

Charlie Mechem:

Welcome to 15 Minutes With Charlie. I'm your host Charlie Mechem. This is a series of podcasts that I've been doing in connection with my recently published book, Total Anecdotal, in which I sit down with guests to discuss anecdotes from the book. Today, we have a very special and unusual guest, Johnny Bench.

Johnny is, I think, by any measure is a greatest catcher in baseball history. He is in the baseball hall of fame, he was most valuable player was the Cincinnati Reds on several occasions, and has always excelled. I've known Johnny for a long time. He's also a hell of a golfer, and we'll talk a little bit about that as we go. So Johnny, welcome.

Johnny Bench:

Thank you so much. It's always great to be with you. I know we saw each other with our good friend the other day at his funeral, unfortunate that we had to meet there.

Charlie Mechem:

Yup.

Johnny Bench:

It's never often enough for me to be around you and to listen, and quite honestly, I loved your book.

Charlie Mechem:

Oh, good.

Johnny Bench:

Your anecdotes were witty. Some old stuff for old people like us that's the way it is.

Charlie Mechem:

That's right. The young stuff, like yesterday, watching the halftime and I'm not a music critic, but I love lyrics and my problem with today's music, I can never understand a single word that they're saying.

Johnny Bench:

Thank you. And I was looking at people, "What is she saying? What is this?" I don't have a clue. I like country music. I like a lot of music but my boys listen to 21 Pilots.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

And Imagine Dragons and stuff, and we go and do that, but yeah. Is that a sign of aging, Charlie?

Charlie Mechem:

Yes.

Johnny Bench:

I saw that in your book as well.

Charlie Mechem:

But it's also a sign of common sense, Johnny.

Johnny Bench:

Yeah. Well, I woke up this morning and I'm missing a mood ring, so I don't know how I feel about it.

Charlie Mechem:

Well, we'll get going here. And for our listeners, the way we do these podcasts is from my book, Total Anecdotal, published about a year ago, I guess, I choose five or six anecdotes and ask my guest to comment on how that particular anecdote might have impacted or had relevance to his or her life.

So we'll get started right off the bat here. Johnny, I have talked to earlier about this anecdote so he's had some chance to think about them. The first anecdote is on page 31 of the book. And it goes like this: "Someone once said that birthdays, like golf, are so much more fun when you don't keep score." Johnny, your thoughts.

Johnny Bench:

Well, I turned 72, which is even par, but I asked a lady friend of mine, I said, "Do I look 72?" And she said, "No, but you're used to." So I don't know if I'd had a few bogeys along the way.

Charlie Mechem:

That's a great line.

Johnny Bench:

We all get excited because we think that the older we get the easier it is going to be to shoot our age.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

So I'm not playing a whole lot of golf right now, but it's the truth. I guess, when you look at life and what it will bring to you and I had no plans on having, I have 10 and 13-year-old boys, and I have Bobby who's 30. And I can't tell you how much younger I am and how much younger I feel when I am around those boys.

Charlie Mechem:

Wow.

Johnny Bench:

And it is just a gift that was given to me. Growing old is mandatory, growing up is optional.

Charlie Mechem:

Very, very good comment. And when you were talking about what your friend said, it reminded me when I turned to 80, one of my friends said, "How old are you?" And I said, "I'm 80," and "Oh, that's amazing," he said, "I thought you were sure you were 90." It's a good way to pull the rug out too.

Johnny Bench:

Another one was saying, "Oh, I thought you were dead." Oh, I ran interesting a lady the other day, "You're Johnny Bench? I thought you were dead."

Charlie Mechem:

Well, here we go. The second one is on page 37 of the book, and this also has some relevance to golf. "A man who was completely obsessed with golf left the house before daybreak one Sunday, played all day, and returned home just as night was descending. His irate wife met him at the door and said, 'I just can't believe what you do, John. I think you love golf more than you love me.' He thought about when I replied, 'You know, I think you're right, but I love you more than tennis.'" And I point out, probably not a good idea to use that story with a tennis audience, but anyway, you ever play tennis, John?

