

Episode 103

Wed, Jun 03, 2026 9:00AM • 57:25

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Brazilian jiu-jitsu, Legado Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, immigrant entrepreneurship, Bellefontaine Ohio, faith and business, Brazil to Ohio, martial arts community, small business ownership, mission trip connection, discipline and confidence, taking a leap of faith, planting seeds, community building, small town opportunity

SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Luciano Gomes, Ethan DeLeon

L Luciano Gomes 00:00

You know, Jason, I believe that every single person has a handful of seeds, and those seeds are gifts, relationships, your time— very important. And we need to use those with faith. We need to plant them and expect that it's going to grow and provide fruits.

E Ethan DeLeon 00:20

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J Jason Duff 00:40

Hey guys, it's Jason Duff. I'm here today with Luciano Gomez. He is the owner of Legado Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, and I have been excited to interview Lou because everyone, many people that I work with are saying, you have got to go and get on the mat and roll around with me. So I'm gonna hear a little bit more and I'm gonna commit today that I'm going to attend a class and I've got to see what all of this is about because everyone that goes to one of Lou's classes comes back and says not only do they feel more positive about themselves, but they feel like they're working on their health, their fitness, and their whole body wellness. So it's a pleasure to have you on the show today, Lou.

L Luciano Gomes 01:21

Thank you so much. Pleasure is mine.

J Jason Duff 01:23

Yeah, well, even more importantly, I love to hear the stories behind the business. And I think for you, you know, becoming a business owner and finding Bellefontaine. I'd like to unpack that journey and that story with you and then hear more about jiu-jitsu in itself, what it means, what it is, not only from the health and wellness side, but for the whole person. So let's just kind of start. Tell us about who you are, Lou.

L Luciano Gomes 01:51

So pleasure to be here. Thanks so much for having me. So yeah, my name is Luciano. I was born and raised in Brazil. I have 3 siblings. I'm the second child, and I honor that title.

J Jason Duff 02:04

The middle child?

L Luciano Gomes 02:06

Oh, yes. Yes. We're 4 boys. And yeah, like I said, I was born and raised in Brazil. The first time I left the country was to come here. I came here in 2016. So I'm walking towards my 10th anniversary in the United States.

J Jason Duff 02:21

Congratulations.

L Luciano Gomes 02:22

Thank you very much. So it's been a long journey, but it's been very rewarding. It's been incredible.

J Jason Duff 02:29

So I want to hear more about your town where you grew up. Why was it special to you and what was it like there?

L Luciano Gomes 02:35

So I'm from southern Brazil. I'm from the last state on the bottom of Brazil. We share with Uruguay down there and then down there is just Antarctica. So I can tell you that I'm from the south. It was—we are farmers, so already this is familiar for me where I live today. My, you know, my grandpa was a farmer, and, uh, it was, it was a very '90s kid type of childhood, like, you know, riding bikes, being with friends, playing soccer out there. And one of the things about Brazil is that we go to school 4 hours a day.

J Jason Duff 03:16

4 hours?

L Luciano Gomes 03:17

Yeah, 4 hours. Wow. Okay. You can pick afternoon or Or morning, and we have a lot of free time. So that's when I started martial arts, because my mom was trying to fill in that time that I was just home. And that's when I started martial arts. I was around 4 or 5.

J Jason Duff 03:35

Well, you had brothers that you had probably to, number one, defend yourself a little bit, but also maybe hit them back occasionally too.

L Luciano Gomes 03:43

Yeah, so me and my oldest brother, believe it or not, we have an 8-year age gap. gap.

J Jason Duff 03:47

Oh, okay.

L Luciano Gomes 03:48

So he was born in '83, I was born in '91, so I just told you my age. But, uh, yeah, so with that gap, I couldn't compete with him. And he also did martial arts. Actually, today we have, uh, the same belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu, so I was able to catch up with him because he got a little older, a little busier, and then I was able to catch him on that one. But, uh, yeah, it was a challenge to keep up with him, but You know what? He took care of me. He was my example. And he kind of, you know, I was with him majority of the day for my parents to work. And then me and my younger siblings, we have a smaller gap in age. But yeah, my oldest brother has been an influence regarding to martial arts, lifestyle, and other things I do in life.

J Jason Duff 04:38

Well, you mentioned soccer was obviously huge growing up. But like, for those of us here that grew up maybe were newer to jiu-jitsu, like what related to Brazil and the culture, is it well known there?

L Luciano Gomes 04:53

Yeah, so the thing with soccer in Brazil, you know, we know it's a passion that we have as Brazilians.

J Jason Duff 05:00

Yeah, right.

L Luciano Gomes 05:00

And my dad was a soccer player. He was a goalie.

E Ethan DeLeon 05:04

Okay.

L Luciano Gomes 05:05

Played, you know, professionally. He did, I still remember when I was a kid going to some games, but he was not playing. as much because the family was growing. And then he's just working very, very hard and several hours a day. And one of the things I'll tell you is that none of the kids got daddy's body type. So my mom was like, let me tell you something. These kids need to do something else. They're not going to play soccer like you did.

J Jason Duff 05:34

Mm-hmm.

L Luciano Gomes 05:35

So martial arts was an option. We have always been so active and athletic, even being bigger kids. And, you know, I just always loved martial arts. Me and my brother always loved watching movies, playing video games, you know, those—

J Jason Duff 05:50

So '80s and '90s, what were some of your big martial arts movies that like, I love this?

L Luciano Gomes 05:54

So that one with, um, the dragon.

J Jason Duff 05:57

So I was big with The Karate Kid. I'm an '80s kid, so I'm a little older than you.

