

Living

MY TALK WITH TONY PART 1: TONY SCHIENA, CARD CARRYING BADASS

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I had the recent pleasure of interviewing an honest-to-goodness international man of mystery, Mr. Tony Schiena. This is a gentleman who has managed to pack more achievements, awards, ranks, and

titles into his 39 years of life than most of us could fabricate were we filling our resume with total bullshit.

Tony has, among other things...

- Won the title of Undisputed World Heavyweight Karate Champion
- Been awarded the rank of Lt. Colonel by the Hungarian National Guard
- Been deputized as a sheriff in the state of Virginia
- Been named a Lieutenant on the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force

And then there is his background with the intelligence community of his native South Africa, his work with the military and Special Forces units of Afghanistan, Mongolia, Latvia, Croatia, Italy, and many more.

Um... we didn't talk about most of that stuff.

But we did talk about a lot of other things! I caught up with Tony as he sat on the steps of his home in Ostuni, Italy. OK, fine – I caught him on the phone; I was sitting in my home office hunched over a computer and a notepad. Not yet knowing what a laid-back and friendly guy Mr. Schiena would turn out to be, I started off by assuring him I'd not take much of his time.

“Oh, it's no problem – I'm just sitting here outside my house with a espresso,” he replied, likely mispronouncing “dry martini” given the time zone difference between Ostuni and Los Angeles. I started off with the following question:

ME: “What, so far, has been the most rewarding aspect of your career?”

There was a strange pause.

TONY: “Which career?”

He laughed and said he needed to think for a moment, as in fact Tony has at least three separate careers: one is as a sportsman, another is as a producer and actor, and the third is as a counter-terrorism and intelligence consultant. He took a sip of espresso and looked out as the fading twilight wrapped around the town (I assume it was like that, anyway), then replied.

TONY: “Well initially winning the World Karate Championship in 2001, of course that was a milestone for me. I mean, there are about 20 million people practicing karate, seriously practicing it. And there were maybe 5 million practicing just in my style, so to win that title, to work for that and get it, that was something that was amazing for me.”

In training to defend his World Heavyweight title the next year, Tony broke both ankles. The injury came just two months before he would have fought, thus forcing him to retire from the competition,

as fighting from a wheelchair was not in the cards. (And yes, for the record, that means he retired undefeated.)

TONY: “When it comes to my security career, I started off supplying bouncers to London nightclubs. Now I run a company with multiple offices that provides consulting and private security all over the world, and the company, MOSAIC (*that’s Multi Operational Security Agency Intelligence Company, FYI*), has a teaming and joint operations agreement with a company run by a former CIA director. That’s something I value hugely – it lets me know what we’ve accomplished. Then when it comes to movies, I’ve been able to write, produce, and even star in the picture I wanted to make. That’s not really what happens usually, in Hollywood.”



Let me be clear about something: when Tony says all this stuff, there’s not an ounce of bragging in his voice. This is not a man talking about himself in a self-serving way; he’s just relaying the facts of his life, a life spent in near constant motion. That’s important to note when considering his answer to this next question...

ME: “What is one major goal you have yet to accomplish?”

TONY: “Uh... well... that I have yet to... listen, this isn’t quite the right answer, maybe, but I’m just very thankful I accomplished making this film [*Darc, releasing 2016*]. If I never make another one, I think I’ll be fine with it. Film-wise... I don’t have that many other goals. I guess my real aspirations are just to keep growing my NGO; I have an organization that fights human trafficking, and expansion and success, that’s a huge goal there.”

So Tony’s to-do list? Grow his nonprofit that fights human trafficking. And you... have you even crossed off “Clean the Gutters” yet? You said you’d do it last April, man...

Anyway, next we changed gears and talked about some lighthearted things, such as cyberterrorism.

ME: “How has the nature of your work changed in the past 10 years?”

TONY: “Well of course as the web grows, as networks grow, cyberterrorism is something everyone’s trying to get control of, and even agencies, even law enforcement officials and specialists, they come to us and they ask us: ‘Hey, can you guys get into the dark web?’ We’ve seen developments there [in the dark web] that are totally new; we see developments in human trafficking and we see child predators using it in ways that require new responses. We have to invent those. See, anyone who has substantial revenue can enter the dark web, and then it’s a cat and mouse chase. Penetrating it is a constant battle: close one avenue and another pops up.”

I thought a bit too late to make a reference to The Hydra, which would have been apt as all hell, but we moved on again. Actually, first we got off topic and talked about Hollywood some, but then we moved on.

ME: “If you’d never gotten into karate, and never been a part of the security and intelligence community, what do you think your career might have been?”

TONY: “I think I’d have wanted to be a pilot. The whole *Top Gun* need for speed thing stuck with me when I was younger. I remember sitting in a suite in a London hotel once, sitting around with these three fighter pilots from a few different countries, and they were all talking shop, just talking about their jobs, and I wanted to do what they did, I just knew that would have been perfect for me in another life.”

ME: “What’s the most interesting place you have visited?”

Here there is a long... long pause.

TONY: “Caracas can be pretty interesting. Or maybe Karachi. Pakistan has so much potential violence there that you never know what could happen, even when things seem calm on the surface. Most of the political wing there, if you’re not with them, you’re against them. I think I have to narrow it down between vacation and craziness to say what’s the most interesting place. When it comes to craziness, sure, it’s places like Afghanistan or Iraq... but then again you expect those places to be crazy.

Sure we do! Each and every we visit...

Tony and I then went on to talk about fitness, exercise, training, and the mental commitment that must go along with it. But that, friends... is a topic for another week! Like, how about next week? Come back for Part 2. It’ll get ya motivated! Or feeling terrible about yourself...

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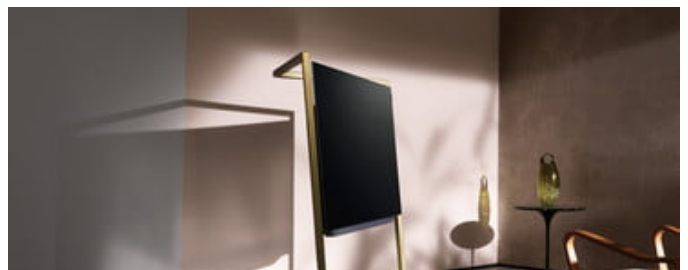
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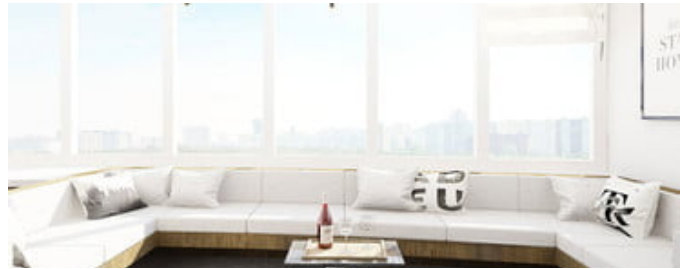
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