Johnny Bench:

I used to play once a year, Charlie. Reuven Katz would make me go out there and play tennis once a year.

Charlie Mechem:

Yup.

Johnny Bench:

And he played all the time and it was easy to beat me, and he would hit my backhand, and then that's when the two hand backhand started. So I thought, "You know what? I'm just going to do every two hand backhand and just hit it back to him."

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

And I beat him 6-3, 6-4. So we played again the next year, and I beat him again like that. And then, the following year, we were in spring training and he came down and he was so frustrated. I said, "You're playing me instead playing your tennis shots." And I thought, "You know what? I better throw this or I might have to play more than once a year."

Charlie Mechem:

That's right. That's right. Well, Reuven Katz was a good friend of mine too, and I really admired him. I thought he was a terrific guy.

Johnny Bench:

We were so lucky. I was probably the luckiest guy in my life. That was probably the one person in my life. I remember when I was 20 years old, Charlie, 21, maybe, I was a rookie at 20, but there was an article written that was a little bit negative about me and I was very upset, and I was very upset and I was complaining and Reuven looked at me and he said, "Johnny, let me tell you something. Never argue with a man who buys the ink for the barrel."

Charlie Mechem:

That's exactly. Right. I heard that years ago and it's very, very true. Well, for our listeners who may not know, Reuven Katz was an attorney in Cincinnati, a brilliant man, represented some major personal personages, and on top of all that, just a great guy. So I'm glad you brought his name up, and he was a dear friend of mine as well.

The next anecdote is on page 48, I'm sorry, 49, of the book under the heading of, Dealing with Adversity, and it goes like this, "When dealing with difficult situations, it's critical that you not do things that make the situation even worse than it is. As someone put it, 'If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is to stop digging.'" I'd like your thoughts on that.

Johnny Bench:

Well, isn't it the truth? In a situation where, again, Reuven was telling me, "Never reply. Never reply to a barb or to some kind of negativism because it just opens it up so much."

Charlie Mechem:

Good point.

Johnny Bench:

You have to look. Common sense says, "Is this the right thing?" And part of this is your upbringing, part of it's your education, but part of it's friends and mentors that you have in your life. And when you start to do something and you should always obviously evaluate as much as we can before we start the situation, but as you get into it, you know what? It's better to cut bait.

We used to do that where you go to fish or cut bait. And you've got to do what's right, and you've got to figure out the best thing for the situation. And if it's not going anywhere good, then you need to abandon it and find another avenue.

Charlie Mechem:

Such a good point. John, and Reuven was so right that if you try to get into a dialogue with someone who is critical of you, however wrong they may be, you just give them an opportunity to say more bad things.

Johnny Bench:

Yeah, it is. It opens it up and everything else. Why are we trying to find intelligent life on other planets if we can't find it here?

Charlie Mechem:

Certainly can't. And by the way, let's go back for a moment to that comment about golf and tennis. Was baseball always your favorite sport?

Johnny Bench:

I was three and a half years old. We played in the backyard with my dad. My dad had served in World War II and he served for eight years, two hitches. His whole desire in life, he wanted to catch in the major league. And so, he abandoned that. He gave up baseball for the war, and when he came out, he was too old. He was still a great player, but just too old in those days for anybody to sign him.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

So he hoped of his kids might be. So I'm watching a game of the week with Dad, and at three and a half years old, the announcer said, "Now batting, the next superstar, the switch hitting center fielder from Oklahoma." And of course it was Mickey Mantle. And I looked at my dad and I said, "You can be from Oklahoma and play in the major leagues? That's what I want to be."

And he said, "Well, catching is the quickest way to the big leagues and what the major leagues needed." So he started the team when I was six years old, little league team. We rode around the back of a pickup truck. And we had our little jeans and t-shirts, and a lot of times in the town of 660 people, which Binger was, we would have to go around and knock on door find the eighth and ninth players so we could have a full team.

Charlie Mechem:

I'll bet, I'll bet.