L Luciano Gomes 06:02

Yeah, no, but my brother, yeah, yeah, yeah. My brother watched Karate Kid. I watched the one, um, Well, I can't think of the name now, but very famous. Um, and then we played video games, like as a kid playing Mortal Kombat, Street Fighter.

J Jason Duff 06:17

Yes. Those are the good ones.

L Luciano Gomes 06:18

Oh yeah. Playing all those things. So, uh, and Brazilians, you know, we, martial arts is very strong in our culture. We have a Brazilian martial arts called capoeira, which is a dance, uh, dressed as a martial arts. Like we dance and we have this martial arts thing together, uh, that the slaves brought to Brazil. So that was my first martial arts. And I still have a lot of that in me. My agility, my flexibility all comes from that. Wow.

J Jason Duff 06:48

Okay.

L Luciano Gomes 06:48

And Brazilian jiu-jitsu became very popular in the '90s when one of the Gracie family— Brazilian jiu-jitsu is known because of the Gracie family. So when Jorge—

J Jason Duff 07:02

Tell me about the Gracie family.

L Luciano Gomes 07:03

Yeah, so the Gracie family, they were north of Brazil. And, you know, they had a, um, the dad owned a circus and they had the kids. They brought a Japanese guy that knew jiu-jitsu, the traditional one from Japan.

J Jason Duff 07:16

Hmm.

L Luciano Gomes 07:17

And then one of the kids called Helio Gracie couldn't do it because of his, you know, body type. And then he adapted the techniques to his body type and created the Brazilian jiu-jitsu. That's why it's called like that. And one of his sons, Rorion Gracie, came to the United States back in the '90s. Also, Rorion Gracie was the creator of UFC.

J Jason Duff 07:39

Ah, we've all heard of UFC. That is blown up as an industry.

L Luciano Gomes 07:43

Yes. And now they have the UFC BJJ.

J Jason Duff 07:47

I didn't know that. OK.

L Luciano Gomes 07:49

Yeah. So Rorion Gracie came to the United States. So prices in jiu-jitsu in Brazil back in the '90s— I was born in '91, right?

J Jason Duff 07:56

Yeah.

L Luciano Gomes 07:56

Went sky high. So I had to do other martial arts that didn't require a lot of money. But when I was 14 or 15, I went back to jiu-jitsu. And today I'm 34. So since I was 14 or 15, I'm still doing it.

J Jason Duff 08:11

Wow. That's awesome. And today you've now built a business around that, and I'm excited to unpack that. But tell us more about how did you find Bellefontaine or how did Bellefontaine find you? Yeah.

L Luciano Gomes 08:23

So 2008, I was serving at my local church in Brazil. And my pastor in Brazil was from United States. And, um, we used to receive a lot of visitors from United States. I didn't speak English, but I was always there willing to help and taking care of them, walking around the neighborhoods, make sure they're safe, taken care of. And just because I was local, that makes total difference, right?

J Jason Duff 08:50

It does. Yeah.

L Luciano Gomes 08:50

So, um, in 2008, we received a group from Bellefontaine, Ohio, and they were from Calvary Baptist Church. And in this group, there was a lady called Hannah. By that time, it was Hannah Woods. Today she's called Hannah Gomez. So, uh, but we were 17. Yeah, you know, we didn't know what we wanted for our lives, and she was a very quiet person, and I am a people person.

J Jason Duff 09:20

If you didn't get that, you're, you're kind of comfortable with connecting with people.

L Luciano Gomes 09:25

Yeah, I appreciate that. But yeah, I always loved people. I always loved talking to them, knowing about them. And she was just quiet. And I was like, you didn't come to Brazil to be like that. Like, hey, if I can help you— I don't remember what I said because I didn't speak English, like I said. But, you know, we spent a lot of time together. And actually, one of the things that happened in that trip was that her friend was kind of like talking to my friend. And I remember me and Hannah just touching elbows and said, they're so silly, this will never happen. So guess what happened to us, right? So we always kept in contact talking, uh, birthdays, Christmas. And, um, I remember that one day we start talking, and I'm gonna tell you, it's been 10 years since we've talked every single day. So I came here.

J Jason Duff 10:19

That's awesome.

L Luciano Gomes 10:20

Well, she went back to Brazil to start our visa process. Have you seen the show K-1? No, sorry. The 90 Days Fiancé? Have you heard about that?

J Jason Duff 10:33

I have seen the show, yes.

L Luciano Gomes 10:34

So that was my visa. I came here with a fiancé visa.

J Jason Duff 10:40

Wow.

L Luciano Gomes 10:40

But I was not part of the show, the 90 Days. But that's true. I went to Rio to get my visa. 90 days, you have to get married. So, but Hannah went to school.

J Jason Duff 10:48

You need to make sure it works out, right? Yes.

L Luciano Gomes 10:52

Yes. But I'm going to tell you right now, it's been the best 10 years of my life. Being a father, a husband. I got here with no responsibility, no money, no nothing. And then all of a sudden I'm a father, I'm a husband, and that makes you grow. I can tell you that. But it's been rewarding. It's been a blessing. And so yeah, I met Hannah on this mission trip, and I got here December 1st, 2016.

J Jason Duff 11:20

So taking that leap of faith with a person that you had a very meaningful connection from a completely different country, and knowing that when you first met, the language barrier had to be really tough, but There was some type of connection. There was something that felt for you and for her, there was something bigger and more meaningful. The day that you landed here and had that 90 days, what was going through your head?

