



ZONETALK PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Matthew Cartisser: Goals to Gumballs—One Athlete's Resiliency

Introduction

What do you do when you want to solve a problem? You simplify it with a powerful metaphor.

Matthew Cartisser is no ordinary athlete. First, he chose to take up a sport that the vast majority of the population have no idea is a sport—trap shooting—and second, he started his life behind the eight ball—so to speak—with a benign cancerous facial growth at 12 months of age. He fought back with incredible strength during multiple surgeries only to get lock jaw after facial reconstruction. At that moment, his simple dream was that someday he would be able to chew a gumball—and he successfully climbed that mountain. And from that day on, he has represented every new goal and challenge as just another gumball—win competitions, make the national All-American all-star team, graduate from college and become a surgeon. Matthew talks to us about his journey, his challenges, and the gumball machine he received from his surgical team.

Bob Palmer

This is Bob Palmer and you're listening to Zone Talk by SportExcel, where the magic of the Zone is a game changer. In every episode we dive into the lives of high performers and learn their amazing strategies so that you can take leadership of your game, your team and your life.

Bob Palmer

Matthew Cartisser is a member of the graduating class of 2020. He got involved in clay target shooting prior to high school and he found out he was good at it. And five years later he made the all-American team. He is not just a good athlete. He is a scholar as well. Plus, he has gone through much more than most kids his age. He contracted a rare facial cancer at age one and had numerous surgeries. Now he has big dreams about making a difference in a future career as a doctor. I welcome you to the show, Matthew.

Matthew Cartisser

Thanks for having me, Bob.



Bob Palmer

When I first met you, Matthew. Well, maybe I should ask you... what was your perspective on our first interview some four years ago?

Matthew Cartisser

Well, I was really shy back then. But my dad said - we're going to talk with this sports guy. And, you know, he's worked with all these other guys. They're all really good. So it's going to be great. And I was kind of not scared, but this guy's worked with people who are in the Olympics and stuff like that. Why is he working with me? But, you really brought me out of my shell. And the next time I practiced, I already started noticing a difference. So, no complaints!

Bob Palmer

What got you into competition in the first place?

Matthew Cartisser

Well, I was playing X Box against my friend and my uncle just came in and watched me - I was beating my friend by a lot. And he suggested that I try this thing called trap shooting that his friend had done in high school and got a scholarship for it. So my parents said, sure. I went out to my local club and I shot 15 out of 18 targets. [a great start for someone who has never played this sport before]. And after that, I joined the team. And the rest is history.

Bob Palmer

So how do you think it's been good for you?

Matthew Cartisser

I think it's really boosted my confidence. At the time when I first started, I never thought, oh, yeah, you're going to be winning state competitions and going out to the world championships. Never did I think when I was in the seventh grade and when I started - oh yeah, I'm going to make the all American team.

Matthew Cartisser

It was just I guess like a slap in the face in a good way.

Bob Palmer

A wakeup call!

Matthew Cartisser

Yes, well, since then I've been just - oh, wow. It's just a massive boost in confidence in that regard. Also, it's given me a lot of stuff to do. What other kid in my school can say, I'm one of the premier people in the state in my sport of choice. But also it's just given me a lot of things to do. I've traveled to other states over the weekends with my dad. It's just been a blast.



Bob Palmer

So a lot has changed in your sport over this time period, obviously. What kinds of blocks did you face and how did you deal with them?

Matthew Cartisser

I think just a big block in general was especially when I started like growing and having to change my fit [of my equipment] every couple of weeks, but also just getting the Zone and trying my best to not feel any pressure or anything like that.

Bob Palmer

So you overcame some nasty competitors from time to time. How did you manage that?

Matthew Cartisser

Well, I did what you told me to do, which is to really picture yourself just above and beyond, like, perfect. And then just pace around. And then when you have to go up [to compete], you don't think about them. You just think about you and you just shoot.

Bob Palmer

Did you ever run into not only competitors who were putting pressure on you, but perhaps their parents?

Matthew Cartisser

A bit. I remember one time I was at a competition and the parents, as well as the kid I was competing against...I looked behind me...and they were just kind of glaring at me. I was kind of like...oh. But I think it is kind of a different dynamic when you're competing against one of your peers and their parents are also watching you.

Bob Palmer

How did you deal with that?

Matthew Cartisser

I mean, I think the best way to deal with anything like that is to just kind of block it out and just pretend. It's just me and this guy. It's just me on a field just like in practice.

Bob Palmer

So you were also part of your school team. Any special challenges dealing with a team of athletes? When it's not just yourself out there on the line?

