

The banner features the 'play to potential' logo on the left. To its right are social media icons for WhatsApp (+91 85914 52129*), Twitter (@PlayToPotential), and a website icon (playtopotential.com). Further right, it lists 'Also available on:' with icons for Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Google Podcasts. On the far right is a portrait of the host, Deepak Jayaraman, with the text 'Podcast Host Deepak Jayaraman' below it. A small note at the bottom left reads: '*Just send us a Whatsapp with your name, number and email and we will add you to our distribution list.'

Context to the nugget conversation

Chris discusses Robert and Lynette's parenting style on Roger. Not putting the child on a pedestal given his precocity, having goals to de-risk the path, handing out consequences when the child crosses the line and so on. He speaks about how they emphasized as much on raising a good human being as being committed to his growth as a tennis player.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I want to take it back to parenting Chris. Given the various conversations you have had with him and your understanding of his journey, what do you notice about the parenting he was exposed to with Lynette and Robert, any aspects of their parenting that stand out for you?

Christopher Clarey (CC): Well, I have not really done in depth interviews with Lynette and Robert. I talked to both of them early in Roger's career when they were more accessible. But I have talked to many people about their way of doing things and I talked to Roger about it, and it is combination, I would say, a couple different levels. One is that, we are talking about Switzerland here and Switzerland does not have a real culture of hero worship or sports star superstar worship, it is not really part of the Swiss mentality. So, Roger grew up in this situation where even though he was a fabulous talent, he was not going to be put up on a pedestal like a guy like Lionel Messi might have been in Argentina or Cristiano Ronaldo would have been or maybe Novak Djokovic in Serbia went along different situation, that is part of it. I also think that Robert and Lynette had lives of their own, they were successful people. Robert was an executive with a pharmaceutical firm. He is engineer by training. His mom has a very strong personality, a lot of charisma, lot of confidence, wanted to raise a good human as well as a good athlete. The human was more important to them than the athlete all along, and they raised Roger to behave himself and to respect other people and to respect his workspace or his colleagues, and that is all part of it as well. And yes, they watched plenty of his tennis and also, Robert and Lynette were also very involved in Roger's career early in his pro career when he separated with his agent Régis Brunet in the IMG team that I mentioned before and began to run things in house. Mirka who became his wife actually was his press liaison during that period, so he used to call Mirka or text Mirka to get an interview with Roger, so things have definitely changed there. But Robert and Lynette in the Swiss culture and the fact that Lynette is South African by birth, not Swiss, so there was an international meeting of cultures already in the Federer household, Switzerland being a fairly international place anyway and Basel being a city right on the border with France and Germany. Roger grew up with many different cultures mixing in his own house as well as outside his front door, and he was very comfortable navigating in the international waters after that and a lot of that has to do with his parents exposing him to all that at a very early age.

DJ: I loved what you said, for them, raising a good human being was probably a notch higher than raising a great athlete. So, I guess that sort of in a way explains a lot of elements of parenting.

CC: Yeah, there is a lot of good stories about, but I do not know all the stories about Lynette, I am sure there are plenty of those with Robert who was the one who, you know, it is sort of, when he was with his son playing tennis because Robert, Lynette are both avid amateur tennis players, came to the game later in life, and really their enthusiasm, I am sure, was one of the reasons why Roger gravitated to tennis, but their stories of Robert making his son walk home from the club because he was acting up during their matches, unable to control himself and take public transport back instead of giving him a ride. There is a famous story of him coming back from a junior tournament and Roger would not stop complaining in the back of the car and this is not very 21st century, at least not in our countries for parenting, but Robert gets out of the car and buries Roger's head in the snow to cool him off and get him to stop complaining. So there was some tough love involved, but there were some clear guidelines and parameters put in place by the Federer parents. And honestly, as professional sports writers covered a lot of tennis, you have seen a lot of enabling behavior from parents over the years, not just in tennis, obviously in many many sports, and probably in many academic disciplines as well where if the child has an exceptional talent, the parents will cut them too much slack and you end up with a better talent than you do a human. I think the Federer's, at least by all the evidence we have seen from the outside, you never know how things happen when the doors are closed, but all the evidence of Roger being in the public eye for 20 plus years, all the conversations I had for this book, they did a good job at producing a pretty good human too.