Johnny Bench:

And we would go play, and my dad, and we would lose. We were a good team and we would lose, my dad would say, "That's all right, we'll get them tomorrow." And then, we kept practicing. I played against my older brothers who were five and six years old. We played [inaudible 00:10:24] in the backyard. We played games over on [inaudible 00:10:25], and we got better. And at the end of the year, we played a team that was undefeated and we beat them. And I looked at my dad and I said, "Dad, what's wrong with them?" "They haven't learned to lose yet, son, let's go get a cheeseburger."

Charlie Mechem:

Well, who taught you to play golf?

Johnny Bench:

It was a common thing. When I signed a baseball contract with Louisville Slugger so they could put my name on the bat, they give you either a golf bag and clubs, or they gave you \$500. Well, I had to have the golf clubs, because I had played a little bit in Binger with a kid. His dad had moved into town and they had a set of clubs, and we went out in the plowed ground back behind Farmer's Gym and we hit the golf balls across the plowed field.

Charlie Mechem:

Yup.

Johnny Bench:

And so, it became just a thing where you could get away from baseball. You could spend time with friends and it didn't matter what your handicap. See, that's the thing about tennis is that you can't play with everybody. They're just too good. You either chase the ball back at the screen or at the net.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah, yeah.

Johnny Bench:

And with golf, you have so much fun. I'll guarantee you, if you admit it, you've done a lot of business deals on a golf course.

Charlie Mechem:

Oh yeah. Absolutely. And even when you didn't make a deal, you had an opportunity to really evaluate the person you were going to make a deal with.

Johnny Bench:

That's so true.

Charlie Mechem:

Golf playing.

Johnny Bench:

Once I started playing, when I was out to Palm Springs, I started working with Michael Grady and Gary McCord.

Charlie Mechem:

Yup.

Johnny Bench:

And I went from a three to a plus two.

Charlie Mechem:

Wow.

Johnny Bench:

And then, I played nine, nine events on the senior tour. I played at the Kroger in Cincinnati and I shot 76 the first day. I can always remember hitting that sprinkler on the side of the green and went down in the creek and made a quad, and then the next day I shot 67. And everybody was responding. All the other players were patting me on the back and congratulating me. And so, I got to play in the tournaments and I got to play with Arnold, and it was just a change in my life.

Charlie Mechem:

Well, it really does. And golf is... I wanted to ask you, our listeners don't need to be reminded, but Johnny was part of one of the great baseball dynasties, I think, of all time, the Big Red Machine. Were there any other good golfers on the Big Red Machine, John?

Johnny Bench:

We had Wayne Granger and Joe Morgan was actually probably a four or five handicap.

Charlie Mechem:

Really, oh wow.

Johnny Bench:

Tony didn't play. Pete didn't play, he always thought I was with my country club friends, and then one day he discovered golf and he said, "How long has this been going on?" He was out there every day, and so it was just a delight. You had your buddies, you had your friends, you could go out and have a tee time and just laugh about everything.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah, yeah.

Johnny Bench:

And it's always been, and now the warranty has run out on my parts, I'm not playing it a whole lot.

Charlie Mechem:

I used to laugh, Johnny, when I was commissioner of the LPGA, a lot of professional athletes, particularly hockey players, somehow thought that they could beat... After all, these are just girls, and it was interesting to watch as they had their brains beat out by some kid, 105 pounds. Anyway, I knew you'd understand that, because you've always been a great supporter.

Johnny Bench:

Well, when they had the Dinah Shore tournament.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

I would go out there and I would just sit and watch them on the range. It was just poetry.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

Poetry. Then they hit it 20 yards past you and it wasn't poetry.

Charlie Mechem:

When I first became commissioner, I would walk up and down the range. And I remember thinking, "How do any of these girls ever lose?"

Johnny Bench:

Isn't that the truth?

Charlie Mechem:

Of course, as you know, it's a very long distance frequently between the practice tee and the first tee actual.

Johnny Bench:

And also, it's a long way from the front nine to the back nine.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

So you've got your best round going ever on your front nine, and then you cross that road to tee off on 10.

Charlie Mechem:

Unbelievable.

Johnny Bench:

Where does it go? Where does it go?