L Luciano Gomes 11:52

Well, that's an awesome question. But yeah, our story is very different. We didn't spend a lot of time together, but we were sure of what we wanted. and what we felt. Um, you know, we had some close people telling us like, you guys need to be careful, you know, what if it doesn't work? But, um, you know, we, we knew what we're feeling, what we wanted, and we were kind of the same stage of life. She was working here, uh, good job. Same thing with me in Brazil. I had a good job. You know, my life was literally work and jiu-jitsu. And that's it. And we just started talking. And we were sure what we wanted to do. But yeah, coming here was a very big challenge. I feel like it was yesterday. I remember arriving here. It was December 1st. And I was wearing shorts. And my flight was to Chicago. So Hannah was like—

J Jason Duff 12:55

Welcome to winter.

L Luciano Gomes 12:57

Do you have jeans?

J Jason Duff 12:58

Had you ever been skiing or heard of skiing before that point?

L Luciano Gomes 13:01

No.

E Ethan DeLeon 13:01

No.

J Jason Duff 13:01

You're like—

L Luciano Gomes 13:03

No, I never touched snow.

J Jason Duff 13:05

Okay.

L Luciano Gomes 13:05

Never knew what below 5 felt like. I didn't know about static stuff that you touch and you get shocked. I didn't know anything about that. But I knew the big challenge that I had to face. But I felt like my heart was at peace and I was with the person that I loved. And I knew that love is not a feeling, it's a choice. And I knew we would struggle with language, culture, financially. Hannah already had London. She was 3 at the time, 4, sorry.

J Jason Duff 13:47

And that was her daughter and now your daughter?

L Luciano Gomes 13:50

That's her daughter. Yes. So I knew that I was going to put a lot of things on my shoulder, but I was committed. And I knew that that was what God had prepared for me. So I was not afraid of anything. And I knew that time would be our best friend. So daily, we would try to kind of see what was the culture shock, what was the language barrier, what was, you know, just me adapting. And I had a lot of empathy towards Hannah because she pretty much had to raise an adult. Yeah. Can you imagine? We would go out to eat and she had to order my food. And then I don't know what I'm asking for. And, oh, food was a big change too. So every single thing when I got here was a challenge. But I enjoy challenges.

J Jason Duff 14:47

Well, for people, change is really hard.

E Ethan DeLeon 14:51

Yes.

J Jason Duff 14:51

And it takes courage. It obviously took a tremendous amount of courage for the steps that you, you took to, to leave everything that you knew that was home at the time and to not— you had a good job. You had good things going for you and, and a wonderful situation, but you were propelled to go and, and do something bigger and different for your life. Like, what would you say to, to people that are listening that maybe have a lot of fear with making that big life change or could be leaving a career or moving out of their town or picking a different state or a different country? Any advice for them?

L Luciano Gomes 15:26

Yeah, so, um, I can speak for myself, right? But we always need to inspect things around us. What's happening? What do you see— just an example— in your parents that they never took that leap of faith? What have your parents done that you really appreciate? I think our biggest examples are inside of our house. Regardless if it's good or bad, you will learn something from it. And I had a dad that he was full of dreams, and unfortunately he passed away and those dreams were buried with him. So I promised to myself that I will not be that guy.

E Ethan DeLeon 16:12

Mm-hmm.

L Luciano Gomes 16:15

So the biggest example it's inside of our own home.

E Ethan DeLeon 16:19

Mm-hmm.

L Luciano Gomes 16:20

You know, maybe an older brother, maybe an uncle, a grandpa. So, you know, I always look for what it's around me first, and then I'm like, what can I gather from this that will help me about what I want to do in life? My dad owned a few, um, places that he rented. And that actually today is my mom's part of her income.

J Jason Duff 16:48

Yes.

L Luciano Gomes 16:49

So he was also a businessman, and I worked with him taking care of— I was doing more the customer service for him. So quotes, phone calls, and, you know, I was able to learn with him. But I knew that being close to him, he was full of dreams. but never took that step. And I didn't want to be like that. So when I came here, I saw everything as an opportunity that I was not going to miss. And if something went wrong, I would just get back up and I was going to try something else. Or I, you know, I always end the possibilities in everything I do. So I think that's At first, we are always so negative. Sometimes when we start a business, we let other voices get in our minds or—

J Jason Duff 17:43

The fears, the disappointment.

E Ethan DeLeon 17:44

The fears.

L Luciano Gomes 17:45

Yeah. The traumas that we have. Yeah. They can stop you. They can freeze you. So you just got to go for it. Because one of the things that I've been learning as I'm talking to you, I've been learning this throughout the years, but sharing this with you, it's like time's going so fast.

J Jason Duff 18:03

Does not slow down.

L Luciano Gomes 18:04

Yes. I can't believe I got here like almost 10 years ago. And I see my kids and it felt like I blinked and now they're a teenager. Now, you know, they don't need all the care that I used to provide to them. They're so independent, you know? And if I can tell people one thing is just take that step. Know why you're doing something. Like, why am I opening this business? Why am I taking this step? Why? You got to do things for the right reason too. If we aim for things that are temporary, um, it hardly ever happened. What I'm trying to say with that is if we're going to start a business just for the money, it's a— this is hard.

E Ethan DeLeon 18:50

Yes.

L Luciano Gomes 18:51

Right? Um, you got to know why you're opening the business. You, you got to have purpose.

J Jason Duff 18:56

I always like the statement that diamonds are forged in fire, and anything that's hard is worth doing because you can look back at how you evolve and how strong it makes you to get through what's next.

E Ethan DeLeon 19:11

Yes.

J Jason Duff 19:11

And thank you for sharing your story about the inspiration of your dad and also how asking the question, and I love this question, In fact, I ask it to people important in my life is, what do you dream about at night? Because when you can articulate something that is a goal or a passion or a purpose, it's so much more than a job. And I think sometimes it's easy to get caught up in just doing to do. But then it's maybe jumping a little bit above the issue and saying a 20,000-foot view, Is what I'm doing bringing me joy and purpose, and is that impacting others? And I'd like to kinda hear how your hobby and kind of the things that you did of learning more about Brazilian jiu-jitsu, how that turned into a business. So tell us more about what that was like that, you know, moving here to the States, having — you kinda had a day job, right?