DJ: Hmm. And one of the things that struck me was, in the book, you say that Robert also told him, given it is a low odds profession that if you do not get into the top 100 by the time you are 20, then you might as well come back and pull up your socks and focus on academics. Do you have a view on that because sports also are not an easy profession to make it commercially viable, so any commentary on how they thought about that at different points in time?

CC: Yeah, that was a family thing, but also, it was a Swiss thing. Swiss culture, as I said, is a culture where sports are secondary to academics. I believe Indian culture in many ways is similar to that, a lot of Asian culture as well is similar to that. And it was very much the case in Switzerland that pro athletes were rare, especially exceptional kind and the country had traditional values and there was a sense that maybe sports were not a 100% serious, unless you were skier, maybe that is different there, that is obviously a holy land for them, the snow and in the Alpine Skiing, but the tennis world was one that they were just kind of getting exposed to at elite level. Martina Hingis who was an immigrant had just become number one in the world in the woman's game, not long before Roger began to emerge. So, there was definitely some quality in the Swiss tennis world, but not a lot of confidence from many parents this was going to be a real path to a profitable long-term career. And Robert Federer is a businessman and somebody who understood risk and reward, was very attuned to the fact that his son needed to have a very strong backup plan, and he did a lot of discussion with agents and people who knew the game well and I think his conclusion was if Roger did not arrive at X which was that top 100 position within three or four years from turning pro, then it probably was not going to happen. And because Roger stopped school at 16, his parents were both well educated, it was important to them that Roger get his degree if he was not able to become a pro tennis player and get that education on the road which is true about tennis. It is a school of its own with all the international travel and all the meetings and Roger took full advantage of a lot of that. Some players do not, but he really did.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This reminds me of an insight from Paddy Upton (PU), Mental Conditioning Coach of the Indian cricket team that won the ODI Cricket world cup in 2011, with Dhoni hitting a last ball six. He speaks about how Sachin Tendulkar's father would obsess about who he was as a human being as much as he would obsess about developing his cricketing capabilities.

PU: *"In fact Sachin told a story of himself when he first made the Indian cricket team as a 16-year-old and when he came back from that tour one of his team mates and very good friends saying to him that you know Sachin we recognize you are a better cricketer than us but since you made the Indian team you are acting as if you are more important person than us and as a group of friends we don't like that. Sachin highlights that as one of the high moments in his career one of my significant sorry should I say moments in his career when he was really able to realize the difference between being a good cricketer and being a human being. Yes he was a great cricketer but it doesn't mean that he is now a great human being or superior or more important human being to his friends and at the time he also mentioned that his father had spoken him about that your results on the field people will very quickly forget them may be you score a 100 and then you scored a naught the next week they will forget your 100 where you score a naught and you scored the 100 the following week people will forget that but always remember the impact that you have as a person. So, from a young age his father had delivered that message then was reinforced there is 16 years old by his friend saying who you are as a person is separate from the results you achieve on the sports field."*

DJ: I have realized that while talent and hard work takes you to the top, what determines staying power is the values of the individual which more often than not have been shaped by early years.

I also loved another point that Chris makes when he speaks about how Robert and Lynette set Roger a goal post when he decided to pursue tennis. If you don't get into the Top 100 by the time you are 20, you might as well come back and focus on academics. There is something to be said about how you give the long rope and where you keep the safety net for the child as they grow up.

Something similar came up in my conversation with Atul Kasbekar (AK), one of the celebrated photographers of the country, the man behind the Kingfisher Calendar. He was actually studying chemical engineering at UDCT, one of the top Chemical Engineering colleges in India. He says that he picked Chemical Eng because he liked Chemistry. Very quickly, he figured out that Chemical Engineering had nothing to do with Chemistry and wanted to go after Photography. He shares what his father said at that point in time.