Charlie Mechem:

The next anecdote is on page 68 of the book. It's under the category of Hard Work. I love this one and I've used it before. It says, "A man prayed and asked God to help him win the lottery. Every day he renewed his prayer and finally said, 'God, won't you please help me win a lottery?' To his absolute amazement, the skies darkened and the lightning flashed, and the strong, deep voice said, 'Would you at least buy a ticket?'" We so often expect good things to happen without effort. They rarely do.

Johnny Bench:

Yeah, Isn't it the truth? I learned early in my life, in fact, I can remember in the eighth grade reading a book, I can't tell you which one, but it said, "Do not compare yourself to others. There are greater and lesser people than all of us.

Charlie Mechem:

Yup, yup.

Johnny Bench:

And then, when I was right around 20 or 21 someone said, "If what you did yesterday is big to you now, then you haven't done much today." And so, every day I went out there on the field, I had to start at the gate and yesterday was gone.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah, yeah. I know the first podcast we ever did was with Jack Nicklaus, whom I know you know quite well. And I used this anecdote with Jack. And he basically said, "Hard work is the essence of any success, no matter what field you're talking about." And he went on to say how hard he worked and people had no idea, John, the kind of preparation, and I think, maybe apart from his obvious skill, one of Jack's greatest assets was how he prepared, particularly for majors.

Johnny Bench:

Oh, well, he knew that's where the success and where the glory lie. But I think Jack was spurred on so much. You need some incentivization, but you need somebody to incentivize you to be better every time.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

There's something like, and we all know Arnold Palmer did that for him, Gary Player did that for him.

Charlie Mechem:

Yup.

Johnny Bench:

But isn't that the great thing? If you have any self-worth and you take pride in what you do, then you want to be the best. That was something I said. I made a comment when I was 18 years old, "I want to be the greatest player ever," and everybody looked at you and it was a lot of brass, a lot of cockiness, is what you would call it.

Charlie Mechem:

Sure.

Johnny Bench:

But the what's wrong with that? What's wrong with wanting to be the best?

Charlie Mechem:

Absolutely right. And working hard to be there, to do that.

Johnny Bench:

Well, hard work does that. It's amazing how 450,000 squats, 850,000 throws, and that's just professionally. That doesn't even count what you did.

Charlie Mechem:

Right.

Johnny Bench:

But here I was growing up in a small town and we played baseball, and then we played basketball, then we worked in the fields. We pulled cotton, we combined peanuts. And so, hard work was just part of that.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

It's what your being was, it's how you made your money, it's how you do that. And if I didn't make a professional baseball player, I was going to be a pharmacist or I was going to be something I could be successful at.

Charlie Mechem:

Johnny, no question in my mind that you're the best ever catcher in baseball. I'd be interested to know who you thought was maybe the next two or three great catchers.

Johnny Bench:

Well, you had Gabby Hartnett, you had Roy Campanella. I loved Carlton Fisk. I thought he was just unbelievable.

Charlie Mechem:

Yup.

Johnny Bench:

True thing, the people think, "Where are all the great catchers?" I said, "They're there, every day you're watching one behind the plate." All these guys are so much better and so in shape, and so strong, and they're so skilled, and talented, and trained, and everything else. I said, "But unless you lead the league in home runs or RBIs, nobody's going to really call you a great catcher."

Charlie Mechem:

Right, right.

Johnny Bench:

What you have to look at is what the offensive side of it did along with the bat side.

Charlie Mechem:

I remember being on an airplane with you one time. I think were both flying back to Cincinnati from Palm Springs, and I said, "Johnny, I think I've seen the best catcher that I've seen since you in Buster Posey." And you agreed that he was going to be tops.

Johnny Bench:

Oh yeah. You see it, and you saw Joel Malheur.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

And you saw some of these guys and they always want to come to me and say, "Johnny, this could be the greatest catcher coming down the pike." And I said, "Okay, but we're going to have to wait six or seven years."

Charlie Mechem:

That's right.