Matthew Cartisser

Oh, just for clarification, my school doesn't have a team - it's Scholastic [Scholastic Clay Target Program, A school-based, country-wide organization]. But, yes, it's a different dynamic with a team, especially when people kind of look to you for leadership. But it's also important to have especially that degree of separation between you and



your teammates where they're not affecting you, but also you can affect them and bring them up. I think it's important to...it's going to sound selfish.

Bob Palmer

Go ahead.

Matthew Cartisser

It's important to not let, when they miss, to not let that drag you down. You're just going to be like, oh, they missed. Forget about it and just continue on with what you're doing. And don't worry about them. Worry about them before you hop on the line [move into competing position], and after. But during, that's when it's just you and just you alone in the Zone. Afterwards, if they come to you for advice, provided it's not in between rounds or anything like that, you tell them how they can improve.

Bob Palmer

What do you mean by worry about them? Is there some other constructive word that you could use? Do you actually help them, you know, buoy them up? What do you mean by that?

Matthew Cartisser

I mean, on my team, at least especially with some of the newer kids - I'll help coach them in a way where if I'm not shooting or if it's their turn and I'm not up, I'll watch them and say, "Oh, hey, by the way, if you do this, you can fix that by doing X, Y and Z" or "Hey, by the way, you're looking over at your friend while on the line - don't do that" - stuff like that, where even on my squad that I compete with a lot. If they're doing that and I'm on the line [competing], I'm not going to tell them then. But after that, you know, [after] 100 rounds [targets], I'll come to them afterwards and say - "Hey, I saw you were doing this. Probably best not to do that".

Bob Palmer

So you made the all-American team.

Matthew Cartisser

Yes.

Matthew Cartisser

From where you came from - how did that feel?

Matthew Cartisser

Well, it felt really good, for starters. But I mean, I didn't know that there was an All-American team at the start of that season. And one of my teammates from my scholastic team, who has since gone to college, was trying to make the All-American team as a junior. I was still a sub junior at the time, and it was my first big Grand [national-level contest], where it was up at the Empire Grand in New York. And, you know, after the first day on the Friday, I got pulled from school, went up, shot doubles [two targets at a time], and my friend's dad comes over and he said, "Oh, there's some All-Americans here in your age group.



Matthew Cartisser

I didn't know there was an All-American team. But that means - I just want to win one thing. And that was my goal. And I ended up winning all of the things in my age group that time and also handicap [a category where the better you are, the further you move backward from the target to level the playing field with weaker opponents who remain closer.] But then they taught us (my friend and his dad) all about how the All-American team points work and all that. We thought - you know, we could maybe make that this year!

Matthew Cartisser

So we went out to Pennsylvania, the Grand American, where I didn't start trying to make the All-American team that season until probably the second half. And I said, oh, wait, I'm only twenty [20th] in terms of points. I can advance and be on the All-American team. So I did that and I made the team. I'd check it every week - the standings. And by September I came in number fourteen.

Bob Palmer

So a lot happened for you over these years, these four years that I've known you. And a lot of things happened in high school as well.

Matthew Cartisser

Yes.

Bob Palmer

What did you face in your education and what were you able to do with some of these strategies you have?

Matthew Cartisser

Paying attention in school, especially in school, is very difficult for me to do. I'm one of those kids. It's like a butterfly. But I think the Zone [helped] especially for taking big tests, like standardized tests, like the S.A.T. and stuff like that - it was instrumental because, you know, the week before I would prepare for it, it was how I would prepare for a competition. Where, all right, I see myself on the line or not on the line [but] at a desk, and just banging out math problems, getting them all right.

Matthew Cartisser

And I had to take the S.A.T. more than once, but by the end of it, I got a score that I was happy with, and I thought - wow, that actually really helped me. Also just in terms of taking notes in school, getting in the Zone and just being able to type out almost word for word what the teacher says, and just being in that "tunnel vision" mode is also just insurmountably helpful.

Bob Palmer

And did you find some of these tools help helpful for making friends and connections within school?



Matthew Cartisser

Yeah, I remember I think I talked to you about this. I was in a Spanish class with kids who were all in a lower class than me. I'm not that good at Spanish. And I knew none of them. And I just pictured myself up on a stage being that really friendly, charismatic guy. And by the end of the year, I had a solid group of people in the class whom I would call friends. And also just throughout high school, just becoming, I guess, more comfortable in my own skin and just making more friends that way as well.

Bob Palmer

Well, you're not that shy kid I first met, that's for sure! It was last year or in the last couple of years, that you gave a presentation to some doctors. What was all that? And how did you prepare for that?

Matthew Cartisser

Well, I made a presentation to the Thank Foundation, which is the Thyroid Head and Neck Cancer Foundation. And it was all about finding your goals. And when I had Lockjaw, my one goal was to be able to eat a red gumball. So I would basically say, Okay. Goals: We're going to call them gumballs. And I went through the speech saying that my goal was to run a twenty-five straight in trap [a perfect round].