AK: *"To give absolute due credit, even though he couldn't afford it at that time, my dad insisted that 'Whatever education you want is not a problem. You figure out which is the best place in the world to go to and I will send you there.' I was like, but you can't afford it right now. And he said, 'Shut up! That's none of your business. But this is your long rope, because education is everything.' He always had this thing about degree. So, I said, photography, I don't really need a degree. I can assist people, I can learn, etcetera. He said, 'No, I want a degree to make myself happy. That degree is my receipt for the money I am spending. So, you give me my receipt. I don't care what you do with this.' So, it was a great line. He said, 'This is your long rope. Now, you come up with it or you hang yourself is up to you, but I am giving you that long rope and after I have taken care of your education and your sisters' education, etcetera, your mother and I will studiously spend your inheritance.' Which I thought was a very cool thing.*

And that's one of the few lines I have brutally used with my kids, 'Kya padhna hain bataao? You get that one shot at the title. After that, good luck, buddy. And if you need me to make phone calls, I am

more than happy to make them. Do you need me to stand guarantor of something? I am happy to do that. But you go on your journey now.’ Then, that safety net right now which is right under your arse, for my kids, I will move that now 30 feet below, and then further below, and then take it away.”

DJ: I guess, as our kids grow up, they are much more likely to make unorthodox choices in the way they think about passion and opportunity. How we think about supporting their passion and ambition while taking care of the risk is a tricky tight rope. Something for us to learn from these journeys here.

If you want to tune into the conversations with Atul Kasbekar and Paddy Upton, you can just go to www.playtopotential.com and look up the Guests section there.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Paddy Upton that is referenced: [Sachin Tendulkar and personal mastery](#).

Nugget from Atul Kasbekar that is referenced: [Transitioning from Engineering to Photography](#).

RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

Parenting: Discussions around the role that parenting plays in shaping who we are and our beliefs, habits, behaviors, and mindsets. Leaders share their personal experiences around how a lot of who they are got baked in their early years. You can access the playlist [here](#).

Formative years: Discussions around how the leaders were influenced by the climate in which they grew up and how that has impacted them as individuals and the choices they have made as they have gone about their journeys. You can access the playlist [here](#).

SIGN UP TO OUR COMMUNICATION

Podcast Newsletter: Join 1000s of leaders who benefit from the Podcast newsletter. Not more than 1-2 emails a month including keeping you posted on the new content that comes up at the podcast. High on signal, low on noise. Sign up for the podcast newsletter [here](#).

Nuggets on Whatsapp: We also have a [Podcast Whatsapp distribution group \(+91 85914 52129\)](#) where we share 2-3 nuggets a week from the Podcast archives to provoke reflection. If that is of interest, please click [here](#) and send a message stating “INTERESTED”. Do also add this number to your Phone Contacts so that we can broadcast our messages to you when we share a nugget.

Christopher Clarey - Nuggets

- 100.01 Christopher Clarey - Signs of early potential

- 100.02 Christopher Clarey - Parenting influences on Roger
- 100.03 Christopher Clarey - Roger's curiosity and empathy
- 100.04 Christopher Clarey - Managing down-time between rallies
- 100.05 Christopher Clarey - Secret to Roger's longevity
- 100.06 Christopher Clarey - How Roger picked his Coaches
- 100.07 Christopher Clarey - Bouncing back from a rough patch
- 100.08 Christopher Clarey - Roger the businessman
- 100.09 Christopher Clarey - In Summary – Playing to Potential
- 100.10 Christopher Clarey - Sowing the seeds for the next innings

About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

Disclaimer and clarification of intent behind the transcripts

This written transcript of the conversation is being made available to make it easier for some people to digest the content in the podcast. Several listeners felt that the written format would be helpful. This may not make sense as an independent document. Very often spoken word does not necessarily read well. Several of the guests have published books and the language in their books might be quite different from the way they speak. We request the readers to appreciate that this transcript is being offered as a service to derive greater value from the podcast content. We request you not to apply journalistic standards to this document.

This document is a transcription obtained through a third party/voice recognition software. There is no claim to accuracy on the content provided in this document, and occasional divergence from the audio file are to be expected. As a transcription, this is not a legal document in itself, and should not be considered binding to advice intelligence, but merely a convenience for reference.

The tags that are used to organize the nuggets in the podcast are evolving and work in progress. You might find that there could be a discrepancy between the nuggets as referenced here and in the actual podcast given this is a static document.

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in any retrieval system of any nature without prior written permission.