

Charlie Mechem:

Welcome to 15 Minutes With Charlie. I am your host, Charlie Mechem. This is one of a series of podcasts that I've been doing in connection with my recently published book, Total Anecdotal. In that book, I sit down with guests to discuss anecdotes from the book.

Today's podcast features an old and good pal of mine, Tom Patri. Tom is one of the premier golf instructors in the nation, and I'm delighted to have this chance to visit with him once again.

Tom, welcome.

Tom Patri:

Charlie, it's so nice to be with you. So nice to see you and nice to be with you.

Charlie Mechem:

Thank you. First of all, I'm sure your memory is better than mine, when and where did we first meet?

Tom Patri:

So, we met in 1993 at the Loxahatchee Club in Jupiter, Florida when you attempted to give me a golf lesson.

Charlie Mechem:

Is that right? How in the world did that happen?

Tom Patri:

No, I'm teasing. I'm teasing. Actually we met actually at Loxahatchee. I was teaching that winter there, and we had lunch one day, you and I and a fellow named Pandel Savic.

Charlie Mechem:

Oh, yeah. He was an incredible guy.

Tom Patri:

He was incredible.

Charlie Mechem:

For those who would not know his name, Pandel Savic was a world-class quarterback for the Ohio State Buckeyes. And also, Pandel was one of Jack Nicklaus' closest pals and he was about a one handicap.

Tom Patri:

He sure was. And he also attempted to give me a few golf lessons.

Charlie Mechem:

Oh. Much better from him than from me. Tom, bring me up to date on you. What are you doing now and where are you doing it?

Tom Patri:

Charlie, I am the Director of Instruction at a place called Crown Colony in Fort Myers, Florida. My wife, Denise and I live in Naples. I've been here for, it's hard to believe I've been here for 20 years now, going on 21 years. And then, during the summer, like last summer because of COVID and not being able to fly, I drove 27,500 miles last summer doing golf schools around the country.

Charlie Mechem:

Oh, my goodness.

Tom Patri:

Yeah. That was quite a summer.

Charlie Mechem:

Tell me again about or give me a little more detail on the club where you are now.

Tom Patri:

Yeah, it's a great spot. I'm brand new Director of Instruction. They hired me. Towards the end of the summer, they approached me. I'd been at a club in Naples for five years. A dear friend of mine named David Kent, who is a wonderful PGA professional and has transitioned into a GM role, took over Crown Colony about a year ago, hired a new greens superintendent. They didn't have instructional presence at Crown Colony and they wanted to create one. And he asked me if I'd take on that role and try to build a program there. So I went there and started October 15th after coming off the road that summer.

And the reception has been tremendous. Charlie, it's hard to believe that when I say this, I've been a great places, Westchester Country Club and Friars at Loxahatchee, so many great places. It's the most welcome I've ever felt anywhere in my career. At 62 years old, it's kind of re-energized me. The reception has been tremendous. It's a really good golf course. Actually, it's a very difficult golf course, in great condition. It's kind of tucked away towards the Gulf of Mexico in Fort Myers. It's a really cool spot and I couldn't be happier.

Charlie Mechem:

How many members?

Tom Patri:

325.

Charlie Mechem:

That's a good number.

Tom Patri:

Great number. Great number. It works really well. They're really into their golf. The superintendent who they hired, a fellow named Paul Bacon who's originally from London, England has done an incredible job putting the place back together. It was in a little bit of disrepair. The conditions are terrific. The greens, putted today, actually at 12.5, really roll great. And the place, it's almost a little bit of a nature sanctuary. It's pushed up against an estuary that leads to the Hendry River that leads to the Gulf of Mexico. And for example, today on the range, I had about a 12-foot alligator walk across the range. I had three raccoons

walk across the range. I had a hawk, I had a osprey and I'm missing somebody. Somebody else stopped by as well. So [crosstalk 00:04:44].

Charlie Mechem:

That's wonderful, though. How is it giving instruction? What are your duties?

Tom Patri:

Well, basically my dues are primarily instruction, to teach and play with the membership. So I still play a fair amount of golf and I'd like to think I still play fairly well. I get out there a little bit with the membership on the golf course too, but basically my duties are to build and instruction program that has never existed at that club before.

