



Conversations w/Tino

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Airdate	Thursday, August 22, 2019

Tino Magnatta: Welcome to another episode of GT Radio, with myself, Tino Magnatta. Tonight I have a very special guest, young guy than we usually have on the show, at the beginning of his career, Jess Martinelli from The D. How are you, Jess?

Jess Martinelli: I'm great, Tino. Really appreciate you having me on the show. Love listening to it. It's going to be a fun opportunity.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks. Thanks for supporting the show. I'm glad we have you on. You've got a lot of interesting stuff. Let's start right from the beginning. So, tell us, you know, where you're from, what kind of upbringing you had, and what were your aspirations when you were growing up?

Jess Martinelli: So, I'm originally from Grosse Pointe, Michigan. Lived there my entire life, same house, and I had a great upbringing, really supportive parents, very successful themselves. I guess I'll just start with them.

My mom was a corporate lawyer for AT&T for 25 years, and then she actually moved into the gaming industry, funny enough. She switched over to the gaming industry two years after I had already been working out here in Las Vegas. I'd love to talk about that a little bit more. My dad was a Detroit police officer for about nine years, then he became a lawyer, probate attorney, and yeah. I was ... interesting combination to be raised by two lawyers. I learned a lot from them.

Anyway, I went to Grosse Pointe South High School and played hockey for 13 years, all the way up until I was the captain of the varsity hockey team out there. Really love hockey, favorite sport. I also played, you know, baseball and a little bit of lacrosse for a couple years too. Made my way to Michigan State University, which was not a surprise to really anyone, I'd say. I was raised by a family of Spartans that includes my dad, three of his brothers, and pretty much, you know, everybody I grew up with, their friends, Spartans as well. Three years before me, my sister as well. [crosstalk 00:03:04]

Tino Magnatta: Let me ask you something. How did the fact that you're from Michigan and from that Midwest kind of mentality, how do you think that shaped your character as opposed to growing up, you know, in the big city or, you know, the West Coast? How are people back there? I mean, you're a very cool guy, down to Earth. How are the people back there?

Jess Martinelli: Well, you know, a lot of people say the same thing about their city, probably. Grosse Pointe was a bubble. We were, you know, 15 minutes outside of downtown Detroit, which was interesting, growing up that close to Detroit at that time. A lot of people, you know, their vision of Detroit is a broken down town that had a lot of crime and all that stuff, and it was absolutely true. You know, when I was growing up, we'd go to Red Wings games down there and always kind of had our guard up and, you know, head on a swivel every single time we parked our car and walked to the arena.

So, then you drive 15 minutes back to Grosse Pointe, and you've got this very, you know, classic Midwestern town where everybody knows each other, not necessarily everyone's in each others business, but it's small enough where families know each other, and they've known each other for a long time. So, you know, the whole Midwestern values thing, we never left our door unlocked. I know that's like, a thing that people say in the Midwest, but it was safe enough that that kind of saying applies.

So, it was a great town to grow up in. We had a phenomenal education system, and I'm very thankful for that because it had a huge part ... played a huge part in my life. I was lucky. All the way from middle school I had a series of really great English teachers. I remember specific teachers in eighth grade, and a specific teacher I had in high school. I had him when I was a sophomore and then I had him again when I was a senior. The things that I learned about writing at that age, it really sculpted the next years of my life. It played a huge role at Michigan State and it, of course, has a huge ... gives me a huge advantage in the business world today. Very, very grateful for that.

Of course, two parents who are both lawyers, and my father is a writer as well, for Police Chief Magazine, and he's written in a number of different ways as well. I was just surrounded by this great writing environment and it ... You know, that translates to communication. Those are things that have just really, really helped me get where I am today. I hope to sharpen those skills for the rest of my life.

Tino Magnatta: Did you have any ... like, as you grew up of what you wanted to do? Did you think you were going to be like, a lawyer? What were the things that you thought you were going to do?

Jess Martinelli: Actually, so, my father said he'd write me out of the will, funny enough, if I tried to become a lawyer or a police officer. Didn't want me to follow in his footsteps. But he reminded me and my sister not to become lawyers, that we ... It was a joke, be written out of the will, but, you know, that's his way of saying that's, you know, "I want you to follow your dreams and your heart, but that one's off the table. Just trust me right now," and we did.

You know, aspirations, I, like a lot of kids, I was jumping from one thing to another every six months, you know, from like, let's say eighth grade through high school. I remember in eighth grade I did a project on Italian culture. I'm from a very Italian family. At that time, I wanted to own my own vineyard, you know, that was the dream back then. Then throughout high school, I started to learn how to cook with my mom, and really started to enjoy it, and appreciate it, and I definitely started, toward the end of high school, to really find passion in cooking and understanding how creative of an art it is. You know, because I couldn't ... I was artistic but I couldn't paint, couldn't draw for, you know, for anything. It's tough enough for me to color inside the lines at Applebee's these days.

I understood what it was like to feel that feeling of creation when I was cooking, and there's not a lot of high school boys who are cooking with their moms and then, you know, going to hockey practice and, you know, not beating the crap out of somebody, but hitting people hard and going back home and eating that shrimp dish that we cooked a couple hours ago. That was kind of a regular thing in my house. So, I knew I liked culinary arts at a young age. My first job in high school was actually as a fry cook. I worked for National Coney Island, which for, you know, Michigan people, is one of our go tos. There's a lot of different coney.

