

Vincenzo Mattei: Where are you from man?

Austin Swanger: Well, I was born in Texas.

Vincenzo Mattei: Born in Texas.

Austin Swanger: My dad was in the army, so I lived all over the Eastern Seaboard, West Virginia, North Carolina, Texas, and everywhere in between.

Vincenzo Mattei: Nice.

Austin Swanger: Kind of have a wide range of where I'm from, I guess you could say.

Vincenzo Mattei: What made you attend UNCC?

Austin Swanger: Well, I was living in Charlotte at the time. My dad also went to this school as well. I just decided to do the same thing and originally was here to get into ROTC program.

Vincenzo Mattei: Nice.

Austin Swanger: That was the original plan at least.

Vincenzo Mattei: And what's your major?

Austin Swanger: Currently it's Earth and Environmental Science.

Vincenzo Mattei: What do you plan on doing with that?

Austin Swanger: I'm not exactly sure, to be honest.

Vincenzo Mattei: That's cool. That's awesome.

Austin Swanger: I've got a couple friends in the field, everything from park rangers to the guys that take soil samples for road construction. I didn't want to be cooped up inside for a job.

Vincenzo Mattei: Yeah. Of course.

Austin Swanger: So it is something where you'll be outside.

Vincenzo Mattei: You'd be outside doing some resource. What year did you start at UNCC?

Austin Swanger: I was here ... started in 2008.

Vincenzo Mattei: 2008. Okay.

Austin Swanger: The first time.

Vincenzo Mattei: Okay.

Austin Swanger: I obviously had a break in between. I've been back here a year-and-a-half now.

Vincenzo Mattei: How old were you when you started?

Austin Swanger: 18.

Vincenzo Mattei: Then when you came back?

Austin Swanger: When I came back I was 27.

Vincenzo Mattei: Do you think that's just because you're mature? When you're 17 or 18, you're not that mature?

Austin Swanger: Partially. Yeah. I can say that I'm a lot more mature now, plus having to pay out of your pocket yourself is a little more reason to be a little more focused, I will admit.

Vincenzo Mattei: Of course. Yeah. No. I know if I went in when I was 17, 18, there's no way I would do as good as I am now at 22. So, I understand that.

Austin Swanger: Right.

Vincenzo Mattei: Is that enough questions or do we switch it up? I'll just tell you about me. My name is Vincenzo from New Jersey. After high school when I was 17 I enlisted in the Army, did four years. I just got out in March 16, 2018. I did a summer course in Writing 101. I was like, okay, "Let me try college again" that's why I got out. After my last deployment, I was like, "I just want to go to school. I want to get a degree and then go work for an agency-"

Austin Swanger: So, you were in school before you enlisted or?

Vincenzo Mattei: ... No. High school.

Austin Swanger: Oh, so you weren't in college?

Vincenzo Mattei: I didn't even try. I didn't take the SATs, nothing.

Austin Swanger: I mean, I did all that last minute myself. I was originally going to enlist. Then my family said you need to go to school.

Vincenzo Mattei: Yeah. You said your dad was in the Army?

Austin Swanger: Yeah.

Vincenzo Mattei: You went to Texas at Fort Hood?

Austin Swanger: I was in Fort Sam Houston.

Vincenzo Mattei: Okay, Houston.

Austin Swanger: And Randolph Air Force Base.

Vincenzo Mattei: Okay. What was he, like a mechanic for aircraft?

Austin Swanger: He was in intelligence in his last field-

Vincenzo Mattei: ... Intelligence? Okay.

Austin Swanger: Originally in armor.

Vincenzo Mattei: My brother is intelligence, military intelligence.

Austin Swanger: Okay. Yeah.

Vincenzo Mattei: Smart people.

Austin Swanger: I was trying to go that route, the military thing. It just didn't work out.

Vincenzo Mattei: Why didn't you try DOD, did you look into that?

Austin Swanger: I'm actually still looking into going to ...

Vincenzo Mattei: That's what I'm looking in for, like forensic accounting, anything like that. I'm getting off topic. Let's talk about college. How do you feel about graduating? After all that time, now you're about to graduate.

Austin Swanger: It's been so long since I was in school. Now that it's almost over, it's like, I guess, a sense of relief. I'd already invested a lot of money into it, the first time. I wanted to finish it while I could while I don't have no real responsibilities. I don't have a wife and kids or a mortgage. It's a lot easier to be in school full-time, only working part-time or whatnot versus you have a career. It feels good to be done I guess, and actually have a degree after all those years. It's honestly been like a decade since I was here.

Vincenzo Mattei: Pretty much. I look at school as like it's just four years of your life you've just got to do. However long it is. Everybody has a different background and different type of learning technique. I'm still learning. I had to learn how to study for school.

Austin Swanger: What are you trying to go for?

Vincenzo Mattei: Right now I'm trying to work for an agency. With my military background, it doesn't really matter what degree I have. What I'm trying to do is, I'm very big into history like why we're here, American history, military history. I'm real big into that. I think transitioning from soldier to civilian, now civilian to student, that's going to make my school period easy because I'm going to be interested in it.

Austin Swanger: Right.

