

What I've Learned: Chuck Winstead

Men's Golf Coach, Louisiana State University

Interview by Paul Ramee, Jr.



Proponent Member Chuck Winstead is the Men's Golf Coach at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, LA. This Q&A article continues our series featuring a spectrum of insights from respected Proponent members.

All the most valuable learning comes from our peers, nowhere more so than in Proponent's network of golf instructors. One of the more enjoyable ways for members to connect and learn is through the question-and-answer interviews conducted by member Paul Ramee of Bull's Bridge Golf Club in western Connecticut. This month's interview subject for Paul is Chuck Winstead, an LSU graduate who played Tiger golf, entered the teaching profession and worked his way back to campus as coach of the men's golf team. In his six seasons leading the team, Chuck has achieved notable success and brought the LSU program back to the pinnacle of college golf. He took time recently for a conversation that weaves its way through that round-trip journey.

Your career has been mainly about development of young players and building team success at the college level. What led you to go this route?

I played college golf at Louisiana State and had a very positive experience there. My teammates were guys like David Toms, Bob Friend and Greg Leshner. In my senior year, which was 1991, I played No. 2 or No. 3 in our matches. I was never top player on the team because there were so many talented players around me. Looking back, those four years at LSU were an extremely important time in my life. I loved athletics, I loved competing. The friendships I formed at that time are friendships for life. The entire experience had a big influence on me.

Leaving school, what thoughts or plans did you have ?

I knew I wanted to stay in golf. I had great passion for the game, but equally important was my curiosity for the game. The seed of that curiosity was my own performance as a player. I hadn't accomplished all the goals I had set for myself, and I kept wondering if it was a matter of simply not having enough natural talent.

I wanted to find that answer, and to see how much more I could develop as a player. I went to David Leadbetter and took a few lessons. At the time, David was teaching such high-profile

players as Nick Faldo and Nick Price. I worked on my game and played professionally for a short period of time. When that was over, I pursued the path of becoming a teaching assistant and was fortunate enough to land a job with Martin Hall at the Nicklaus/Flick Golf Schools, in South Florida, which really was a blessing for me. Martin has remained a mentor and a great friend to this day.

One day while I was there I got word of an opportunity back in Louisiana, which had a lot of appeal to me. The teaching professional job at English Turn Golf & Country Club had opened up and I applied for it. I was hired there and returned to New Orleans, working at English Turn for about a year and a half. Then I got an offer to direct the Teaching Academy at the University Club in Baton Rouge. I stayed there for a couple of years and then in 2005 I was asked to run the Men's Golf Program at LSU. It made great sense for me and was a good fit for them, as well. They needed a coach with the passion to build a program. It did come with challenges, the biggest of which was trying to make my work fit in with the family lifestyle.

What was the program like when you took over?

We were ranked No. 87 in the country and we had a nice group of players. Two players in particular made great strides. John Peterson became both a three-time NCAA All-American and an NCAA Champion and Andrew Loupe went on to become a two-time All-American. We had something to build on and set to work doing that. By 2011 we were ranked in the top ten. We are currently ranked No. 12 in the U.S.

How much emphasis do you put on the rankings?

Not that much. It's helpful when you're in discussions with people who don't follow college golf. Of course it's nice to win the conference or NCAA Championship, but it's more important to be a good role model and develop quality young men and create an environment for them to try and live out their dream of making it to the PGA Tour. So, I would say that we create a quality education and golf program and the rankings are a by-product.

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- Chuck Winstead

Talk a little about recruiting and the responsibility you feel when you bring someone's child onto the property.

Recruiting has become highly competitive, much more so than when I played college golf. Schools are spending more money to attract players and the coaches are making as many travel visits as the NCAA will allow. The responsibility we feel is enormous. As a coach, the role you play as a mentor never stops. You have to be into everything they are doing. We spend more time with

these guys than we do with our own families. The commitment to their development is not for four years, as people might think. It lasts a lifetime. In my office I have a photo of every player that has every played at LSU. The photos make the statement that this program is not about me, it is about them.

Coaching men's golf at LSU presents all the challenges and responsibilities of a major sports program. Are you given adequate resources to handle them?

The resources are fantastic. We have one of the largest indoor training facilities in the country, we have a strength-and-conditioning coach who is TPI certified, and we've got an academic support center that is phenomenal. Each of our students has an advisor and there is a tutor for each class. If you are injured, sick or even have allergies, we have the finest sports medicine professionals in the business.

In your opinion, what can the club professional or director of instruction at the local level do to help prepare a player for college golf?

The professional who is working with a player during the junior-golf and high school phase has always been a vital part of their development, going back to Harvey Penick's days with Ben Crenshaw and Tom Kite and long before that. It's a vital resource for the player. That being said, it all has to flow from the young person's desire and passion for the game coupled with their willingness to work. My one suggestion to the golf pro is to spend less time on the range in 30-minute or one-hour intervals and really focus on planting the seed about how the game is played.

How about parents and their involvement?

Typically every successful college player whom I have recruited has had either a parent or another adult at the club who has spent a lot of time with the junior player on the golf course. A strong junior program is certainly a huge benefit.

How about scheduling the player into tournaments?

The junior who has very high aims should set a goal of being the best player on their high school team, then the best in the town or city they live in, then the state. After that, you can let them worry about the regional and national events. I think you should have success and win a few of the local PGA Junior Level events before you run out to play in AJGA events.

What skill or trait do the incoming freshmen seem to lack, in general?

In their golf skills, there is not one typical area where we see a deficiency. It's different for each individual. What they have to learn is that they are not on their own and they are part of a family. They tend to struggle with their time management. Likewise, taking the academic step up is challenging. I also see many of them struggle with the

transition from being a big fish in a small pond to being surrounded by people equally talented or even more so.

What are your feelings about kids playing other sports and when it may be more productive for them to specialize?

That is a hard questions and I don't have a real answer to it. A perfect example is Andrew Loupe, who was very raw as a freshman golfer and went on to become a two-time All-American for us. He was a kid who loved basketball and played all through high school. Did he lose anything by playing hoops in high school? Has it hindered his ability to make it on the PGA Tour? You could go ahead and ask those questions. But you also have to ask what level of enjoyment would he have lost if he did not play basketball?

How do you handle conflicts among members of the team?

Luckily, we did not have many, most of the young men are from similar backgrounds and have a common goal. We have a high compatibility level. But we do work hard on the family element. We start practice around the table and we talk about our day the way most families do at the dinner table. I typically ask them the simple question: "Are you okay?" I might ask them: "How is school?" "How is your family?" The last thing I am going to allow is a disruption to our family that stems from problem one individual is going through, that are more than he can handle and need to be shared.

How do you pick the kids up when they need it?

First of all, they all know, I love them and if it is important, I call them and let them know we have to talk. I have been through a lot with my players and I even have had to be the one to let them know that they lost a loved one. I give them a hug, tell them I love them and we say a prayer. When we've had tough situations happen to one of our players, its not unusual for the entire team to be at my house within 15 minutes bonding as a group. Being the coach is not always easy and sometimes you do not have all the answers, but my kids know that I am always there for them, even well after they graduate.



Chuck Winstead (left) has gone back to his roots to bring LSU back into the National Championship race.