Matthew Cartisser

Gumball. Right there. And I prepared for that just by lots of practice. And again, just picturing myself up on stage - being very well-spoken and just very professional. And I nailed it!

Bob Palmer

Does it help to have that dream of being one of the people you were presenting to, like the doctors?

Matthew Cartisser

Definitely. And at the end of it, my surgeon came up to me and gave me a gumball machine and a stethoscope!

Bob Palmer

Now, you just finished up high school this year and you did it in a Covid-19 dominated landscape. Do you have any survival tips in terms of strategies that helped you stay buoyant these last months?

Matthew Cartisser

Oh, I think number one would be - don't procrastinate because it is very easy to get behind, especially when you don't have teachers on your back saying - hey, you know, we're in class. You should do this. And if you don't, it's homework. And also just at home, we'll be working on an anatomy problem. There are so many things I would rather be doing other than working on this presentation or working on this like Web quest.

Matthew Cartisser

So really finding a place with no distractions and not procrastinating saying, oh, yeah, I'm just going to go outside and then do this later - because you never do it later!



Bob Palmer

So you're going to college. That may seem scary for a lot of kids. How do you think about it?

Matthew Cartisser

I definitely have anxiety about it. But I'm just going to do what I did in that Spanish class but on a larger scale. I think just going out there, (I'm going to Texas). And it's just a fresh start. Nobody there is going to know me from high school.

Bob Palmer

What school?

Matthew Cartisser

Trinity University in San Antonio. And I'm just going to get in the Zone - not only for academics, but also for just being social and forcing myself to be social as well, especially at the beginning with like orientation and all that, provided that there is an orientation.

Bob Palmer

Congratulations on that.

Matthew Cartisser

Thank you.

Bob Palmer

Now, you're also going to be heading into your new season, and it's a shortened season due to Covid-19. How are you preparing for that right now?

Matthew Cartisser

My state just reopened this past week. So I got to practice for the first or second time this year, over the weekend. Which I kind of surprised myself with how fast I got back in the groove. But I think especially just for preparing for it, just again, picturing myself up on a stage as the perfect trap shooter and just going through that every day. And also just for going out on the weekends and forcing myself to practice as much as I can just so I don't get surprised or anything like that.

Bob Palmer

Any advice for someone going into a new season?

Matthew Cartisser

I would say, you're going to have...I mean, if you're from the Northeast where you have winter, you're going to have cobwebs. And whenever you miss, as long as you learn from that miss, and as long as you don't repeat the same mistake, it's okay.



Matthew Cartisser

I mean, it's not okay, you know. But if you're going to have maybe a rocky start, maybe you're used to shooting 23 or 24's [out of 25] and you shoot a 20 or something like that. Just say, you know what? It's just the start of the season. I know what I missed; what I did on those five birds. I know how to fix that. I'm going to go out this next round and I'm going to fix that. And then say, you shoot a 23 that round and you say - okay. Those two birds. I know what I did. I know why it happened. I'm going to fix that.

Matthew Cartisser

And as long as you continue to improve yourself like that, bad days can actually be good for you in that way where you say - I know that I always shoot to the left of this one target. So whenever I see that one target, I'm just going to go a little more to the right each time. And then you won't be missing that target anymore.

Bob Palmer

Does that get you consistently into your Zone?

Matthew Cartisser

Yeah. I think especially if you see yourself being the best you can be and being just the guy that nobody wants to compete against. But also, humble and all that, that's important!

Bob Palmer

One last question.

Matthew Cartisser

Yes.

Bob Palmer

Where do you think or hope your future career as a doctor will take you?

Matthew Cartisser

I mean, I want to be an Otolaryngology surgeon. Otolaryngology is head and neck. I'd like to be similar to what the surgeon was that I shadowed over last summer. He runs the Thank Foundation that I gave a speech at. And he's also just this nice guy. He'll be in the operating room and he'll make a sarcastic joke like that, the nurses and stuff like that.

Matthew Cartisser

So, I'd like to be able to really mesh that - being really connected with patients and also just very busy but not busy that I hate my job and all that.

Bob Palmer

Well, I wish you well with this. I'm sure we'll be connected in the next while. But I would love to have you back to the podcast to revisit your progress through college and ultimately as a surgeon.



Matthew Cartisser

Of course, I'd love to.

Bob Palmer

Okay. Thank you so much for being on the show.

Matthew Cartisser

Thank you for having me.

Bob Palmer

Best of luck!

Matthew Cartisser

Thank you.

Bob Palmer

This episode of ZoneTalk by SportExcel has ended. Be sure to subscribe. And be sure to read and review us so that we can continue to bring you the best Zone and High-Performance content. See you on the next episode.