L Luciano Gomes 20:13

Mhmm.

J Jason Duff 20:13

Yes. And you knew you had this dream and ambition of opening a business. What did that look like to say, I want to do this?

L Luciano Gomes 20:20

Yeah, so I worked for a car company close to us over here.

J Jason Duff 20:25

We manufacture a lot of vehicles around here.

L Luciano Gomes 20:27

Yes, we do. And I started there delivering some material to the line, driving a little cart. And my English was very tiny. Didn't have a lot of English.

J Jason Duff 20:41

Poco.

L Luciano Gomes 20:42

Poco, yeah.

J Jason Duff 20:44

I know very few Spanish, but I have a little bit.

L Luciano Gomes 20:46

Well, that's another thing I'm going to tell you. In Brazil, we speak a harder language.

J Jason Duff 20:52

Yes, you do actually.

L Luciano Gomes 20:53

Portuguese.

J Jason Duff 20:54

Portuguese.

E Ethan DeLeon 20:54

That's right.

L Luciano Gomes 20:55

But because we live surrounded by the Hispanic countries, it's influenced by that, right?

J Jason Duff 20:59

Yes.

L Luciano Gomes 21:01

So yo hablo español también. But working in this place, Jason, it was one of the biggest lessons of my life because of the diversity of people working there, the amount of different jobs that they had. And I remember that actually Spanish saved me. I used to work in front of one of the departments that were welding, and there were some Mexicans in there. And because I didn't speak English, they were my best friends. So I was able to develop my Spanish and sharpen that skill.

J Jason Duff 21:36

Maybe quicker than English?

L Luciano Gomes 21:38

I— well, my wife always said that I was able to communicate.

J Jason Duff 21:42

Okay.

L Luciano Gomes 21:43

In my mind, Today I still don't speak English. And she said, you need to quit. But, um, I always wanted to get better. And, but working there, I was so close to Mexicans. And then I remember that that year we started seeing some Venezuelans coming in.

E Ethan DeLeon 22:02

Mm-hmm.

L Luciano Gomes 22:02

And I saw Louie in every single one of them, not understanding the process, making mistakes, not able to do the job, you know, with proficiency. And in my mind, I was like, how can I help these people? And it was not about the money. It's not about moving up in the company. I just wanted to be a help. And that started opening doors for me to train them. And then I moved up to, uh, as an HR coordinator.

J Jason Duff 22:30

Which is a big deal.

L Luciano Gomes 22:32

It is a big deal for someone that was like 5 years in the company, right? Had to just learn the language. over there working. This is something that I'm very proud of. So working as an HR, I was able to learn more English. I was able to know a different part of the business, how to be more personable, how to talk to people with efficiency, more respectfully. Because when you get here, your vocabulary is kind of limited when you come from a different country. So sometimes you can say—you just have one way of saying things. So that opened my mind to a different level of English. Wow, now I'm having meetings with these people and I need to, you know, be able to talk to them. So I'm very hard on myself about English, but I worked delivering parts and I started moving up. And when I got a job as an HR, I saw a friend of mine that about to retire, passing away because they were so busy working overtime, doing this, not with a healthy lifestyle. And then when they were done, ready to retire, they would die. I had one friend that found out that he had cancer, and I'm like, man, I love that guy. He was one of the greatest supervisors I've ever had. A friend of mine from the same area that I drove forklift at, And I was like, am I gonna be another one? Like, and then when I moved up to as an HR, I had to deal with their documents and stuff. And that made me very sad, but also made me think about my future. But not only that, the job was demanding more hours and more time and more this and more that. And I was like, um, it was very hard for me one day that I got home and my oldest daughter said, when are you gonna be home? And I said, I'm home now. She said, well, but, you know, it's not always like that. I could have seen her face like, yeah, you're home now. But like, so I started thinking like, life needs to be more than this because truthfully, Jason, my bank account was looking good, but inside of home was empty. And numbers You know, today we can have an X amount, tomorrow maybe more, maybe less. That's something that changes every day. But your family is one of the most precious things that God has placed in your hand. And I was not willing to lose that. So I started looking for career changes and I needed an outlet. So our local police department was having Behind the Badge. And I attended it. And I remember we were having a self-defense day, and I'm with Honda clothes. And it's like, you know, what do I do now? I'm like, I was looking at him, and I was invited to be part of that self-defense. And I gave the cop a hard time, which he's a big friend of mine, love him. And they saw my skills. They saw me doing other stuff.

J Jason Duff 25:48

Uh, did you surprise some people?

L Luciano Gomes 25:51

Yes.

J Jason Duff 25:52

You're in the Honda uniform. I can just picture this as you're describing it, and you're at the self-defense behind the badge event, and you're like, oh, I can teach you some skills.

L Luciano Gomes 26:00

So I'm not a guy that you look at me and you think that I am a jiu-jitsu coach, but this is the most wonderful thing about jiu-jitsu. It has no face. And you can get really surprised because my daughter, she's the cutest thing ever. Tiny, book smart, and she can—

J Jason Duff 26:23

She can take you down.

L Luciano Gomes 26:24

Rock your world. So jiu-jitsu has no face.

J Jason Duff 26:29

It's for everybody. I'll tell you, as someone that's learning about it and new through what you're describing, I have walked by your studio and you just survey. When you go to a gym, There is— everyone is always kinda looking who's on the treadmill, who's pumping weights. But when I go by your studio, I see all different body types. I see men, I see women, I see children, and they're all learning in the same room. There's not many types of fitness that is what I would say could be universally embraced by all.