Of course, we've got the American Coney Island down at The D Las Vegas. That one's in the heart of Detroit. Then they have a competitor right next to them as well. We've got a lot of not like, New York's Coney Island, but we've got our own history of the chili dog and the onions, and that's my first job was ... Our term for it was slinging coney. So, you know, I was the low level fry cook, and I just loved something about the, you know, customer service side of it. Of course, you got angry guests when you're 15 years old, and you've got angry guests today. It's just something that I learned to, you know, deal with at a young age.

But really, I loved the chaos of the kitchen. It was hot in there. Of course, it smelled like chili and cheese, and all that stuff, but I loved the camaraderie in there and, you know, you're a really tight knit team when you're working in a kitchen, especially the one we were in. It wasn't very big. So, that was my first experience in the service industry. It really only grew from there.

I worked a couple Summers at the Arts, Beats, and Eats festival in Royal Oak, Michigan. My first job in college, I was working at a banquet center as a banquet server. So, you know, it worked all the way up ... I felt like I belonged in food and beverage.

Tino Magnatta:

So, what was it about cooking that you ... I mean, you said, you know, you played hockey and, you know, there's fighting in hockey, but cooking is the other end. Right? You usually do it alone or with one other person, or two other people. There's no fighting involved, sometimes, but maybe yelling and screaming.

What is it that you like about cooking, that it kind of like, compliments everything else you do?

Jess Martinelli:

I think, honestly, it's just creation. It's pure creation. You got to do it quickly and, you know, you follow a recipe, or you're cooking, literally just making something up, trying new things. Like I said, whether you're with someone or not, it's that feeling of creation. It's quick. It's a quick, you know, redemption or payback if you get an order and five minutes later, boom, it's made. You made it and you're, you know, touching someone's life for five seconds while they're eating that coney or, you know, it's the service industry at its best, in terms of creations.

I think that's what I enjoyed about it, especially at that young age too. It was, you know ... I was eager to impress, even though it was a fry cook position, I was eager to impress. From day one I just wanted to be a part of something.

Tino Magnatta: That's the key, right? No matter what kind of job you have, you have to be passionate about it. Like you said, I was a fry cook, but I loved it.

Jess Martinelli: Right. Yeah. Yeah. I appreciated the income too. You know?

Tino Magnatta: Of course. That never hurts. Tell me a little bit about what exactly ... When you started doing this fry cook thing and customer service on that level, and interacting with people, what did you learn? What was the foundation there? What were the principles that you learned?

Jess Martinelli: I mean, you know, this is something I experience all the time these days too. Making mistakes. Forgetting that this person ordered something. You know, whether you're in the best state of mind at work that day, or you're just not as sharp as usual, you make mistakes. You know, you feel ... If you care, you feel like it's kind of the end of the world, even for just a millisecond. But, you know, you might get yelled at by the guest or the customer. A lot of times you don't. Sometimes they go, "It's okay. Don't worry." You know, "I forgot your fries. I forgot, you know ... I forgot your soda." "Don't worry about it." It's a little thing.

So, you know, that was the first experience with making mistakes, and it, you know, still is something that I deal with occasionally when I'm, you know ... I really ... just a little mistake. Oh no! Well, it's going to be all right because we're going to figure it out, try to do the right thing, and people make mistakes. That was definitely a lesson I remember.

Communication. You know? Early on. When I started out, things were a little lax in the kitchen and as I, you know, worked there over the year, things got tightened up, new management kind of thing, and you start listening to new people and taking directions from new people, and you got to help them do their job too. So, you know, I think managing up is what we say. But without, you know, understanding these nuances and these terms back then.

Tino Magnatta: Now, you told me that your dad was really into writing, and you got that bug too, but also just storytelling. Tell us a little bit about that and how that's helped you in your professional career?

Jess Martinelli: Yeah. So, I do come from a writing family. I remember both my mom and dad saying, when I was pretty young, probably before middle school, how important writing is. They knew back then that a lot of people in the world don't know how to write, and then they don't, it is a very tangible barrier that will hold them but from whatever their goal is, because if you can't communicate in that way, you know, it's just ... It's a harder road.

Yeah. I know my dad would edit my stuff. He would edit my sister's stuff. I recall him like, editing her English papers when I was still in middle school. He'd be editing her English papers when she was in high school. I remember that being a big deal back then. You know, that and then there's legal pads. You got two lawyers in the house. There's legal pads, you know, all over the house with pages and pages of writing, in any way, whether it's a direct lesson, or editing session, or just, you know, [inaudible 00:15:58] stacks of writing all over the house. It was in my face, in a good way.

I had a little bit of experience on the school newspaper in high school. That was kind of just because my sister had done it too and, you know, I could be good at it. She was really good at it, but I just kind of wanted to, you know, follow in her footsteps a little too back then. She went on to Michigan State and got an arts and humanities degree, eventually made her way to Northwestern for journalism school, and she's actually working for USA Today, writing for their sports website. She is a writer at heart and very good at what she does.

This whole ... Math, of course, and sciences were important in our family, but it was obvious that I was meant to be a writer, and I knew that from a young age. I loved it. I embraced it. It showed. I got the best grades in English. I can't say that for the other subjects. Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. It's hard to be good at everything, but if you have a passion for stuff, it's good. How did your siblings ... What kind of an affect did your siblings have on you? Because you're the youngest, right?