Johnny Bench:

Because they're going to have to stay healthy. This isn't something that comes along and just... I caught a hundred games, 13 consecutive seasons, this isn't something that happens. You get foul balls. People don't see the foul chips.

I just had 30 chips taken out of my shoulder three years ago because of foul balls on my shoulder and the broken bones. I've got six broken bones in each foot from foul balls and stuff. They don't see the foul ball go on your hand that causes you to go into a slump.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

It's not an Oral Roberts uniform. You don't put it on and it heals everything.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

That just doesn't happen.

Charlie Mechem:

All right. The next anecdote is on page 109 under the heading of Statistics. And it's a comment by one of my favorite comedians named Steven Wright. And he made up these statistics right out of his brain.

Johnny Bench:

I love this.

Charlie Mechem:

This one is-

Johnny Bench:

You've got to tell them.

Charlie Mechem:

... "42.7% of all statistics are made up on spot." Second one is, "99.9% of lawyers give the rest of the bad name." And this is the third and my all-time favorite. He said, "Do you realize that half your friends are below average?", which is really funny. Anyway.

Johnny Bench:

It's all statistics. If you look around the poker table and one out of every four, in a card game of four guys, there's always one sucker. And if you look at the other three guys and they're not, you'd better figure it out.

Charlie Mechem:

That's true. Of course, statistics, just in baseball particular, there's a statistic for everything, Johnny. It's amazing.

Johnny Bench:

What they've done with the analytics today is amazing. I was at the Golden Glove award dinner, and I looked at this guy who was all this stat guy, and he had all these percentages and everything else.

And I said, "Well, do you ever consider the fact that as a catcher, when another team you're playing has five base stealers, but only one or two even try it against you, isn't that considered a percentage where you should have at least three of those guys thrown out of the game?" And he said, "Yeah, we do that." I went, "Oh my gosh," it's unbelievable, they don't miss a thing.

Charlie Mechem:

They really don't. The final anecdote is on page 110 under the heading of Success and Failure. Before we get to that one, though, there's another one on that same page that I just love. And I'm just going to quote that for our listeners, and then we'll get to the one I really want to talk about, but it says, "Harry Neale, who was a professional hockey coach, once stated about coaching, 'Last year, we couldn't win at home and we were losing on the road. My failure as a coach was I couldn't think of any other place to play.'"

Johnny Bench:

I love that.

Charlie Mechem:

I do too. Well, here's the one-

Johnny Bench:

The one you wrote about Sparky.

Charlie Mechem:

Yup. "Sparky Anderson was the great manager of the Big Red Machine, one of baseball's all time finest teams. When asked for the secret of his success he explained it this way. 'There were five guys on my team who are so talented, so motivated, and so focused that nothing I do or say can improve their performance. Then there are five guys on my team who are so marginal, so lazy, and so unfocused that nothing I do or say can improve their performance. My success depends on my ability to get the other 15 players on the team to listen to the right five.'" Let me have your thoughts on Sparky.

Johnny Bench:

It was Sparky's first year and we were in spring training and they made the final cutdown and Sparky comes in and says, "All right, you 25 players have made the club, and I just want to go over some rules. All right, there are two sets of rules. Pete, Joe, Tony, Johnny. You don't have rules. You can do whatever you want.

"Now, your other 20 guys," and I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh, this is great. If I want to stay out late, I can stay out late," "and you other 20 guys, here's your curfew you have to be on and everything else." And I'm thinking, "Man, this is the greatest." And then I'm thinking, "Uh-oh. Oh, here it comes."

Charlie Mechem:

Something's coming.

Johnny Bench:

I don't have to worry about those four guys, because I know they're going to do the right thing. They'll have a chance when they go out, if they decide to stay out late, that may work, and everything else. I don't have to worry about those guys because they are prepared every day. And I hear so often about the leaders. "You need a leader on this club."

Well a leader isn't a guy who's [inaudible 00:23:46] or anything else. He's the guy that's on time. He's the guy that doesn't ask any special quarter. He's the guy that's on the field. He's the guy on the bus, on the plane, and he's never late, and you have [inaudible 00:23:57] about being on time, because as Sinatra used to say, he was just adamant about being on time and everything was on schedule.