L Luciano Gomes 27:04

Yeah. That's That's true. And I always say that jiu-jitsu is for everybody, everyone that's willing to put in the hard work to face challenges. And it is kind of different from the fitness world where— I love about jiu-jitsu is we all wear the same clothes and we're all barefoot. So it's the place where the mailman is training with the judge and they don't know about it sometimes. And it's amazing. Because truthfully, we don't care about your title. We care about you as a human being, as an individual that maybe is on the mats to run away from the noise out there in the world, just trying to take care of yourself, get in better shape, or learn something new. So jiu-jitsu is amazing, um, because it helped me as a kid. Being a bigger kid, I was bullied. And I'm like, if it gets physical, dude, like— so I avoided it because I knew that if it got physical, I could just hold this person down. And okay, I'll give you your 5 minutes of, of, you know, bullying me. Cool. Like— And I grew up with brothers, so nothing bothered me. Um, and I just loved it because, like I said, when I was there for Behind the Badge, Nobody knew who I was. They didn't know about Lou, the jiu-jitsu guy. And I ended up, you know, volunteering and we had a scramble, me and the guy. And he's like, don't leave this place. I need to talk to you about jiu-jitsu.

J Jason Duff 28:43

That's awesome.

L Luciano Gomes 28:44

And was at that moment where I had a career change. I joined our local police, I passed the state test, and I worked in our local jail for 3 years as my business was growing on the side because I started teaching cops first. And it's— jiu-jitsu has given me so many opportunities. That was not just the opportunity of opening a business. It gave me an opportunity to be more humble, gave me the opportunity to work under pressure, gave me the opportunity to come to a different country at the age of 25, not speaking the language, not knowing what would happen tomorrow. But I was so used to the resilience I was so used to the hard training. I was so used to facing challenges that it— I carried jiu-jitsu with me. It is a lifestyle, and everything I do is jiu-jitsu. The way I talk to people, the way I treat people, um, when I see people, I'm like, I think jiu-jitsu is going to be great for that person.

J Jason Duff 29:44

Not just the physical elements, so much more than the physical elements.

L Luciano Gomes 29:48

Way more, yes.

J Jason Duff 29:49

And I think what you have kind of described it, and I hear this from others, and this is why me just speaking of someone, why I'm excited to go to class and learn more. It is kind of what people describe to me as like an operation system. It's like it gives you these tools, and, and you're a living example of it, of how you go out into the world, you know, protecting yourself, protecting others, um, being able to, uh, to focus on The whole side of you.

E Ethan DeLeon 30:19

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L Luciano Gomes 30:30

You know, I come from a country where violence is a thing. So I think my mom was also ahead of her time when she signed us up for martial arts classes. because she knew she would not be around us, and she wanted to raise men that would be able to literally serve and protect. And, you know, I had no plans of joining the police, but I knew jiu-jitsu would be an asset and I would be able to help. And that was a way of me saying thank you to the community because I came here with literally nothing, and that's how I a way I found to say thank you to this community that have embraced me and my family, even though my wife was born and raised here. When we got married, we became one. We're one family. We're the Gomez family. And I wanted to pay it back. Because if today I have a comfortable life, if today I'm able to drive a nice car and wear nice clothes, it's because of this country, this community, this people. Jiu-jitsu is also a tool that I use to say thank you to the community.

J Jason Duff 31:39

Well, it is obvious. And I wanna share, we had a space in a building that went through a pretty sizable renovation. It was a second floor studio space. And I have to say that the gym on the first floor, when you've got first floor spaces, those are always typically the easiest to fill. But the second floor space, it had these gigantic windows, it had new LVT floors, 2 restrooms that were there, and we had always struggled finding that perfect tenant that would complement the things that were happening on the first floor. And Lou, I think you reached out and connected maybe with Kane, one of our team members, and just kind of walked through the space. But I think, and what I remember from this conversation, is there were a lot of things you liked about it, but it was pretty scary going from a side business to actually saying, I'm ready to have a studio space. Can you kind of tell me, like, some of those steps of, like, I'm just not sure this is gonna work? Yeah.

L Luciano Gomes 32:48

Yeah. So that's true. Speaking of Kane, love that guy.

J Jason Duff 32:51

Great guy. He is a big jiu-jitsu fan, by the way.

L Luciano Gomes 32:55

He is, and he's very good. I just, I know he's very busy, but, you know, Ken, we're waiting for you anytime. Love that guy. He's very special in a personal side, but also on the business side for me, right? But yeah, it was kind of hard because, you know, connecting with what I was telling you is I start teaching cops and then all of a sudden outsiders wanted to do it. And one of my first students that were an outsider was Brett Herring.

J Jason Duff 33:21

Yes.

L Luciano Gomes 33:22

And me and Brett Herring, people don't know, but I went to Dublin, Ohio for jiu-jitsu classes since year 1 here. Because I believe we're the first jiu-jitsu school in Belfound that just offered that with everything that jiu-jitsu has to offer. We're the first ones. And the drive, the cost. And I start teaching Brad Herring in my basement.

J Jason Duff 33:47

Did you really?

L Luciano Gomes 33:48

Yes. And he was one of the outsiders that joined me and the cops. And we saw a possibility, you know.

J Jason Duff 33:57

Well, Brad had a set of skills too coming into this. He is a professional, a business owner, understands insurance and finance. So he had a different set of skill sets. But through your teaching and coaching, you were teaching him.

L Luciano Gomes 34:16

Yes.

J Jason Duff 34:16

But he was also reciprocating and teaching you. Is that right?

