



“Golf has always been in my family,” says Joey Piatek. “My dad, Joe, was a 5th grade teacher, but all summer he would give golf lessons at a par 3 golf course, which is where my brother and I learned to play at a young age.”

The Piatek brothers and their dad would play all kinds of formats, starting with three-man scrambles, then best ball matches, and by middle school they were playing golf in all kinds of weather including in the snow on a nine hole par 36 course that their father laid out over the top of the par 3 course.

Joey began to compete more broadly and eventually his mother was driving him throughout Indiana for junior tournaments in the summers.

“Living in northwest Indiana, we often had snowy winters, wet springs, and hot, humid summers so we got used to playing in all kinds of conditions,” Joey recalls. “It’s a lot like hickory golf in that a good player can find a way to get around the course in all kinds of conditions with all kinds of clubs and shots. It makes it fun and interesting.”

On the Munster High School boys golf team, Joey was named Indiana All-State. Later, at DePauw University (Div. III), he was an All-America Scholar, four-year letterman, and two-year captain of the golf team. He won individual titles at the Conference Championship his sophomore year and Depauw’s home tournament his senior year.

Today, Joey works as a fixed income trader at an investment company in Chicago and has an MBA from the University of Chicago.

He lives in Munster, Ind., with his wife, Michelle, a nurse anesthetist, and their son who will be four in October and twin daughters who will be two in September. Joey and Michelle met in 7th grade and they are both graduates of Munster High School.

“I consider my dad teaching me to play golf as one of the best gifts I have ever received,” he says. “Hopefully I can pass it along to my kids, too. Also, just maybe I can return the favor and get my dad into hickory golf.”

(Turns out, Joey did get his dad into hickory golf. Joe Sr. even won the Statesman division at the 2025 Michiana Hickory Open. And the kids each received their own hickory club when they turned 5 and are getting into playing.)

How were you introduced to hickory golf?

My dad seems to have all kinds of clubs appear out of nowhere. He had given me two or three hickories as well as some antique clubs of various ages. It really started when my father-in-law gave me a Spence and Gourlay putter that somebody was getting rid of. That really got me thinking that if I just find one or two more clubs, I can try to play with these.

How often do you play hickories?

Pre-1935 hickory – 45%; gutty – 20%; featherie – 5%; and modern clubs – 30%.

What’s in your play set?

It’s still under construction, and may always be:

Modern hickory:

- Jack White Autograph Brassie, 14 deg 42.5”
- George Sayers Gruv-Sol Spoon, 17 deg 42”
- Tom Stewart RTJ 2 iron, 24 deg 39”
- Tom Stewart RTJ Mashie-Iron, 28 deg 38.5”
- Tom Stewart RTJ Mashie, 36 deg 38”
- Tom Stewart RTJ Spade Mashie, 40 deg 37.5”
- Tom Stewart RTJ Mashie-Niblick, 46 deg 37.25”
- Tom Stewart RTJ Niblick, 54 deg 36.5”
- Tom Stewart RTJ Putter, 7 deg 34.5”

Gutty:

- McEwan Long Spoon Brassie made by Kelly Leonard, 15 deg
- BGI Cleek, 22 deg 39.75”
- George Bussey General Iron, 33 deg 38.5”
- Robert Forgan Lofter, 45 deg 37.5”
- Tom Stewart Niblick, 50 deg 37”
- Tom Morris replica long nosed putter I made, 8 deg 35”

Favorite club?

Very hard to choose. I think the more atypical or unique, the more I like the club. I also appreciate irons from the very beginning of the Haskell era. It’s such an interesting window into how golfers and clubmakers dealt with the “problem” of the “bounding-Billy” vs the old gutty. Clubheads got shorter and deeper, and grips got thinner.

I really enjoy hitting my Tom Stewart RTJ Mashie-Iron. The deep face makes it useful for hitting penetrating longer shots, but it has enough loft to hit it high as well. Also, the deep face is well suited to hit longer shots out of the rough. I have a good connection with all the clubs in my set and many more I have laying around at home. I like to keep nearly everything in a condition to bring out and play on any given day.