Charlie Mechem:

So you're obviously happy.

Tom Patri:

Yeah.

Charlie Mechem:

And you deserve to be. That's wonderful.

Tom Patri:

Thank you, sir. Yes. Thank you.

Charlie Mechem:

As you know, what spurred this podcast was a book that I wrote a year or so ago called Total Anecdotal. And-

Tom Patri:

Now, Charlie, let me just say one thing. That book, you can see my bookshelf behind me, I've got 2,500 volumes up here behind me and they're divided into different areas. And your book is right up here on the third shelf on the left. I actually put that book in my sports psychology section, if you don't mind.

Charlie Mechem:

I'm thrilled. Well, for our listeners, I'll try to explain what Total Anecdotal is all about. One of my sons-in-law... Hold on. My phone is ringing here.

Speaker 3:

You're going to have to turn it off. You're going to have to-

Charlie Mechem:

Oh, no. That's just Chris. Tell him to call me back. Just Chris.

Speaker 3:

Okay.

Charlie Mechem:

Sorry.

Speaker 3:

Chris, we're in a podcast. Can he call you back?

Charlie Mechem:

One of my sons-in-law called me and he said, "I've got an idea for a book for you to write." And you may or may not know, Tom, but I did another book about 10 years ago called, Who's That With Charlie?

Tom Patri:

[inaudible 00:06:27]. That's up here too.

Charlie Mechem:

That's up there too. Okay.

Tom Patri:

[inaudible 00:06:34].

Charlie Mechem:

I'm glad I brought this up. So I said, "God, I didn't expect to write one book and now you want me to write another one?" And he said, "Yeah, I got an idea." And he said, "I've always noticed that when you make speeches or talks, you like to use anecdotes to illustrate the points that you're trying to make." And I said, "Yeah, I do. I've always felt that if you can use an anecdote, even better, if you can use a humorous anecdote. People will remember the point you're trying to make longer and better."

Tom Patri:

Absolutely.

Charlie Mechem:

And he said, "Well, I'd love to have a sort of a dictionary or a glossary of anecdotes. So then when I was going to make a talk or presentation, I could look at that and go from there and pick some out."

Tom Patri:

Great idea.

Charlie Mechem:

I said, "Well, you know, I think I can do that because I have this box next to my desk, I've been throwing stuff in there for 40 years." So that's what led to Total Anecdotal. And it's done really well. And I think it's an easy look to read, and it's an easy book to get comfortable with. And it does really help people, I think. Because you can be a good speaker, but if you don't engage the audience, it's not going to matter very much.

Tom Patri:

Absolutely.

Charlie Mechem:

So I thought I might, if you will tolerate it, I'd like to read a couple of anecdotes from the book and then sort of give your reaction to those anecdotes as it's impacting you.

Tom Patri:

Now Charlie, don't make this too hard for me because I'm not that smart. I did not go to Yale Law School. So just to-

Charlie Mechem:

If I can read it, you can deal with it. So, yeah, I did go to Yale, but it was an awful long time ago. In fact, I'm going on 91, Tom. So [inaudible 00:08:42] remember.

Tom Patri:

So you graduated from Yale law school in 1955.

Charlie Mechem:

It's exactly right. And went to work in a law firm in Cincinnati and for about nine months. But in those days military service was compulsory. So I took three years off and then came back to the law firm. Now, here's the first anecdote and this comes under the heading of Good News, Bad News. A dentist completes his annual checkup and says, "I've got good news and bad news. Which do you want first?" Well, the patient responds, "Well, let's get the bad news out of the way." So the dentist said, "You have some very serious dental problems. You need two root canals and they will be expensive and difficult, but you must have them done." Well, the man was obviously not happy. So he said, "Well then, let's hear the good news." And the dentist smiled and said, "I had a hole in one yesterday." So it made me focus on, I guess, people live and die for holes in one. But how many have you had, for example?

Tom Patri:

I've had five, Charlie. I've had five ones and I've had two double eagles. I had a one par four and a two on a par five.