L Luciano Gomes 34:19

That is 100% accurate. He's been my old brother here. He kind of took me under his wing and said, hey, there's potential in here. We can make this happen. And I normally don't mention that because he don't expect any recognition, but he did everything to this day out of generosity. So he's one of the most generous person I've ever met. And he refused to just let go. It's his baby. The gym is his baby, even though he don't get paid one cent about it. Lou is the owner and coach, but people don't know that he's my right arm. He's the one I go to because of his experience.

J Jason Duff 35:04

We need a champion in our life. And we also need advisors, coaches, friends. And it sounds like what I have seen of how you and Brad work together, You're both very humble. And that's the thing is, like, you do want to give those shoutouts and show that appreciation. But when you— it is that givers gain philosophy. When you give to someone else, it all comes in full return.

L Luciano Gomes 35:30

Yeah. If I can just, you know, put our story in a nutshell is opportunities plus relationships equals to influence. So we saw an opportunity. We develop relationships, and now we're influencing people. And but to get where we are today, it was a hustle. So from, you know, little mats from our basement, we're able to get a better space with our local police. Very thankful for them. You know, they provided space for us to train. We train at 4:00 AM, Jason, Monday and Wednesday and Friday. 4:00 AM.

E Ethan DeLeon 36:09

Yes.

L Luciano Gomes 36:10

And our earliest class today is 5:00 AM.

J Jason Duff 36:14

Wow.

L Luciano Gomes 36:14

So from there, we had another mutual friend that's a business owner here in town that provided a space for us. So Jason, I believe that every single person has a handful of seeds, and those seeds are gifts, relationships, your time, Very important. And we need to use those with faith. We need to plant them and expect that it's going to grow and provide fruits, but we can also waste them. So, you know, I just wanted to share jiu-jitsu with them. I didn't charge them. I just wanted to do jiu-jitsu. It was just a passion, my hobby, my therapy. And, you know, my friends were like, hey dude, There's potential in here. And I was like, dude, but I don't want to make this a career. I love my job. And they're like, well, but can you imagine kids benefiting from it? And then joining law enforcement, the amount of cases of domestic violence that I've seen, that bothers me. I turned that into fuel because I want to see Belfonte with a minimum rate of domestic violence. And if that starts in my gym teaching kids, I'm gonna do that. So I took that very personal because like I said, growing up in Brazil, it was a very good school for me with the violence, with making good choices, because I had the chance to join bad guys or do good in life.

J Jason Duff 37:55

Yes.

L Luciano Gomes 37:56

Praise God I had parents that guided me. But not only that, just living in Brazil, you hear things, you see things that are very traumatic that I didn't wanna be part of. So when I came here, I wanted to just, you know, share jiu-jitsu with people. I drove, I used to work, come home, get my bag, a sandwich, and just go to Dublin to train. Then I would come back, spend time with my kids, say goodnight, and repeat. I did that for 5 years. So I think Bellefontaine needed something like that. And, you know, thankfully I had the right people around me, surrounded with wonderful people that believed in me more than anything else. They believed in me. They're like, Lou, I think you have everything you need. And material stuff we can buy, but we can't buy care. We can't buy respect. We can't buy some of the things that you present to us. And I was very thankful because truthfully, Jason, sometimes I don't see those things in me. And I have—

J Jason Duff 38:57

We need other people sometimes around us that will help us realize what our gifts are, but also keep us humble too.

L Luciano Gomes 39:05

Yes.

J Jason Duff 39:05

You need kind of both sides of that. It's like, hey, I want to build you up and remind you what naturally you're really good at, but I want to give you some feedback. Like, I want to share this might be a blind spot that you have too.

L Luciano Gomes 39:17

Yeah, that's correct. And Brad Harris is one of those.

J Jason Duff 39:20

Yeah.

L Luciano Gomes 39:20

When I'm going to a route that it's, you know, not very good. He's like, hey, Lou, have you tried to see this in a different perspective? So I'm very thankful for all these friends and I'm very thankful to Small Nation. Kane was a blessing. He not was, he is a blessing in my life.

E Ethan DeLeon 39:39

Yeah.

L Luciano Gomes 39:39

Love that guy. You have been such a blessing. I'm very thankful for you because I don't know if you have the idea of the things that it's happening inside of our gym. Maybe I don't share everything with you guys, But man, you have addicts that have been clean for 2 years. You have females that have come from trauma and they're able to overcome that with jiu-jitsu and just finding a family. Jiu-jitsu will give you a family they never asked for. That's what I tell people.

J Jason Duff 40:12

Yeah, we all need that.

L Luciano Gomes 40:13

You're going to come here for jiu-jitsu and you're going to find a family you never asked for. And it's amazing. I'm just very thankful for everything that, you know, you guys, my friends in, in Small Nation have provided. Because if I'm successful today, you know, these 3 years that we have been in business, I carry with me a lot of fingerprints. Brad's, yours, Kane's, a lot of people that have helped me in the past. You know, I was in a job which I don't have anything against working in a different place, but I was losing my family because my priorities were not in the right place. And then when you find your purpose in life, that changes the whole thing. But it's not easy. It comes with a price. It comes with waking up at 3:00 AM and teaching a class of 5. Yeah, it's very hard, but it's so rewarding.

J Jason Duff 41:10

With opening up your Studio, one goal that as an economic developer, and us wanting to see good things happen in a community, there's this term called developing a sense of place. And I think businesses like yours, Lou, are developing that sense of place for people to find themselves, to realize the courage that they have. They just need it emphasized. Like you said, to unpack a trauma, to work on their health— physical, spiritual, mental, all of the above in terms of the health of the person. But I think that's something of building upon is that we want to use your business, your story, and the good things that you're doing as that example of creating a sense of place. And that sense of place— I loved your analogy of planting the seeds because your students someday may go out and use their jiu-jitsu in a situation that they need it to protect themselves or to inspire someone else, or who knows, maybe there'll be other coaches like you that start their studios in other towns around the state or around the country or around the world. So I appreciate that. And it comes as a two-way street, but I'd like for those that maybe are new, just the physical elements of your studio, walk us in what's in the space, as a new person to jiu-jitsu, how you learn about it, how you get involved about it. Tell me more about it for someone that may be listening that says, I'm thinking about coming in and trying out a class. What is it like there?