Jess Martinelli: Yeah. It's just me and my sister.

Tino Magnatta: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jess Martinelli: Honestly, we had three years apart. She's three years older than me. We were both very, very independent kids. So, you know, she would spend hours after school at swim practice and then school newspaper. I'd spend hours after school at either hockey or baseball or, you know, out with my friends. We were just really independent kittens. We both had big circles of friends. Didn't play any similar sports, but we did ... I'd say we did a great job of finding our own identities.

I think [Beth 00:18:31] had a big impact on me too, and my core group of friends that I grew up with, I was very lucky to have, you know, four friends all the way from kindergarten until high school before we all went our separate ways for college. I was very lucky to have that group. Couldn't say the same for a lot of people in my city. Each of us had our own independent, you know, goals and hobbies.

I played hockey, and my four best friends, none of them played hockey with me. One of them played basketball. One of them was very good at guitar. The other

is great at drums. We each had our own independent lives, but we also, you know, were kind of brothers too. I'd say that they were just as close as siblings to me. That independence really taught me how to deal with different groups of people, different groups of friends, different walks of life. It was the same practice every year growing up.

Tino Magnatta: Very cool. Tell us a little bit about the job at The D and how that all came about?

Jess Martinelli: So, The D Las Vegas, which is also, you know, the Golden Gate Casino, both downtown casinos. The D, they recruit from a lot more colleges these days, but when I was graduating in December of 2015, they recruited from Michigan State University exclusively. That has a lot to do with the fact that our owner, Derek Stevens, is from Michigan, along with his wife and his daughter. They're all from Michigan.

A lot of people in our company are from Michigan. We just ... We've got a nice Midwestern base. He likes ... The owner likes to recruit from Michigan State University. That has to do with the fact that he likes the kids that come out of there, and it also has to do with the fact that Michigan State has unbelievable hospitality business program. Number two in the country, second to Cornell. The guys who recruited me, one of them is actually from Michigan State University. He graduated, I think, four years before me. His name's Michael Bender. He was the guy who started the management program at The D the year that I was graduating. He went to Michigan State with a specific person in mind to kick off this management program. You know, we crossed paths, and I was lucky enough to make my way out to Las Vegas.

The reason I was interested in casinos, honestly, I got into the hospitality business program as a sophomore. I knew it was a great program. I knew my food and beverage background had, you know, could play a huge role in that. I was a banquet server at the hotel on campus at the time. Everybody in my program, it was a big ... a lot of kids in hospitality business at MSU. Everybody I talked to seemed to have an interest in the front desk or some side of hotel operations, and if not that, they were going to food and beverage.

You know, I was really enjoying my job at the banquet hall. I loved the camaraderie in there too, being a server and prepping in the kitchen. But I just ... I felt like everybody was kind of doing the same thing and had the same goal. "I'm going to start out at the front desk and then a couple years, I'll be a front desk manager." There's, you know, absolutely nothing wrong with that. That's what so many people are great at. That's how so many people in our industry get their start. It just ... It wasn't speaking to me. While I did love food and beverage, I was having trouble visualizing a path in it back then.

I think I was afraid that if I moved up any higher at the, you know, the banquet hall or in food and beverage altogether, maybe I wouldn't enjoy it as much as just being a server and having fun. So, you know, then there was this class, the Casino 101 at Michigan State, and I took that, and then I was lucky enough to

visit Las Vegas for the first time when I was 21, with a family who was basically my family as well, just some very close family friends. That was my first experience in Las Vegas, so I just realized, "Well, there's only two casino classes at MSU. Everybody else is going to, you know, hotels or food and beverage, maybe I should try, and do what nobody else is doing."

You know, of course, I was [inaudible 00:24:09]. I got to stay at The Venetian out here in a suite. That was my first experience, of course. The whole lavish side of Las Vegas and nice dinners and all that stuff. I thought, "That sounds pretty fun. It sounds different. Nobody in my other hospitality business classes are talking about the operations of a casino." I just didn't ... It was this whole world that I didn't know, and I wanted to know about. That's kind of what led me to casinos.

Yeah. Then the hospitality business career fair at Michigan State, it's phenomenal. That was December of 2015 or November of 2015 is when they interviewed me, and just, you know, had a great time in the interview. They just kept saying, "Look, this guy's from Michigan. This is his vision. This is what we're looking for out at The D." It kind of lined up. That's how I got out to The D Las Vegas.

Tino Magnatta: Now, when you first started, you came to Vegas, big city, you know, what were your feelings when you first started this job? I mean, it was a completely different world, right? Give us a little bit of [crosstalk 00:25:31] an idea of how you felt?

Jess Martinelli: Well, it was the same feeling that I describe to people when they come here and visit me, or they ask how Las Vegas is, even today, it was overstimulating, you know? That's what we do here. Just, you know, the bright lights.

I came out here for the first time with my dad. He met everybody down at The D. They treated us to an unbelievable first couple days, just, you know, everybody, so welcoming, instantly, from the owner down to, you know, the executives, and everybody in between. Right out of the gate, you know, you felt like this family was welcoming you in with like, a group hug kind of, which I don't know. I can't say for sure if it's done that way for other kids who come from Michigan or from my exact situation to a different casino in Las Vegas.

