



*Chris Rowe's third book **Golf Shops, Coffee Shops and Barbershops** is short stories about golf and life and how they coincide with each other.*

## **Golf Shops, Coffee Shops & Barber Shops**

By Chris Rowe

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# GOLF SHOPS, COFFEE SHOPS AND BARBER SHOPS

CHRIS ROWE

2012 & 2016 HARVEY PENICK TEACHER OF THE YEAR  
US KIDS TOP 50 KID TEACHERS IN UNITED STATES

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## **HANGING WITH AN AGGIE LEGEND**

One of the greatest parts about my job is all the great people you meet. Golf brings people together from all walks of life. It does not matter if you are a professional athlete, musician, or a political figure they all are golfers when they come through the gates at Whispering Pines.

Recently, RC Slocum asked me to play golf with his group at Traditions Club, in College Station. Coach Slocum has been to Whispering Pines a few times and have had the pleasure to get to know him a little bit.

Coach Slocum is the winningest Texas A&M football coach in the history of the program. I am an Oklahoma



Sooner fan and will always root for Oklahoma but dating a girl who proudly wears her aggie ring and spending time with coach makes them my favorite *other* team.

We had a great day on the course with lots of wonderful stories about coaching and big games played at Kyle Field. When we finished the round, we had a coke and talked about golf swings and my teaching philosophies. Golfers are like fisherman and really perk up when they hear someone talking about how to perform better at their sport. Coach Slocum seemed intrigued as my swing theories were unveiled on the patio and later that week called and asked for a lesson.

A few months later, Coach Slocum, asked me and my girlfriend to meet he and his wife for the weekend in Carmel, California. My girlfriend was so excited, not only to go to Pebble Beach and get out of the Texas heat, but to spend time with the Head Football Coach when she attended A&M. My joke to her the entire week was *you are hanging out with an A&M legend and cannot even arrange a dinner for me and Coach Switzer*. Spending time with Coach Slocum was a wonderful opportunity to ask questions about all the things you ever wanted to know about college football. The number of stories he told on the golf course or at the house in the morning drinking coffee were all priceless. It was a weekend where you wish you had a tape recorder to record every incredible story.

Our last day we were scheduled to play The Preserve Golf Club up in the mountains of Carmel Valley. When you arrive at the gate the clubhouse is still another 25 minutes along a winding road up the mountain. The question that was most intriguing to me was if there was ever a game where the coaching staff did not know how to counter what the other team was doing. Specifically, my question was related to OU playing A&M in the Cotton Bowl and OU getting dismantled by Johnny Manziel. Even though Coach Slocum wasn't the coach for that game I knew he would have insight. As we drove up the winding mountain road, he told me there was not a game that the team and coaches were not prepared for whatever they might face. Sometimes they might not execute well enough to win, but they were always prepared for any situation.

The typical golfer hits shots on the range from a perfect lie with the same club usually not aiming at a specific target. Short game practice is usually hitting a few chips from a perfect lie with the same club. What happens when you get on the course and your ball is in the rough or on a sidehill lie? If you only practice perfect situations it would be the same a Coach Slocum practicing as if the defense would never tackle his offensive players and the safety would intercept every pass thrown in the game. This is not realistic in football and getting a perfect lie every time, you reach your ball is not realistic either. When you get to the driving range work on shots you will have during your round. Practice

hitting shots from different lies and angles. When I am working with students, I will take them to a downslope off the side of the tee box and have them hit shots and then take them to a side slope and hit shots. The student can see how the ball reacts and adjust. When you work on your short game do not hit balls from the exact spot over and over. You are not getting better practicing like this! Create different lies around the green, hit bunker shots from buried lies, sidehill lies etc. When you practice with the expectation of something could go wrong you will be prepared when it happens.

Coach Slocum and his wife were the perfect hosts, and we were honored to be able to spend time with them for the weekend. The stories Coach Slocum told could fill three books and they would all be best sellers. The knowledge he has is incredible, but more than that he is an unbelievable person. The integrity he has and the grace he has shown impressed me more than any big game won at Kyle Field. If he were still coaching for the aggies and my son wanted to play football my choice would be for my kid to play for him.

Prepare for everything that could happen in your next round of golf and you will not be surprised if your ball happens to find a not so perfect lie.

GIG EM



## **THE JACKET**

One of my young junior players named Cash was taking a lesson last October. The weather had just turned cool enough to wear a jacket and we happened to just get a shipment of KJUS jackets in that week. I personally cannot stand the heat and always look forward to the first day of Fall when it is cool enough to wear a jacket on the course. Cash arrived for his lesson and immediately told me how much he liked my new jacket. Cash is a very good player and will play college golf without a doubt. He is extremely long off the tee and has a short game to match. We went through a session in the teaching facility getting his numbers on Trackman along with some video work to tighten up his mechanics. After working on full swing, we went out to the needler par three course to work on his wedge shots and putting. The needler

is a magical place to work on all aspects of your game. A few years ago, Lee Trevino came to Whispering Pines and I was fortunate enough to play with him on the big course and then the needler to close out an unforgettable day. When Lee had played a few of the holes on the needler he stopped and told me he would join this course just to be able to practice on the needler. What a compliment from one of the legends of the game! I jokingly mentioned he could fill out a membership application and he would have no problem becoming a member. All this to say you can hit every shot imaginable on the needler and it is the best place to take students to work on different parts of their game.