Charlie Mechem:

Wow. That's incredible. I've had an eagle, but never a hole in one. And probably at my stage in life, I probably won't. But that's okay.

Tom Patri:

Charlie, don't give up the ship, man.

Charlie Mechem:

No, I'm not doing that. But what do holes in one mean to the average player?

Tom Patri:

To the average player, it's got to be a thrill of a lifetime. I actually was playing with a guy this past fall at a place called Victoria National, which is in southern Indiana, a really hard golf course. I was doing a corporate outing and I was playing with the guy who was a former University of Cincinnati, as a matter of fact, he was a baseball player, a really good athlete. And I helped him in a clinic during the morning and we had lunch and went out in the afternoon as a group. And on this really hard par three on the back nine, the 16th hole, he knocks it in the hole for a one. And here's a guy who played major college baseball, actually was drafted, played a little minor league ball, obviously good athlete. And he turned to me and he said, "That's better than winning the World Series right there."

Charlie Mechem:

I'm sure that's the way... Now I got to tell you, this is a hundred percent true story. I couldn't make this up. You probably remember my wife, Marilyn. And she played a lot of golf, as did I. And our home club was in a suburb of Cincinnati, the Camargo Club.

Tom Patri:

I played there.

Charlie Mechem:

I'm sure you have.

Tom Patri:

It's a great place. How about that oak tree behind the clubhouse to eat lunch under?

Charlie Mechem:

Still there.

Tom Patri:

Oh my God. It's beautiful. It's a great spot.

Charlie Mechem:

Well, it's a 1925 Seth Raynor classic. So Marilyn was hitting balls one day before she was going to have a lesson later on. And a couple of her pals came by and said, "Hey, come play with us." And she said, "I can't. I'm going to have a lesson here in a little bit." And they said, "Oh, just play a few holes." So, they started to play on the 10th hole. The 11th hole at Camargo is a very short par three, probably about 120 yards, elevated tee and like a mushroom green. So Marilyn gets up, hits the ball. Nobody really sees it, but when they get over, they can't find it. They look. It's in the cup.

Tom Patri:

Bingo.

Charlie Mechem:

It must have hit the bank, bounced up and rolled in the cup. So Marilyn has a hole in one, she says, "Well now, I've got to leave because I've got to take a lesson." I said, "No one has ever walked away from a-

Tom Patri:

[crosstalk 00:12:53] You have to make it a one.

Charlie Mechem:

That's right. To take a lesson. Anyway, it's a great club. And that's a very, very funny story that I've never, ever [crosstalk 00:13:04].

Tom Patri:

I got to tell you, Charlie, Seth Raynor is my all time favorite.

Charlie Mechem:

Me too. Me too.

Tom Patri:

He's awesome.

Charlie Mechem:

He not only gets credit for the clubs he did, but he gets credit for a lot of them that C.B. MacDonald claims and Raynor really did.

Tom Patri:

So I'll tell you a great story. I'm such a big Seth Raynor fan and a C.B. fan as well, that I had heard a rumor because Seth Raynor was from Southampton, Long Island, New York. And obviously C.B. because the National Golf League spent a lot of time out there. And I heard, I didn't know if this is true or not, that they were buried in the Southampton cemetery. So two summers ago, I'll tell you how crazy I am, I drove out to Southampton on a day off. I was on Long Island and I drove to the Southampton cemetery and there was nobody in the office that day. I parked my car in the back of the cemetery, thinking the oldest graves must be towards the back of the property and I just started walking.

I was trying to find the grave site of Seth Raynor and C.B. MacDonald. And about 20 minutes into my walk, I walked through a grove of trees in the cemetery and I turned to my right and there's a headstone, Seth Raynor. And I was so excited. And I said, "I wonder where C.B. is." And I literally turned around and directly opposite Seth Raynor is C.B. MacDonald.

Charlie Mechem:

No kidding? That's interesting.

Tom Patri:

They're facing each other.

Charlie Mechem:

Well, I've always thought, that for the number of courses he designed, because as you know, he died quite young, I'll bet he's got more great courses to his name maybe than anybody. So, okay, well here's the next anecdote.