So, very welcoming right away. They made it clear to me early on that, you know, "This management program is for you. This is ... We want you to, you know, understand as much about this industry and as much about this company as possible for the first six months. We want you to be open about what interests you." That was made clear to me right away. You know, I jumped into work right away. I didn't, you know ... wasn't going out all the time. Wasn't, you know, really like, just staying at the casinos until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning right away. I was just trying to figure out how to be professional. That's all I could handle back then. I'm sure I was overthinking it, but I guess I'm glad that I did.

That was my first impression of the city, is I've got a new little family here. New corporate family. I'm very lucky for that.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. That's very cool that you had that feeling, and especially because you, kind of like we say in Italy, you know, you had your [inaudible 00:27:58], right?

Jess Martinelli: That's right. That's right.

Tino Magnatta: So, as you evolved and started to learn more about the business, what were some of the things that you found the most difficult to absorb?

Jess Martinelli: So, you know, I started out in ... I went through my six month rotation and dove right into database analytics, became a marketing analyst at the company. You know, I learned ... I was so lucky to have all this experience at The D at like, my first year, first two years. I was able to wear many hats right away. Because of the management program but even afterwards, you know, as a marketing analyst in this industry, it's kind of normal to work slot tournaments and assist with that. But we're a smaller company. So, I was assisting with slot tournaments for the beginning of, you know, being a marketing analyst but then like, some changes, some staff changes, I ended up kind of running the slot tournament software. It kind of fell in my lap. They needed someone to do it.

So, you know, I'm a marketing analyst for eight hours a day and then, you know, three hours a couple times a month, I'm operating slot tournament software that I kind of had to learn and teach myself. You know, so, right away got a couple roles and had to learn, kind of trial by combat. Those pressure situations were great because I, you know, once again, I knew there was a ton on the line, and if I made a mistake I was going to just really beat myself up about it and feel terrible about it. But sure enough, I made plenty of mistakes, and the software would crash, and I'd have to, you know, apologize to 80 guests, "Hey, we're figuring it out," blah, blah, blah. Occasionally I'd have to get on the microphone.

This is like, less than a year into being in Las Vegas. I'd be covered in sweat and trying to figure out all this stuff at the same time, and then slot tournament ends and boom, I've got to go right back up to my desk and start working on those direct mailers. Stuff like that. I got involved in keeping lists for ticketing for all of our events center events. Eventually, got into stuff related to VIP ticketing for T-Mobile Arena and, you know, accommodating as many of our players as I could, and figuring out, you know, who deserves to go, and balancing all that stuff at the same time. Then, you know, back to the direct mail stuff.

So, this was happening all very quickly. I was very lucky to have the boss that I have, who gave me this freedom to, you know, to wear a lot of hats. Even after my management trainee program ended, it still felt like, and it kind of stuff does today, feels like I'm rotating a little bit because that's exactly what I've been doing. I've been lucky enough to take on a couple roles at the same time, despite what the title on my business card says. You know, I just ... I'm so

grateful for that because I don't know if a lot of other people my age, with my experience, have had that luxury.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. The thing is, because of your, you know, fearlessness and willing to learn, you're learning a lot of different aspects about the business.

Jess Martinelli: Absolutely. Yeah. No, it's ... Yeah, when you stop learning, you're doing something wrong. That advice has been passed on to me by so many great people in the industry and so many great people at The D. If you're not learning, you're not growing, and then you're really ... you might say you have goals, but you're not going to, you know ... You're not going to reach them. So, learning new roles and new responsibilities and, you know, just trying to cover as much ground as possible while not sacrificing any quality has been huge for me.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. It's a great thing. Tell us a little bit about what you think of the state of our business right now. Where are we at? I know you guys are doing a lot of exciting stuff at The D with the new building, and, you know, basically building something that there hasn't been any construction going on there in decades.

Where are we at in our business?

Jess Martinelli: You know, it's an exciting time, of course. That's what people say, right? It is though. You got sports betting taking over the country. It's in our headlines, in our gaming reports every day, and that's a new challenge. People are concerned and happy with where we're going about that. You know, I think I'm, of course, going to say what I have to say, as being an employee of downtown Las Vegas, and being a proud patron of downtown Las Vegas, you know, everything is more fun downtown, to us, and of course, there's things that are on the Strip these days that you'll only ever find on the Strip. Everybody needs to experience that too. It's still fun, of course.

But people are looking for value these days and, you know, I'm surrounded by people who, no matter where we're going for lunch, a new place we're going for lunch, first thing after we decided where we're going, we got to look it up and see what the reviews are. You know? Everybody has lots of access to reviews and information these days, and it's so quick and so instant that, you know, things are held to a higher degree these days, of satisfaction. People want a lot more value. So, you know, I think that's what we've learned to provide downtown, is good value for money. You know, there's unforgettable experiences in Vegas overall, but I think it's a lot more fun downtown.

As far as the gaming across the whole country goes, yeah. I'm doing my best right now to learn about as many casinos as possible, and that's just part of my role these days, as the affiliate marketing goes, and it's been exciting. You get to learn about casinos and their different programs, and their incentives all across the country. You know, we're all very different. I think a lot of people living in Las Vegas, they forget how different casinos are in different parts of the

country. There's a lot we could learn from everybody out there that might not be applicable to Las Vegas but, you know, that's the fun of continuing to learn.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. It's pretty amazing. Should we take some phone calls?