Often, with my students, I will challenge them with a certain part of their game and attach a prize if they can perform the task. Sometimes the prize will be a discounted lesson or buying them a hat from the professional shop. Cash was preparing for an upcoming tournament, so the challenge was made that he had to hole a twenty-foot putt and the prize was a new KJUS jacket. When the challenge was made his eyes lit up a bit along with a big smile. He lined up the putt and confidently rolled it in and immediately told me I did not have to buy him a jacket. KJUS jackets are very expensive and even with my discount it cost me my hourly rate. Buying him the jacket made me just as happy as Cash making the putt to win it. Every time he wears that jacket, he knows he earned it. Every time he has a twenty-foot putt to win a tournament he can draw off that moment where he beat his

instructor out of a jacket. When you practice put something on the line before you leave the range or putting green. You might bet yourself something like not having a cup of coffee for a week if you don't make the putt or reward yourself if there is something you have been wanting to purchase if you pull off the shot. When we challenge ourselves with a prize attached our intensity level goes up. If we practiced like there was a prize attached to the outcome we would perform better on the course. Most of us work on our chipping without thinking about holing the shot, but what if every shot hit was 100% committed to holing the shot. You might not hole any of the shots, but your proximity to the hole would be much closer if you tried to hole the shot rather than just get it close.

Cash might have made the putt without having a prize attached, but his intensity went up a level when he knew there would be a reward. Practice like you want to play and you will play like you practice! The moral to this story is never bet a kid with a name like CASH and think he is not going to win the money!



## THE TALE OF TWO IRISH MEN

The British Open returned to Ireland this year and one of the favorites to win golf's oldest championship was Rory McIlroy. Rory has been one of the top players in the world since he came onto the PGA Tour. He's won every major except the Masters as I'm writing this and seemed to be destined to possibly challenge Tiger Woods record in majors. Shane Lowry has been a good player for a long-time as well but has never been considered someone who could challenge Rory on a career basis. All of Ireland was cheering for their countrymen to play well and hopefully bring the claret jug to

a pub in Northern Ireland on Sunday evening of golf greatest major. Rory was a heavy favorite to win the tournament months before and had been in great form all year. Shane Lowry has had a good career, but with no disrespect not even close to Rory's career accomplishments.

After all the build-up, practice rounds, and press conferences being asked what it would mean to win the British Open in your home country Rory arrived at the first tee. With the crowd cheering his name with thunderous applause, Rory pulled a long iron shot out of bounds. As the crowd gasped in disbelief Rory proceeded to make a quadruple eight on the first hole in route to a 79 first round score. Shane Lowry on the other hand opened with a 67 clipping the most famous Irishman by 12 shots.

It's extremely difficult to win a PGA Tour event when the event is played in your hometown. Living in Fort Worth for ten years there were plenty of tour players in the DFW area who played the Byron Nelson and the Colonial. Spieth won the Colonial, but he's from Dallas and Rory Sabatini won the Byron Nelson, but lives in Fort Worth and originally from South Africa. We all know Ben Hogan won Colonial five times with Fort Worth being his hometown, but winning in your home town doesn't happen often. Now think about your entire country cheering for you along with being the favorite to win the event. How much pressure can you put on a golfer in a major championship? In my opinion this would



be even more difficult than playing in a Ryder Cup in your home European country. In a Ryder Cup you have a team to fall back on if you're not playing your best. In the 148th British Open it's just you against the field. Of course, there were other Irish players in the event besides Rory, but nobody had the credentials and fire power of McIlroy coming into this event.

Rory during his practice round hit a shot out of bounds to the right on the starting hole. On Thursday Rory pulled his tee shot badly to the left out of bounds on the starting hole. It would be interesting to ask Rory if he was thinking about the out of bounds on the right as he stood over the first tee shot of his opening round. If you are telling yourself don't hit the ball to the right two things usually happen. You either hit the ball to the right, *self-fulfilling prophecy*, or you hit the ball as far left as possible to avoid the shot you do not want to hit. Secondly, putting pressure on yourself to play well rarely produces great results. We've seen Phil Mickelson every year trying his best to win the US OPEN, his only major left to complete the grand slam of golf. We will see this with Jordan Spieth for many years at the PGA Championship until he finally wins one. When you want something too much it rarely works out and when it finally does you usually were able to downplay the moment to some extent. I'm not saying Shane Lowry didn't care, but he was able to control his nerves and stay in the moment better than the other Irishmen playing in the event. Rory followed his 79 with a blistering

65 the next day and unfortunately missed the cut. Rory's score on Friday even though 14 shots better doesn't mean he found something magical in his swing 24 hours later. This is the same person who shot the course record 61 at the same course when he was a teenager. I bet his mindset when he shot the 61 and the tournament round of 65 were probably very close to the same. His mindset when he shot the 79 was probably an out of body experience, which we've all had if you've played this game long enough. Rory made the moment bigger than it needed to be with his horrific start when he should have been in contention on Sunday.

The tale of the two Irishmen is simple. Both wanted to win, both prepared well, both tried very hard, but only one handled his nerves and the moment well enough to win in his home country. If you have a club championship coming up or a big event at your home club remember this year's British Open. You can want something too bad and it could actually back-fire. Prepare your best and get your mind in a good place. Picture yourself winning the tournament weeks before and see yourself holding the trophy.

Shane Lowry probably did all of these things in the 148<sup>th</sup> Open and you can too!



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