L Luciano Gomes 42:44

Yeah, so at Legado Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, since I've trained in places before, I wanted to make a place where it was welcoming, where respect is a priority, and where you can just come in on the mats the way you are. And because we all need to start somewhere. So I don't only teach people how to defend themselves, or I just don't present them a hobby. It's more than that because like I said, we have different people from different backgrounds coming in, but it's a place where we all gather to just learn with each other. I know I'm in charge of the school and the teaching, But I learn with a kid that's 4 years old. I learn with my older students that's 53. So they all teach me something and it's a place of mutual learning and changing experiences. But when you get there, first of all, our gym is just so pretty. We try to work very hard to make it clean, welcoming, Uh, you know, our mats are always being taken care of. And when you get there, you know, you can expect people to smile at you, coming at you and shaking your hand and talking to you. And our classes, you know, we normally start with an, a, a warmup and then we go through some technique of the day. I work with the methodology, so I know what I'm teaching, you know, until December 31st this year. And it's very organized, you know, and The group of people, it depends what class you choose. In the morning, we have a lot of people that train at 5:00 AM. We, our classes vary between 10 and 20 people. And, you know, I think most of the people, when they think of martial arts, they think it's an intimidating place. But one of the things we always said at Legado Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu is that if you come through that door, we're automatically respecting you. Because we know it can be very intimidating. If you're coming to a jiu-jitsu class, something's bringing you there, and we don't need to know what that is at first. Just come and join us. Just take that step of— I always ask people, when was the last time you tried something for the first time? Because as an adult, we get so caught up in the busy culture. And life's passing and we never tried anything anymore. You know, speaking of this, like my hobby became my work and I'm in search for a new hobby. Like I'm learning a new instrument. So like we always need to learn new things and start new things. Not that my hobby now, it's not interesting anymore. I don't love it. No, I love it. But I'm so inserted in that environment that I'm trying something else to do. And I know it can be intimidating. But if we don't try, if we don't give it a shot, we'll never know. It can be something that's life-changing. Speaking of Brad Herring, the weight loss, the, you know, he came to me because he's like, Lou, I need to do something, man. Like, I'm not living a healthy lifestyle. And he today, like, man, best shape of, of his life. Like, it's— he's an inspiration to a lot of our students. You know, not only him, but everyone that comes to our gym, they carry their own story, and we are always willing to help and cater to them. You know, and one of the things I tell people, don't let the financial aspect of it stop you. We're not interested about your money. We're interested about you as an individual that needs something. Money is not everything. It's a consequence of your hard work, but You know, and I, I just want to say this here. If you come from trauma, if you are being bullied, if you have suffered a massive violence, I don't need to know, but come to us and just try jiu-jitsu. Just try. We have a females-only class. We have a regular adults class. We have kids classes, 2 age groups, 4 to 8, 9 to 14. Please let us serve you. That's why we opened Legado Jiu-Jitsu. To serve people.

J Jason Duff 46:56

And here's why it's working, is that one studio space that you started in, you know, the call— the best call you get from a tenant is like, listen, I was concerned about maybe jumping in and opening up this space, but I shouldn't have had that concern because it's doing so well. I need double the space.

L Luciano Gomes 47:16

Yeah, that still scares me because we're still growing.

J Jason Duff 47:22

I know. So you've built something, and I think that goes down to is like people want to belong to something that feels good. And I, I think I'm sure the listeners are feeling this as they're, they're listening, and, and the viewers that are watching, it's like you're very passionate about what you do and it, it's very authentic. And people, they feel that, but they also want to be a part of that. Um, and, and I think that's just where I'll put the, the celebration fact is that now you're in a space double the size. And again, I work out at the Loco Depot a few nights a week downstairs. And probably the thing that brings me the most joy is when I hear all of your little kids running and doing their training. It sounds like a herd of elephants, but it's the energy and the joy that you see young kids burning off that energy. And the other thing I'll comment, you've got probably now— I don't know what your membership numbers are, but at times, hundreds of people that are coming in and out of your building, and everyone is so courteous and respectful. Because we were concerned just on the second floor, there's a lot of stairs. There's a lot of places, and just kids, kids being kids.

L Luciano Gomes 48:30

Yeah.

J Jason Duff 48:30

I don't think in the time that we've had business there has been a single incident that I'm aware of. And so part of it is I do think what's working is the respect and the skills that you're teaching. It is— it's making a very positive impact. And I think for the parents that are listening too, like, this is another thing that I— I work out with other parents that have kids that are in some of your classes. It's time for mom and dad while they can work out downstairs.

L Luciano Gomes 49:00

Mhmm.

J Jason Duff 49:01

While their kids are, you know, learning something healthy and doing something upstairs. So that whole building and that whole block has become this health wellness kind of focus. And even one of your biggest champions is Jamie and Robin from Always brewing. They love when you come down and get a beverage from them. And you've just kind of built a whole little neighborhood of great people that are around. Yeah.

