And so I want to lighten it up a little bit.

**Jason Neef:**

Sure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

One of my favorite things about what we do here on the show, is that most of our conversations are rooted in story. And, you know, stories, great stories, the oldest way of sharing information of passing down knowledge. Story is powerful. But story can also be entertaining. Now through your your travels, your training, conversations, I'm sure that you know, if I asked you to write a book of the funny, silly, entertaining things that you've experienced within the world of martial arts over the last few years, you'd have plenty of options. So I'd like you to choose one. You know, is there something ridiculous or lighthearted that the listeners might find entertaining as we start to wind down here?

**Jason Neef:**

Sure. Oh my goodness, I've got so many but I want to protect some of people there's one over...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Feel free to change names.



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**Jason Neef:**

Okay, I'm gonna share this one. I'm gonna leave names out. I just can't get this one out of my head so I feel compelled to share it. So I will keep every every participant out of it. I won't mention names. But early on, when I first took over at Kicksite, I was invited to a pretty prominent martial arts industry now would you call it, you know, one of the...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Convention?

**Jason Neef:**

Or a convention, thank you, convention where you got to hear from very successful owners, and they'll got up and kind of presented their approaches. And these are great owners all over the country and beyond. So one of the the individuals who was presenting that he was all mic'd up and, and, you know, had his headset going and presented and did a great job. And then as he left the stage, and walked out of the room, we're in Las Vegas, you know, we're in a huge room full of people. For whatever reason, due to technical difficulties, the mic didn't get turned off. And this gentleman precedes to head into the bathroom.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh nooo.

**Jason Neef:**

So, I know, it's not it's kind of like one of those Zoom moments, right where you don't know you're being recorded. And needless to say, everybody in the audience knew what was happening when he left the room, because of the sound that were coming from his mic. And when he came back in, and he did a great job, I would have been too embarrassed to walk back in the room, I think I would have headed for the doors and gotten home after that. But I give a lot of credit. He came in, he laughed at himself, and everybody laughed with him. But as I'm thinking about funny, light hearted stories, that's one that probably comes to mind immediately.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's a great one. And you know what I what I like about that? Is that that could happen to any one of us.

**Jason Neef:**

Oh, I know.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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And it's it's so it's so relatable. You know, any of us could do that. And then of course, the the fact that I would imagine, I mean, we don't have to get more detailed than this. But I would imagine that whatever this gentleman did in the bathroom is something that we've probably all done in the bathroom. So while maybe not the most professional conveyance, it's still something that, again, is pretty relatable. So we can, we can laugh it off, it doesn't matter who you are, you're still a person who still puts your pants on one leg at a time and does other things that...

**Jason Neef:**

And use the facility. For sure. Yeah, no, you're absolutely right. Absolutely. Right. And I think that's what made it kind of laughable is it could happen to any of us.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

All right. Well, Jason, if people want to get a hold of you, or Kicksite, you know, what do we do emails, social media, websites, you know, any of that stuff. And of course, we're gonna have this in the show notes, but let's get it on air too.

**Jason Neef:**

Kicksite.com, you can check us out there. Jeremy, I think I provided I may have already sent you the link for the win initiative. So I would highly encourage everybody to opt in. This is where we'll be providing your resources and updates and when the time comes, where we need your help from you and your constituents, and your district. You know, this would be how we would communicate that. Yeah if anyone needs to reach me, I'd welcome to hear I'd welcome an email from you, you can reach me at [Jason@kicksite.net](mailto:Jason@kicksite.net).

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Great. Great, thank you so much. And of course, the last thing that I always ask of the guests, you know, this is this is your episode, we've talked about you, your history, your involvement in the martial arts. So your chance to choose how we fade out to the outro, parting words, wisdom, anecdote, whatever. How do you want to end our conversation today?

**Jason Neef:**

First and foremost, I want to thank you for the opportunity, Jeremy. I, I've heard so many great things about you in this podcast. It's a privilege for me to be on it. So thank you for for providing me this opportunity. And I guess I just wanna leave everybody with just I wouldn't call them words of wisdom, just words of encouragement. I would just say these are difficult times no doubt, and small businesses are dealing with circumstances, you would have never guessed going into the year. I just want to offer words of encouragement, stay the course, keep grinding, keep fighting. Do everything you can to protect your business 'coz your communities, your students, they desperately need you right now. So do not



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quit. Do not give up the fight. I just want everyone to know that we're right there with you in the trenches. And we just look forward to seeing this industry not only survive, but be much stronger and better because of this circumstance we're in.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

One of my favorite things about this show is, as you already know, it's meeting people. It's connecting with some of these folks who I've had the opportunity to learn from. There are times though in this episode where I felt like, you know, Jason and I could have been in a mirror in a sense. I get the sense that we have far more in common than we even unpacked in today's show. And so I'm looking forward to connecting with him. You know, we talked for a bit after we recorded, and it was just more of the same or the same kind of good stuff, talking about the industry, talking about what he's got going on. And I'm confident that this isn't the end for he and I chatting. Hopefully, we'll get some more time with him on the show. And hopefully, I'll get some more time to learn about him and what makes them tick. Thank you. Really appreciate you coming on the show. And, yeah, let's make sure this isn't the last time. If you want to find more. We've got videos, links, all the stuff we talked about today. Eventually, there's a transcript up there, doesn't usually happen at launch, but we get a transcript up eventually. So go check that stuff out [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). And if the stuff that we do, provides value to you, I hope you'll consider supporting us. You've got a bunch of options. The easiest ones make a purchase at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com), use the code podcast 15 to save 15% if that strikes you. You could also leave a review by a book, pick up one of the training programs, or help out with the Patreon [P-A-T-R-E-O-N.com/whistlekick](https://www.patreon.com/whistlekick). And if you see somebody out there wearing some with whistlekick on it, make sure you say hello, connect. Maybe you make a new friend out of it or hey, you know what, grab a selfie in and tag whistlekick in it. If you've got guest suggestions or other feedback. I wanna hear it, email me [Jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:Jeremy@whistlekick.com). That's it. It's all I've got for you today. So until next time, train hard, smile, and have a great day.