And he said, "You can take my money. You can take my property. I can replace those, but I can't replace time. So if my time is not worth anything else, you'll value that as you will be on time for me."

Charlie Mechem:

That is really interesting. And he never really seemed to me to be a guy who was seeking accolades or seeking praise. He knew that that would come from success.

Johnny Bench:

And he proved it every day. But he was one of those guys you had to admire because he did it to the best he could possibly do. He wanted to be the best at that. He wanted people to remember him and he had a pride about him. And isn't that the truth when pride comes in? If I had any faults, some people won't admit their faults. I would if I had any. That's just the way that I look at it.

Charlie Mechem:

I've got a line I think is original with me where I say, "I once thought I made a mistake, but I was wrong." My son, Dan, wants to ask you a question.

Dan Mechem:

I just wanted to get your impression of Kobe Bryant, because so much has been written about his hard work ethic. And what were your thoughts about him and his passing and the work ethic, the whole of Kobe Bryan?

Johnny Bench:

Well, I think he's just one of many. The greatness he had, the talent, the gift, as gifted as he was, he was like so many other people who applied themselves, who took pride in everything that they did, and he was just a step above. There are just some greatness. There's something about greatness that exudes itself. But when he got to be great, he wanted to be always great.

It wasn't something that he had accepted or took for granted. He knew he had to stay one step ahead of others and he had to do things. And he had the ability and the talent. A lot of people have called me and said, "I haven't taken the time to say thank you or appreciate the things you did," because they realize that it's so fleeting.

Dan Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

It's just, all of a sudden he's gone.

Dan Mechem:

Yup.

Johnny Bench:

And some people just don't take the time to say, "Really, I may have not told you, but I may have, and I want to tell you again how much I appreciated all the things that you've done and the way you went about your life, and the way you went about your career."

Dan Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

So we need to take time. And there are a lot of us who wanted to be the best because if what you did yesterday is big to you now, then you haven't done much today.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah. I always, I think, at Arnold's memorial service, I remember saying to the audience that someone once said there are no irreplaceable people, but Arnie came pretty close. I know you knew him well as well, and you've known a lot of great golfers, but he was quite a guy.

Johnny Bench:

I played golf with him, Charlie, in 1971. I was invited to play. I won the Bob Hope in 1970.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

And in 1971, I went to his golf tournament and I was about 15 handicap at the time. I was just starting to learn and all, do this golfing. So now I'm paired with him, but I'm on the putting green and Mark Anthony, who was Bob Hope's right-hand guy comes over and says, "The boss wants you over on the first tee."

So I go over and I stand on the tee and he introduces me and we do a little skit that we had done on our USO trip, me and Bob.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

And so, I said, "Okay, play well," and I said, "No, no stay," so I had to stay there. Now, I'm watching. It's a 538 par 5 at Bermuda Dunes and it's five deep, or 10 deep on each side because that was the only celebrity field.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

And so, here's Arnold. Here's whoever the pro was they [inaudible 00:27:52] played from last year. He hits it down there. Bob gets up, hits it right down the middle. And Spiro Agnew gets up, tees it up, hits it right off the toe, hits the guy sitting right there beside him in the stands. They said, "Give him a Mulligan."

He tees off again, hits the guy next to him. Now, Willie Mays gets up, duck hooks one down there, takes out about three-fourths of the crowd on the left side of 120 yards from the tee, and I've got to sit there for 10 minutes trying to figure out what the hell I'm going to do.

Well, here comes Arnold. Arnold's back on the back tee. And you could hear the ball.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah, right.

Johnny Bench:

[crosstalk 00:28:23] the fairway, and he comes, hitching his pants, and I get up he they introduce me. And I happened to learn at this time that you go put the ball on the tee before they introduce so you don't have everybody watching it.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

I couldn't get the ball on the tee. I could not get the ball on the tee. Finally, then I took out the other 20 people next to where we were sitting. He hit it over on the far side and nobody would move. They were watching Arnold walking down the fairway.