What ball do you play?

Thanks to my brother I discovered the Srixon Q-Star Tour and have enjoyed it. Being a urethane ball, it performs great



Golfing since he was a youngster, Joey Piatek finds hickory golf allows him to explore more of the game’s shot-making challenges.

around the greens, but it’s still soft enough to feel how I want it to on the woods and irons. I have tried other softer balls with non-urethane covers and they seemed a little too soft and jumpy to me. And the other tour balls sometimes can feel too hard. The Srixon is a nice middle ground. For gutty, the McIntyre Park. For featherie, the Lane.

Favorite course for hickories?

Kankakee Elks, Oak Knoll (in Crown Point, Ind.), the Lido, and Belvedere are my favorites. All four of these courses make you think about where you want to place your ball to set up the next shot. Instead of telling you what to do, they ask you what you want to do, which I think is essential for the best courses, which I think are also good for matchplay. They all also feature some visual deception and reward you for having a little bit of course knowledge. Having said that, I have always had a soft spot for Golden Age “small town country clubs,” but I also enjoy anything with hilly open ground, mounds, and wind. It’s fun to plan and execute not only the flight of a shot but also the bounce and the roll, just like how it was done a long time ago in Scotland.

For gutty, and for the same reasons listed above: Eagle Springs, Wawashkamo, and again Oak Knoll.

Favorite hickory tournament?

Belvedere is the best run and most fun tournament I have ever played, hickory or otherwise. They really make you feel welcome, and they love hickory golf there. I think it starts with strong buy-in from the membership and of course Marty Joy. Plus the social aspects are just as good as the golf course and competition.

Any particular player or aspect of golf history you especially enjoy?

I think Walter Hagen gets overshadowed a little bit by the amazing accomplishments of Bobby Jones from 1923-1930. To me, golf, especially hickory golf, is not about being perfect, it’s about being honest with yourself, accepting mistakes, and being able to recover from them. I think Walter Hagen played that way, and it made him a very tough match play golfer.

Best thing about hickory golf?

I love all things golf-related and hickory golf provides another way to enjoy the game on courses/tees that I wouldn’t play with my modern clubs. I see it as an essential way to play for anybody who wants to become a complete player. I love hitting all of the creative recovery shots around greens and planning out a hole in order to avoid the big mistakes. Plus, it’s fun to find a new club and unlock its potential. But, having said all that, it’s the people!

Ideas to promote hickory golf?

A lot of people I talk to are fascinated by hickory golf, but it really takes putting the ego aside to really get into it. One thing I often hear is something along the lines that “modern golf is hard enough.” Once a player abandons the idea of a “good score” and can enjoy the challenge of playing the best you can using your mind and skills, it is very rewarding. Still, it’s a tough sell for my friends who can hit a 460cc driver over 300 yards, and it may remain a tough sell for some time. I think offering rentals at the multitude of hickory events across the country is a great idea.

Most recent book on golf that you read?

The most recent book I read was Golf’s Most Astonishing Round by Anthony Gibson about Ernie Foord’s legendary 73 with just a putter at Burnham and Berrow Golf Club in 1912. For the past couple of years I have hosted a limited-set event for my friends and usually play a one-club round each year, so I always enjoy hearing stories about people like Ernie Foord and Gloria Minoprio.

Other favorites include: The Badminton Library: Golf by Horace Hutchinson; The Long Golden Afternoon by Stephen Proctor; Great Golfers in the Making by Henry Leach; and Golf for Enlightenment by Deepak Chopra.

Scotland’s Gift - Golf by C.B. Macdonald and The Spirit of St. Andrews by Alister MacKenzie are both worth reading and re-reading. But I also should mention The Story of American Golf by Herbert Warren Wind. Reading that was the final nudge for me to get out and try hickories for the first time in late 2019.

Anything else?

Indiana, especially Northwest Indiana, lives up to its name as “The Crossroads of America,” so if anybody is passing through and wants to play some hickory golf, don’t hesitate to contact me.