Jess Martinelli: Yeah. Let's do it.

Tino Magnatta: Let's do it. Great stuff so far. Hello? This is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Jess?

Steve Neely: Good evening, gentlemen. It's Steve [Neely 00:36:14]. How are you doing? [crosstalk 00:36:17] Doing well. Great job tonight, Jess, really enjoying listening to your interview. As always, Tino, doing a great job. [crosstalk 00:36:30]

So, you talked a lot about your experience at Michigan State and, you know, it sounds like not only a great program to get to some fundamental stuff, but also, you know, a great pipeline for Derek and his team to recruit from. So, you know, nice set up there. But if you had to go back to what you learned in school and then entering into the business world, specifically the casino world, what's one or two lessons that you wish they would have taught you at school, to assist you with that transition?

Jess Martinelli: I think I would have framed and just generally talked about player development more. I didn't understand what player development was at all. Michigan State hospitality business only had two casino classes. You know, like I said, that niche. So, I would have framed player development different.

I would have tried to, you know, start off a class by showing, you know, all the, you know, the lavishness and the luxury of what player development is, what casino hosts do, and how people in a casino take care of their players, or incentivize their players on a much higher level. I would have started out with the bang, and the boom, and the flashing lights, and, "Look, we get you front row seats at the boxing match. Then you get to go up to your beautiful suite that has two floors and a spiral staircase, and marble everywhere. You know, this is what it's like," and then just, you know, grab students' attention. Students like me, who weren't paying attention the way I could have been to then start to really listen.

Then you start talking about, you know, how that is, you know ... how you get there. Then [crosstalk 00:38:34] You know, do a picture. Do pictures, graphics, and slides saying, you know, "A player loses this amount of money. We know players gamble at casinos. They lose this money. That equals, you know, this kind of statistics and math." Then that's what equals a front row seat at the big fight. You know? Really kind of break it down like that, and then you really get behind, you know, the math and what the theoretical is, and I think that it's just a great place to start to really help kids visualize how many turns into the perks, and what we use ... the word we use, comp, out here. You know?

I didn't understand any of that back then.

Steve Neely: Ah, very good. Well, like I said, doing a great job. Have enjoyed listening to the show and getting to know more about you. Enjoy working with you as well, from the affiliate side.

Jess Martinelli: I appreciate that. All right. Thanks, Steve.

Steve Neely: All right. Goodnight, guys.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks, Steve. Have a good night.

Yeah. Steve's a great guy. I really like him a lot.

Jess Martinelli: Oh, yeah. Fun to work with.

Tino Magnatta: Here we go. Hello? This is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Jess Martinelli? Hello?

Speaker 4: [inaudible 00:40:04]

Tino Magnatta: Can you hear us?

Speaker 4: [inaudible 00:40:18]

Tino Magnatta: Hello, hello?

Jess Martinelli: Hm.

Tino Magnatta: I guess they're ... I guess they can't hear us.

Jess Martinelli: Yeah.

Tino Magnatta: We'll get right back to you. If you can hear us, we'll get right back to you.

Speaker 4: [inaudible 00:40:24]

Tino Magnatta: All right. Hang on one sec. Hello? This is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Jess Martinelli?

Speaker 5: Yes. Good evening, guys. How are you doing? [crosstalk 00:40:39] Excellent, excellent. I've really, really enjoyed listening to how you got where you are, and there's a few things you said that had my deepest respect that you committed. One, anybody that's put as much into hockey as you have, has a different understanding of life and commitment.

Jess Martinelli: Oh, no doubt. No doubt.

Speaker 5: Yeah. I mean, it isn't like some kid who's playing basketball, or I was in a rock band in high school [inaudible 00:41:21]. Hockey, the commitment is so amazing to me. Then I have many, many close friends who went to State. I've always been in awe of their comfort in dealing with situations of not getting ... what would I say ... over exhausted or over stimulated in trying to resolve something.

It sounds like you got a lot of that from getting into doing food service early. Did you find that you learned a lot then, and did your hockey and being in the team help you desire to do that in food service?

Jess Martinelli: Yeah. Actually, I really appreciate your kind words. It's funny, I know hockey was a huge commitment from six-years-old all the way up until 18. I mean, it really did ... It takes a lot. I missed countless vacations with groups of friends. I missed after school activities outside of, you know, outside of hockey because of it, and had to drive 25 minutes to my rink every single day. You really do form this unbreakable bond with your teammates because they're all in the same boat. They're all missing other things just for this one goal, this one passion. Yeah.

It was a big commitment my whole life. I actually ... I remember my dad saying, all the time, that exact thing. "This is a commitment. We've made this commitment." That taught me to honor commitments and how important loyalty is. You don't give up because at the end of the day, you love something, and I really do love hockey. I respect hockey players because it's the fastest sport in the world, you know, aside from NASCAR, literally, it's, you know ... You're on two tiny pieces of metal, and you're out there, you know, just going so fast.

Your brain ... I really, I think my brain developed in a way that, because of hockey, I'm able to make very quick decisions in my head without saying anything out loud. You have to. Otherwise, you could end up actually physically hurt, or you missed an opportunity where your teammate's open across the ice, and nobody else sees that. You know, you have ... Your brain develops a way to make those decisions and see things that other people outside of that world don't, and so quickly.