I hit a [inaudible 00:28:49] in the middle of the fairway on the other side of him. Eight iron, and made a putt for birdie. And Arnold said, "What's that?", and I said, "It's a four." "A four? Where in the hell have you been? I haven't even seen you there."

We walked for 17 holes and watched one of the greatest things I've ever seen. The way he treated people, the way he made contact, his smile, just, "Hi, how you doing?" Everything else, and then right to the point.

Charlie Mechem:

Yup.

Johnny Bench:

Time to hit. He shot 64, walked around the golf course and it was just one of the finest days I've ever had.

Charlie Mechem:

That's a wonderful memory, and that reminds me of one time at the Kings Island tournament, I was in a group with Bill Keating, whom you remember was the editor and publisher of the Cincinnati Inquirer, Nancy Lopez, and President Ford. And as many of your friends and I would remember Ford, was a great athlete, great football player, but he was a little errant with his shots.

So Keating and I were petrified with fear because we had a gallery of about 5,000 people because of Nancy and President Ford, so we were scared to death. But after about three holes, after Ford line-driven a ball right into the galleries and people were falling like leaves in the fall, we relaxed because we knew that all eyes were going to be on him.

Well, John, I can't thank you enough. In fact, this has been so good, I'd like to say that we ought to do another one, and-

Johnny Bench:

I would love to. The eulogy you gave at [inaudible 00:30:34], I saw the, what's the [inaudible 00:30:35], at Arnold's funeral and everything else, and it's just a pleasure and honor to know and everything else.

I was on the board of the LPGA at one time with you and the transition you've made and what you did for the LPGA tour was when you told them that you cannot compete against the other tours, you have to be you.

Charlie Mechem:

Yup.

Johnny Bench:

You have to show everybody, and then people started to appreciate and admire what they did and it became a very successful tour under your tutelage. But what you're done for Cincinnati is also very special to all of us, just being the gentleman that you are, it's always been great to be around you.

Charlie Mechem:

Well, Johnny, after that, I'm flattered, and also if I wasn't planning to have another podcast with you, I sure as hell am going to have one now. Thank you.

Johnny Bench:

Another thing with Jack.

Charlie Mechem:

Yeah.

Johnny Bench:

I was up in Deerfield with him and I asked about something about bowling or tennis, and say, "If you can't be the best at it, don't do it."

Charlie Mechem:

That's a good, good, good point. And one we all should remember, at least if you can't be, you should always be striving to be.

Johnny Bench:

I agree.

Charlie Mechem:

Yep. Yep. Well, thanks so much, John. I really totally appreciate it. You've been an idol of mine since the first time I saw you play, and it's an honor for me to-

Johnny Bench:

Now you're going to say you're younger than I am.

Charlie Mechem:

No.

Johnny Bench:

You're supposed to walk up and say, "I followed you when I was a little boy."

Charlie Mechem:

I'm not younger than anybody. There was a time when I was, but I'll soon be 90 years old. So, well you heard what I said at Nicklaus' birthday party that I wondered if Jack and Barbara would like a greeting from somebody older, but I couldn't think of anybody older than them except me.

Johnny Bench:

Charlie, here's what I hope. I hope I live to be 120 and the last voice I hear is yours.

Charlie Mechem:

This transcript was exported on Feb 14, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Oh my God. That is a great way to close. Thanks, pal, so much.

Johnny Bench:

Thank you.

Charlie Mechem:

And we'll be in touch. We'll do another one.

Johnny Bench:

Thank you, Charlie.

Charlie Mechem:

Okay.

Johnny Bench:

Take care.

Charlie Mechem:

Bye-bye. Thank you for joining me today's conversation. If you'd like to listen to more episodes, please visit [charliemechem.com](http://charliemechem.com) or search for 15 Minutes with Charlie in your podcasting app.

And if you're enjoying the show, you should check out my book, Total Anecdotal, the fun guide to help you become a better speaker and writer. Learn more at [charliemechem.com/book](http://charliemechem.com/book). That's [charliemechem.com/book](http://charliemechem.com/book), or you can acquire the book either through Amazon or Barnes & Noble. Thank you.