L Luciano Gomes 49:25

So our kids are phenomenal. We've had families since day 1 of kids class when we opened in a different place that we were. They are still with us. Our retention of students right now is 100%. I don't have one case where they switched us for a different gym. Or, you know, sometimes people quit because of life, but you are absolutely right. What we try to teach our kids is that they cannot be one kid on the mats and another off of the mats. And what I tell 'em is that you're the face of jiu-jitsu out there now. I gave you something very precious and you need to know what you're doing with this. So when they're out there, they're reading books, they have a book club. So all the kids are, you know, not all of them, but some of them are reading books. They talk to each other. Uh, we have a lot of homeschoolers and they're always in touch with each other. They created this community inside of our community that it's just so amazing. You know, my, my daughter's birthday party the other day, all the friends were jiu-jitsu kids and they're so respectful. They know how to follow rules. You know, we were so interested and very aware of the job that we're doing, that we're helping parents to raise kids that understands what rule is, or just how to be nice to others, or just how to be generous. So when they are inside of our class, that you hear them running and playing and being loud, it's because when I was a kid, Martial arts was not like that. So I found a way of making jiu-jitsu fun for them. So we play games and then we start the class and they know it's time to be serious. And then they have to earn the game after that. So we work with them in every single aspect of life. And, you know, sometimes they struggle with something and the parents share with us. And we are there to help. I don't know everything, but one of the things that it's this new generation now, it's getting stopped by screens, you know? And you mentioned you're '80 kids. I was a '90 kids. I didn't have screens and it was a little different for us.

J Jason Duff 51:49

Yeah.

L Luciano Gomes 51:49

So the times that they're spending on the mats are so valuable. are so amazing that when they're done with jiu-jitsu, they go out there and read books. And you probably saw them around the couches sitting there being loud, but they are amazing kids. We have amazing parents and our group of coaches are phenomenal as well.

J Jason Duff 52:08

Yeah. How many coaches do you have now?

L Luciano Gomes 52:10

Um, well, a total of probably between 10, 12 coaches.

J Jason Duff 52:14

That's great. That's great.

L Luciano Gomes 52:15

And all people that are, you know, their kids are doing jiu-jitsu. They have been with me for a while now. You know, we have a little process of them joining. We got to know them. You know, we need to know who they are, how long they've been with us, because we want people that will influence these kids. That— because in my opinion, we're standing in there and yeah, cool, you want to be a coach, you want to help, but that kid needs to look at you and say, this person is an example of my life.

J Jason Duff 52:44

Yes.

L Luciano Gomes 52:45

So that's what I look for. And sometimes I don't care how good you are in jiu-jitsu. I care about how jiu-jitsu's being good for you. If that's making you humble, respectful, able to follow the rules. Because what I tell my students, Jason, is that jiu-jitsu's temporary in our lives. One day Lou is not gonna be able to do jiu-jitsu, but how am I gonna be remembered in our community?

J Jason Duff 53:10

Mm-hmm.

L Luciano Gomes 53:11

That a guy that served and helped people, or just someone that opened a business and just, you know, was there and didn't pour anything into the kids' lives.

J Jason Duff 53:20

Yep.

L Luciano Gomes 53:21

So, and sometimes it's opening a business hard and then working there several hours. I teach between 12 to 14 classes, sometimes 17. That's a lot of hours. It's a very physical job. You're literally fighting people. But I learned something with my older brother that Whenever I'm discouraged or tired, I think of that, which is he said, I don't care if you're— if you have 100% to give, if you have 10, give 100% of your 10% and call it done. That's all you could have done. Face it, get it done, and let's go. We got to be thankful for the things we have because what I have today, Jason, was a prayer request a few years ago. So I need to honor what God has given me. And it's been an incredible journey.

J Jason Duff 54:15

And let's go. I like that.

L Luciano Gomes 54:17

Yep.

J Jason Duff 54:17

So I'm going to ask you the question as we wrap up this episode. We talked about how important dreams are, and you have taken and used your courage, your gifts, your mentors to Move to the country, become a husband, a father, a business owner. You've got your studio. You've doubled the size of your studio. When you dream now, what do your dreams look like for what's next?

L Luciano Gomes 54:46

Yeah, so I dream about— how can I put this into words? Because truthfully, when I get home after a class, Jason, I can still hear the kids. I can still hear all the noise. And it takes me a while to fall asleep. But speaking of dreams, I want that place to be open for many years, even if Lou's not there anymore. I want that place to— I want the new generation to take over and do a better job than I ever done. I want them to see the goods in Coach Lou and make it even better. I want that place, that school to keep changing lives. to keep giving back to the community, to keep inspiring other people that want to open a business. Who would you think that Brazilian jiu-jitsu would work here in town? And it's, it's been surprisingly amazing, the progress that we've had. And the reason I'm saying that's not out of arrogance, it's just like we're so proud of what we're doing and we haven't even started. So my dream for that place is that regardless if it lives there or not one day, That we keep transforming lives through the art of jiu-jitsu.

J Jason Duff 55:59

I think that you have set the foundation for a lot of people that are listening of being able to take those steps and step out of their comfort zone. And the really, the big thing that I take away that you learned and that you live is that opportunities plus relationships equal influence. And you're using that influence to inspire your students and that next big dream that you have You're right on the way for it. It doesn't mean that you have to let off the gas. There's a lot more work and things to do. But I'm so honored to have you on the show today and hear your story. And thank you for being a tenant. Thank you for being a part of our town and community and inspiring all of our listeners today.

L Luciano Gomes 56:46

Well, it's my pleasure. I just wanted to thank you one more time for everything you've done for us. You are a very special part in that puzzle. And we're so thankful to be working with Small Nation. And I think if people are thinking about opening a business, they should definitely reach out to you guys because you guys have given us crazy support that people don't see. And, you know, like I said, we have your guys' fingerprints in our, in our gym. So thank you very much.

J Jason Duff 57:12

It's a pleasure, Louie. Thank you.

L Luciano Gomes 57:14

Thank you.

E Ethan DeLeon 57:14

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