To your question about food and beverage, you know, I loved ... Hockey is chaos all the time. There is a romantic chaos in the kitchen as well. You know, things are hot. You're going to get hurt. Things are sharp. You're going to get hurt. There's communication in there and you have to act quickly. There's people waiting on you. There's people counting on you. Yeah, those two experiences throughout my whole life, food and beverage and hockey, they definitely add to my ability to be in a metaphorical war zone situations in the workplace, where I just, you know, I know how to listen to everything and observe everything that's going on in a kind of slow mo visualization, and act quickly, and make those decisions quickly, or internalize it quickly.

You know, I can be a nervous guy but also all this adrenaline I've had from those experiences, I've kind of learned how to shape it and utilize it. So, absolutely. Huge impact.

Speaker 5: I think what you just said about scoring that one goal or getting that one point, in hockey it's harder than almost any other sport I can think of.

Jess Martinelli: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 5: The commitment it takes. I always respect any young person when they have a bit of naïve enthusiasm and if they can keep going when they have it. Because what you don't know, you don't know, but if you get up and keep going, you're going to do ... It's going to work. You have a commitment and a focus that, hey, they're blessed to have you where you're working, and your future and their future's awesome.

Jess Martinelli: I'll tell you, it kind of goes with how I ended up in casinos, how I wanted to do the thing that no one else was doing. It was the same. You know, the highest level of hockey I played was varsity in high school. It was the same situation. I was the guy who stood in front of the net as a forward, trying to score, and would have the defenseman and the other forwards out there shoot the puck full speed, slap shots, wrist shots, whatever, full speed, and then I was the guy who takes the beating from the defenseman, from the goalie, at the same time, getting full speed pucks coming right at you, because I loved this role that nobody else wanted to take.

All I had to do was just kind of nick the puck with the edge of my stick, and it would redirect it in this way that nobody saw coming, and that's how you [inaudible 00:47:26] hockey. Nobody else wanted to, you know, have the goalie's stick in the back of your legs, whacking you the whole time while trying to focus on a puck that's coming 80 miles an hour at your chest, that you've got to move out of the way in [inaudible 00:47:38] second, and I loved that role. That's why they called me the trash man. They called those guys [crosstalk 00:47:49]. That's a very common nickname on a hockey team.

Speaker 5: Yes. [crosstalk 00:47:58] That's great. Well, [crosstalk 00:48:01]

Tino Magnatta: Yeah, I love hockey. You know, I'm Canadian, so I grew up on the stuff. Really love it.

Jess Martinelli: Oh, yeah.

Tino Magnatta: Really, really good. Hello, this is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Jess Martinelli?

Mike Sovino: Tino, good evening. Mike [Sovino 00:48:22] from New York.

Tino Magnatta: How are you, Mike?

Mike Sovino: Very well. I'm watching my Jets just tanking it.

Tino Magnatta: Oh, good.

Mike Sovino: You guys are a great distraction. Jess, how are you doing tonight?

Jess Martinelli: Very good. Very good, Mike. Thank you.

Mike Sovino: Good. First of all, sorry about your Spartans on Saturday.

Jess Martinelli: It happens.

Mike Sovino: Yes, it does.

Jess Martinelli: As a Spartan, I'm used to it.

Mike Sovino: Yeah. You touched on a few different aspects of the hospitality, the [inaudible 00:48:54], the hosting, the back off house stuff, like the direct mail, being on the floor, the slots. I'm just curious. What have you found most rewarding, from a hospitality standpoint, which of those roles?

Jess Martinelli: I mean, my current role has, by far, been the most rewarding, in affiliate marketing. By leaps and bounds. But what ... It's the same thing. It applies to affiliate marketing as well, because we do these VIP group trips where we bring a group of players out from a different casino to The D for a weekend. We get to tailor the whole weekend to them, and it applied with my time in special events because I worked slot tournaments, but I also was briefly, during my rotation, very briefly, due to a personnel change, I was a manager of special events for about two weeks because I was rotating. I'd only been at the company for three months.

I was rotating through, and the current manager left the company, and I was the only person to fill the role. There was a party that needed to be planned. I, you know, was [inaudible 00:50:22], the paper flying all over the office, somebody else's office. I'm trying to scramble for notes and look how to do this, and teach myself within a couple days on how to plan an event, and that was my first experience with planning an event. That goes into part of my job right now, which is, you know, entertaining guests out here with those similar kind of VIP events.

I'm very, very attentive to detail when it comes to these things. I've found that these events give me the ability to go to each department head with a list of what I need from that person, a description of what my goal is for the weekend, and description of what the players will experience, and pretty much overload them with paperwork and just kind of annoy them until they're like, "Okay, I got

it. I got it. I got it." You know, these VIP weekends have really, really paid off financially, but really more they've just paid off for me personally because it's something that, you know, it's a creative thing.

It started from just one Word document where I was typing out notes because I got a million things on my mind, and then it forms into a real itinerary, and then it forms into real work orders, and then it forms into this and that, and then at the end of the weekend you get all this feedback from the guests saying, "Everything was seamless. We couldn't believe how much attention you guys gave us and your staff was unbelievable. We really did feel like we were the only guests in the casino."