Tom Patri:

Go ahead. Fire away.

Charlie Mechem:

And this under the heading of Hard Work. 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 the lottery." To his absolute amazement, the skies darkened, lightning flashed, and a strong, deep voice said, "Would you at least buy a ticket?" So, we so often expect good things to happen without effort and they rarely do. And I'm sure you can identify with that in terms of golf.

Tom Patri:

So I'll tell you my hard work story. So Charlie, as you know, and maybe folks listening don't know, I was blessed during my senior year at Florida Southern to win the NCAA Division Two National Championship. And leading into that tournament that year, about six months earlier, I made the decision that if I was going to win, because I didn't hit the ball that far, that my short game, especially my putting would have to move to a different level if I was going to be competitive at the national level.

So one day, I was out at our home golf course in Lakeland, Florida, and I was putting and working on my putting and just by happenstance, I turned around, because the clubhouse was quite close, and for the first time I noticed, and I'd been out there a million times, I noticed that on top of the clubhouse, there were three large security spotlights. And a bell went off in my head. Because my normal routine after practice was to go to cafeteria, eat. I'd go to the library in the evening and finish my work, whenever it was due. And then, there was a lake on property, it had a three-mile route around it. And I'd run the lake at night, three miles, and I'd go to bed. But this night I came out of the library and I had this idea and I rode back out to Lone Palm, the golf course we played at. And just as sure as I was, when I got out there, those three security spotlights were on. And that green was just as illuminated as it was at 12 noon that day when I had been out there.

So I ran over to my car, I had this great idea that I could go out there in the evenings and nobody would know, and I could get more work in than my teammates and maybe hit some putts at night for a couple hours after the library closed. But with this, the nightwatchman came by, Barry, who we all knew. And he was an old school Florida cracker. And he rode out to me in the security cart and he said, "Tom, what are you doing out here?" And I said, "Barry, look at this green. It's just like daytime out here. I'm going to come out here in the evenings and I'm going to putt some more." He says, "Tom, you know nobody's allowed on the property in the evening." I said, "Barry, I got to be out here in the evenings. You got to cut me some slack. I can get three or four hours a night in here every night. I can get 20 more hours a week of putting practice in." And he said, "Tom, I can't have you on the property."

So being the New Yorker that I am, Charlie, I rode across the street to a 7-Eleven. I bought a case of Pabst Blue Ribbon beer, drove back across to him. "Barry. Here's a case of beer for you." He goes, "Tom, you can be out here anytime you want." It only took one case a month. So I went out there evening that we weren't traveling to a tournament, at 10 o'clock at night and putted from 10 to one o'clock in the morning, every single night where we weren't out of town on a tournament for the entire season. And that spring, I won my NCAA. So that work paid off.

Charlie Mechem:

Terrific. Now, the last anecdote that I want to read is under the heading of Passion. It is critically important for success to make every goal a stretch goal. If you get there, fabulous. If you don't get there,

you're still going to get farther than you would had you not set that lofty goal. The first great showman, P.T. Barnum, put it this way. "If I shoot at the sun, I may hit a star." And I think that probably separates the good from the great, doesn't it? The passion.

Tom Patri:

Well, now Charlie, to the folks listening who don't know much about Charlie Mechem, you worked alongside, advised two of the greatest players of all time, Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer. If those two guys didn't embody the word passion for the game, I don't know who did or who does. When I think about Arnold and Jack, both, of course, two of my boyhood idols.

Charlie Mechem:

Sure.

Tom Patri:

As well as Ballesteros and then, I guess modern day, you have to list Tiger Woods. And the older generation you have to list Bobby Jones. Any of those great champions had passion for what they did. In our game, it's so much easier to identify that as an individual sport because you can kind of pick them out of the crowd. Where in a team sport, maybe you can't pick out individuals quite that well on a personal level. But Arnold was very special to me. As you know, Charlie, my son's name is Palmer. And there's a reason his first name is Palmer. I was hoping he'd have just one ounce of the passion that Arnold had for life. [crosstalk 00:19:54].

