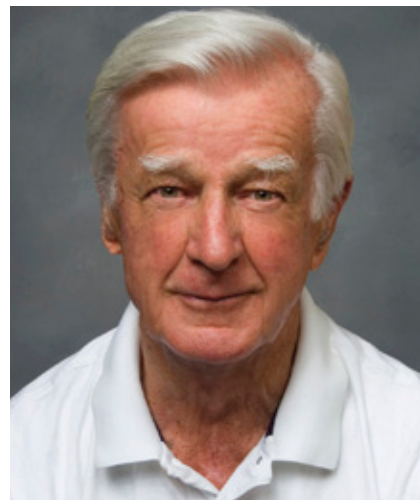




For the Love of the Game

As a partner with the Cooley law firm for many decades, Sandy Tatum became one of America's most influential lawyers. He's also been called the dean of American golf. And apart from his athletic achievements (in 1942, for example, he won the NCAA individual men's championship) he continues to be a great booster of the game. Tatum was a moving force behind the multimillion-dollar renovation of Harding Park Golf Course in San Francisco in the early 2000s. He was also instrumental in creating a nationwide program called "First Tee," which introduces the game to the youth of underserved communities. In March Tatum, who turns 92 this month, spoke with UC Hastings law professor Evan Lee about his life and love of the game.



Sandy Tatum



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Legally Speaking is a series of in-depth interviews with prominent lawyers, judges, and academics, coproduced by *California Lawyer* and UC Hastings College of the Law.

Q: You claim that you can learn more about people by playing 18 holes of golf with them than you can in any other way. Why is that?

The game has a combination of characteristics that include how you approach the play of it, how you organize yourself, how you think, and how you react, and obviously those are characteristics that apply way beyond golf.

Without naming names, were there lawyers that you played with who handled the game badly? And I don't mean to ask were they bad golfers. I mean did they handle adversity badly, or have bad course-management skills, and if so could you see those same things in the way that they practiced law?

Yes. Happily only a few. I would put it this way: The difference between a good golfer and a great golfer is the ability to focus. And there's an exact analogy there with the practice of law.

I understand that your father once pulled you out of school to watch the great golfer Bobby Jones play.

I only saw him play once. But from a very young age I was motivated to do whatever I possibly could to be just like him. You know there's a story about him that in a game he hit a tee shot in the woods and he went into the woods with his caddy—no one else was there—and he came out of the woods and said, "I don't lie two, I lie three because I moved the ball in there when I was addressing it." And somebody said to him later: "How remarkable is that?" And his reaction was: "Gee, you might as well give a medal to someone who doesn't rob a bank."

But for young people just starting out in their legal careers, whether as summer associates or externs for judges, it's especially difficult to call a penalty on yourself—to say, "Oh yeah, I dropped the ball on that one." Isn't that sort of a license for unemployment?

It doesn't occur to me that way. The way it occurs to me is that you're playing according to the rules. That's the name of the game—both in golf and in life.

Before this interview you were talking about the challenges of relearning how to play golf as your body ages. How do you deal with that?

Some years ago I wrote a piece for *Golf Digest* in which I described how all my life I had this love affair with the game that had been satisfying beyond words, and that all of a sudden it left me for a younger player. And when I realized that, I discovered too that my former lover had a cruel streak. It would turn up from time to time on a practice tee to lull me into thinking that maybe we were going to have a joyful reunion, and then on the way to the first tee it would again abandon me, and I'd be left with another 18 holes of unrequited love. So I said to myself: "Instead of worrying about what you no longer have, figure out what you still have left and make that work as well as you possibly can." And I find that challenge very stimulating. I should say, too, that I'm so grateful to still be out there swinging at age 92. In fact, when I think about it, it's enough to make me break out in tears. 🍷

Watch the full interview at www.callawyer.com.