That, you know, hearing that, it gives you self confidence. The next time you go to do one of these things, you have that under your belt, that self confidence, which is everything. You're able to get more creative and take a little more risk, and see things that you didn't see before because you were worried about this little, you know, check in process or something like that, but you start to ... It's a positive cycle where you get this feedback from your guests about this thing that you said was going to be all about them, and then that's exactly what they say back to you. That's a great feeling.

Mike Sovino: Yeah. I'm also, full disclosure, I'm a hockey guy. I played and actually coach my son's team. I used to teach him. I played defense. I used to teach him how to keep guys like you out of the crease. It involves a lot of sticks to knees, to the ankles, and the back of the knees.

Jess Martinelli: It's a fine line. It's a fine line. [inaudible 00:53:05]

Mike Sovino: Let's say for a second that some moratorium came down, and you weren't allowed to work in the casinos anymore. Working for the VIP, working for the Detroit Red Wings, would that work for you?

Jess Martinelli: Yeah. I think it might. I'd only take an offer from Steve Yzerman now that he's back there though. It's petty, I know, but that's who I am.

Mike Sovino: That's hockey town. That's hockey town.

Jess Martinelli: That's right. [crosstalk 00:53:36]

Tino Magnatta: I got a little anecdote for you guys. Gordie Howe, who was considered the gentleman hockey player, you know, he ... Gordie Howe was Wayne Gretzky's idol. Gordie Howe and Wayne Gretzky, they played against each other for a few games. Gretzky then wrote later that he was the dirtiest player that he had ever met, but he did it in the corners when everybody was piled in. He'd like, you know, he'd poke check the end of the stick into your ribs, and he said he knew exactly where to get you. [crosstalk 00:54:12]

Totally shattered my image of Gordie Howe. Totally shattered my image of him.

Mike Sovino: The movie Slap Shot, where they're talking about, you know, Eddie Shore, old time hockey, Gordie Howe was old time hockey. He was ... You watch some of the YouTube videos and you just [inaudible 00:54:29]. He was a tough SOB. He took [crosstalk 00:54:32]. That's the way the game was. Jess touched on [inaudible 00:54:40]. You have to learn to adjust and adapt to the situation at hand, whether you're on the ice or whether you're in the boardroom.

You know, a lot of this stuff, you know, we don't know what's going to happen going in, and it's ... Sometimes it's more about what you do when the you know what hits the fan, because things do change. It's unpredictable, which, I think, makes all three of us and everybody else, it makes it more exciting. [crosstalk 00:55:08]

Jess Martinelli: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Makes you stronger. [crosstalk 00:55:14]

Tino Magnatta: Thanks so much, Mike. Really appreciate it.

Mike Sovino: Thank you guys. [crosstalk 00:55:18] Goodnight.

Tino Magnatta: Have a good night. Great questions. We have time for one more. Hello? This is Tino Magnatta. Do you have a question for Jess Martinelli?

Vince Manfredi: Hi. This is Vince [Manfredi 00:55:31]. I have a couple questions, actually. Let me start with my joke though.

Jess, I've enjoyed listening to you talk. It takes me back to me starting in the industry when I finished college, which was too many years ago to count. I think the biggest difference is back then they didn't ask me if I graduated high school. So, it's nice to see that the industry is maturing and becoming more technical. I think that's really cool.

A question just about moving to Vegas. I mean, it sounds like it was a bit of an insulated move for you because you had an executive, you know, junior executive job lined up, et cetera. Was there anything culturally about the community that was a surprise to you, especially maybe coming from the Midwest? Were there any significant aha shocks or anything like that?

Jess Martinelli: Yeah. You know, I won't lie. You know, in college I'd partied until the sun come up before. A lot of us had. So, to do that here and just have a place where they're serving you drinks instead of, you know, drinking at a buddy's house or buddy's apartment until the sun comes up, that's, you know ... I conceptualized that. That part wasn't the shock to me.

You know, the ... I will say though, people in Vegas definitely have a very high tolerance for alcohol. That's just [inaudible 00:57:00]. That's part of the job too.

It really can be. I personally have taken a step back from that. You know, I like to take breaks from drinking at all, even a glass of wine, just because it is an intense industry for young people too. You work very hard and then you want to go out at night too. It's about balance. That wasn't overwhelming to me at all.

I think what was overwhelming in the beginning was having the access to gambling because we had casinos in Detroit, and we had Caesars Windsor right across the river. But I, you know, after turning 21, I really never frequented the casinos. I think I'd been to a casino in Michigan, I think, less than five times before I physically moved to Vegas.

Vince Manfridi: Interesting. So, that's a whole new world for you.

Jess Martinelli: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. That's something you can ... A lot of people will gamble on their own too. You don't have to be out with a group of friends. "Oh, we're all going to the casino."

So, you know, I started out gambling, and I started out winning. I wasn't betting much. I wasn't greedy. Five dollars, to me, is still a lot of money. It was a lot of money to me back then. You know?

Vince Manfridi: Right.

Jess Martinelli: It just is. But, you know, my problem was, was that the first month that I was here, I had won like, you know, \$200. I was like, "Wow, this is easy." It was really just that small [inaudible 00:58:44]. That's the worst thing you could do. I say this to people all the time. The worst thing you can do is come to Vegas on your first night, if you're on vacation, or your first night moving here, and win. Because then you think, "Oh, it's easy!"