Charlie Mechem:

He certainly did. And that is a great segue into a story that I think you'll appreciate. As you know, Nicklaus and I are close and we still talk quite often. And the last time we talked, it was just after the father son tournament. And I said, "Jack, what do you think of Charlie?" And he said, "Obviously, he knows how to play." But he said, "It all depends on how badly he wants it." And then he said, "Tiger really wanted it. And we'll have to see." And my guess is, Charlie will want it, but you never know. And Jack is right. You got to want it.

Tom Patri:

Charlie, it's funny you say that because one of the things I always say to my junior players and my college players, and I've got a couple of really good ones right now. I say, "Ultimately, talent is a great measuring tool. And obviously, your work ethic matters and your intelligence matters and your athleticism matters. But it all comes down to one thing as far as I'm concerned, how bad you want it." To get to the top of the mountain. You've got to climb over a lot of people, man. You've got to really want it.

Charlie Mechem:

You sure do.

Tom Patri:

I've got one boy in particular right now, one girl in particular right now that are pretty passionate and really want it. So hopefully, I keep my fingers crossed, they're on the right path right now.

Charlie Mechem:

Well, when I think of all the great players I've known, both male and female, the ones that really reached the top have that passion. It's more obvious with some than others. Nancy Lopez probably never looked as though she had strong passion because she was smiling so much that it didn't... But she really deeply... Of course, I got to know Mickey Wright pretty well.

Tom Patri:

Wow.

Charlie Mechem:

After I became Commissioner, I made a point of getting it over because she was not a recluse, but she was very private, a very private person. And I said to her, "Why did you quit as early as you did?" And she said, "Well, Charlie, because I lost the real passion to win." My God, she won 82 events, I guess, but she had some physical issues with her feet and one thing and another.

But anyway, let me close the podcast by asking you, I've always been a little skeptical, maybe that's too strong, a word, but of golf instruction that I read in magazines. And so on. I'm going to give you a chance to [crosstalk 00:22:42].

Tom Patri:

You're going to get me in trouble, aren't you?

Charlie Mechem:

It seems to me that if somebody really wants to get golf instruction, they need to go to a person. I used to go to Gardner Dickinson who-

Tom Patri:

That's a good one. That's a good one.

Charlie Mechem:

He was good and Jack Grout. Jack Grout, who our listeners will maybe not remember, but was Jack Nicklaus' only teacher ever. And when he retired, he came to Loxahatchee and he would always come over to particularly to Marilyn because he liked good looking young women, and he would always say, "I can help you, honey." So he gave her a few lessons. But give me your closing thoughts here on golf instruction.

Tom Patri:

Well, Charlie, I think in 2021, I think that golf is a little bit over-taught and a little bit under-coached. And I mean, I think we've gotten so technical at times that we've turned the average recreational player into a bag of knots. And I guess a lot of the young guys in my business think that I'm a little bit of a dinosaur. I try to keep it for the recreational player as simple as I can. I don't think we're curing cancer. I think we're teaching somebody how to hit a golf ball.

So I tend to under- teach a little bit and over-coach, if you will. And they're very different skills. Not that I don't use the X's and O's at all because you need good solid X's and O's, but you got to make it really understandable. You can't be speaking Greek. You can't try to impress somebody with how much

you know. You have to do something that's very understandable to them that they can get a result from. So I think to simplify the answer, I think we need to go back to the fundamentals and the grassroots a little bit and make this game a little bit more understandable for the average player.

Charlie Mechem:

It's a very good point. And people would ask me over the years about getting golf instruction. And I said, "I encourage it, but find the right teacher, somebody you can get along with. And if they tell you right off the bat, 'We'll need to change your swing.' Go to another teacher. They got to work with your swing." So, anyway.

Tom Patri:

Right.

Charlie Mechem:

Well, Tom, I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed this. My goodness. We'll need to keep our friendship alive and I wish you all the best in your new relationship. And I know you'll do a good job. And they're very lucky to have you.

Tom Patri:

Charlie, thank you so much. It's always a pleasure being with you and I'll be on here anytime you want me to be. It's great connecting with you here.

Charlie Mechem:

Thank you, pal.

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