But, you know, that's what happened to me. After the first month I was like, "Wow." So, you know, that is ... That's not what you do. Like, yeah, you just [crosstalk 00:59:07]

Vince Manfridi: I had the opposite experience of you. I lost a whole paycheck on a Friday night shortly after I got to Las Vegas, playing blackjack with ... Bourbon may or may not have been involved. I was looking for quarters for a week until I got paid again. So, I learned my lesson early on.

As far as the direct marketing, et cetera, like, how ... What's the breadth of your role? Are you involved in everything from creative to segmentation? I was kind of curious.

Jess Martinelli: So, I was a marketing analyst for three years. Well, I guess, two and a half years at The D. I'm no longer a part of direct mail and database analytics.

Vince Manfridi: Oh.

Jess Martinelli: At the time, I was involved with all of it. It was for The D and the Golden Gate for US and Canada. I had a, I'd say, pretty big role for someone with my level of experience and age. I was confident after a year of doing it. I had a great trainer and a great support staff, but there were really only three or four of us when I started out doing database analytics stuff.

That experience was huge for me. I got, you know, 12 different departments in my management program. I rotated through.

Vince Manfredi: I see.

Jess Martinelli: Then there's marketing [inaudible 01:00:38], database analytics. You know, a kid in Vegas probably, you know, nine out of 10 aren't going to select what seems like the most boring one. You know. I had some good coaches back then who said, "Look, you learn about this stuff. This is the stuff at the core of what everybody cares about. If you understand an actual win and a theoretical win, and how everything stems from there, and how it all, you know, builds out, then, you know, you're going to be off to a running start in a couple years."

It was absolutely true. So, that's ... That was a lot of reason I went into database analytics, and I had some experience with computer sciences in college as well.

Vince Manfredi: Gotcha. It sounds like you learned some very valuable lessons. Do we have another minute, or where are we, Tino?

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. Yeah. One more question and I think we can wrap it up.

Vince Manfredi: I just have one more. Just one more question for you, Jess. Do you guys get any locals at The D?

Jess Martinelli: We do. We do. I know we call ourselves a destination property because that's what we are. We are ... We get plenty of locals. Lots of walk-ins. Foot traffic. You know, you got Fremont Street. It's easy to bring people in, but while we focus on locals and divert plenty of attention to locals, a lot of our operation and a lot of our work is for destination market.

Vince Manfredi: I would think that the Golden Gate, which you guys did an incredible job of revamping, I think it looks spectacular in there.

Jess Martinelli: Thank you.

Vince Manfredi: I was there on a mid-morning and it was just cranking. I was thrilled to see that downtown. But I was just wondering if you treat them differently in any way when it comes to the way that you create offers and that sort of thing?

Jess Martinelli: Yeah. Yeah. You mean The D and the Golden ... like, separate companies?

Vince Manfredi: No, I mean just like, for your direct mail. I know you don't do it directly anymore, but the direct mail, do you handle a local player differently when it comes to the reinvestment, I guess?

Jess Martinelli: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. 100%. You know, rooms ... The whole rooming component is a completely different situation. Very good locals. They get a room, but a lot of the lower end tiers, they don't because they're within driving distance and that's, you know, something that we use our database analytics for when we pull our data lists. The classic local's a code thing. They're very different. Very different offers.

That's from everything from rooms, to food, to show tickets.

Vince Manfredi: I think the PD component that you mentioned you wish you knew more about, I think that's also really at the core of, you know, building high value customers, and that's critical in our business, especially right now.

Anyway, I knew we're out of time, but Jess, it was a pleasure to talk to you. I wish you much success, continued success as you progress.

Jess Martinelli: Thank you. Thank you so much.

Vince Manfredi: All right. Take care.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks for being a big supporter of the show.

Vince Manfredi: You bet.

Tino Magnatta: Really appreciate it.

Vince Manfredi: You bet. Take care, guys.

Tino Magnatta: Yep. Bye bye. Jess, it's been fantastic. You were absolutely great on the show. I've been getting a lot of texts and feedback. People really enjoy what you were saying. I'm looking forward to having you back on the show, buddy.

Jess Martinelli: Cool. Well, thanks so much. That was a lot of fun, really. Really appreciate it.

Tino Magnatta: Yeah. If you're going to pop in the G2E, I'm doing a video clip series of people giving one to two minute comments.

Jess Martinelli: Okay.

Tino Magnatta: I'll send you an invite. If you can make it, love to get a one or two minute video comment that we're going to use across all our networks.

Jess Martinelli: Okay. Yeah. I'll definitely try and work you guys in. Absolutely.

Tino Magnatta: Okay. You got it. I'm going to send you an invite. Like I said, thanks for taking the time to be on the show, and really appreciate everything you said.

Jess Martinelli: Cool. Thank you, Tino. Really appreciate it.

Tino Magnatta: Thanks, buddy. Have a good night.

What a great show. Jess is younger, up and coming, and he's got, you know, a lot of hard work and dedication behind him. Great guy.

Thursday, Judy Wright, she is an amazing HR person. She also is the president of the Native American HR Association. She got a lot of great things to say. She works at [inaudible 01:05:19] now. Great casino. Remember, everybody's got a story to tell. Just have to have time to listen.

Have a great night, we'll talk to you soon. Ciao!

END