Vincenzo Mattei: I'm not going to be like ... I can do a business degree. I can do anything. If I put my mind to it, I can accomplish anything. For me to actually enjoy it and actually take everything in, I have to go to the history route. I'm going to minor in military science. I'm going to probably do the ROTC program here and just become an officer. I was already enlisted for four years.

Austin Swanger: Yeah. I know there's a lot of people that were enlisted that got into ROTC program after [00:05:17] ...

Vincenzo Mattei: My brother was in the infantry and he was enlisted infantry and then he went MI and became an officer so, I'm probably just to do that. I'll stay infantry, be in the National Guard.

Austin Swanger: Right.

Vincenzo Mattei: I always plan ahead. I always do three short-term and then three long-term goals. Then I just plan an attack to accomplish them and then go onto the next. That's how I was taught.

Austin Swanger: I can't say I'm a lot more structured and, I guess you could say, focused. I keep a planner. I didn't keep a planner when I was here the first time.

Vincenzo Mattei: No. Absolutely not.

Austin Swanger: I make sure I'm always on time and whatnot. You're probably already aware of that being in the military.

Vincenzo Mattei: Oh, yeah. It gets weird when you sit in your classroom and your professor for 30 minutes. They'll look at you like, "Why are you so early? Where are your friends?" You're like, "I just want to be early."

Austin Swanger: You already have goals where you want to work after the fact.

Vincenzo Mattei: Yeah, but right now the thing is I've just got to do UNCC. I've got to be a student. I'll learn, that's down the road. That's what pushes me because I got taught never to quit when I was in the military no matter what.

Austin Swanger: Right.

Vincenzo Mattei: I was scared because when I was in high school I wasn't the greatest student. Not at all. Now that I'm older, I'm very more mature. I know how to not freak out. My hormones aren't going everywhere like I did when I was 17 and 18. So, it's really good.

Austin Swanger: Well, I also could say that you're focusing on something you like versus ... I know a lot of people-

Vincenzo Mattei: Exactly. A lot of people don't know anything.

Austin Swanger: ... My major was what my family wanted me to do the first time and I didn't want to do it. So, that was part of other circumstances that affected it, family issue and whatnot. But, the fact that I didn't really

enjoy the major definitely impacted staying in, versus now I really enjoy what I'm doing now. It's fun. So, it's more likely to actually complete a degree in something that you're interested in.

Vincenzo Mattei: So, out of all the years that you attended at UNCC, what was the hardest obstacle you got to surpass, you had to get past? What was the biggest factor of you going to the lowest part of the hill? You know what I mean?

Austin Swanger: Well, honestly, I guess the course load. When I was in school I would take seven courses and it'd be all hard, yo know [00:07:42] and stuff like that. And I didn't account for what was involved with taking those courses. It got to the point where I was just, you're just trying to pass, versus you're not actually taking in the information. Whereas now it's a whole different outlook. You're paying for the courses, you might as well learn to do something from them. So, it's, I guess, getting too much on the plate at one time. Taking 18 hours and stuff it just gets a little over bearing.

Vincenzo Mattei: Okay. What was your biggest regret?

Austin Swanger: Well I always say there's never really regrets, but I guess if I had to think about it, it's I didn't choose a major that I enjoyed. I just listened to what other people thought I should do, which I think I hear that a lot with people that that didn't finish school. Is that, they were doing something that they didn't truly enjoy. So, it was just a burden. You're not going to want to finish something if you don't enjoy it.

Vincenzo Mattei: Exactly.

Austin Swanger: If you don't find some kind of interest or pleasure or whatever, you just fizzle out, you get tired of it, you get burnout. Plus, I was in school, I took summer courses. I basically had no-

Vincenzo Mattei: You overloaded yourself way too much.

Austin Swanger: ... I guess basically, lack of better words, I got burnt out. It wasn't something I wanted to do.

Vincenzo Mattei: Lost motivation.

Austin Swanger: Basically, lost motivation. So, got out and moved to California, basically. I guess my main thing was for a while tell everybody now is to do what you want to do, not what somebody else thinks you should or what ... It's not always about the money. I guess it's ... A lot of people's determining factors of what major they have is, I can make X amount of money and it really doesn't matter. I mean, I'm not a really greedy person, so it's a little different for me I guess. I mean ... And keeping a good plan as far as how you're going to complete your degree. I'm sure you talk like you kind of got like some goals that you've set.

Vincenzo Mattei: Yeah, I've set short ones. What I want to do since getting out. It definitely is, I had to adjust. And, I didn't go home. So, it's basically like releasing a tiger out of the cage in Charlotte. And I say that because I had somebody that was always on top of me making sure all my duties were completed. Making sure I was being set for success. There was a leadership, there was core values. When I got out it was just, you're by yourself.

Austin Swanger: You can do whatever you want.

Vincenzo Mattei: Anything you want. And I was like, "What?" And then I got an apartment in uptown. I started bartending. So, over the summer I had a fun time. I definitely went to a couple concerts, met great people. I love it here. And I think that's what makes my transition 10 times easier, is the people. When you have good friends and family by you. It was ...

Austin Swanger: So, why did you choose this area? You said you're from New Jersey?

Vincenzo Mattei: Yeah, I'm from New Jersey. I got family all close around here. That was one of the reasons. And when I was in the army, I would always come down here. We would have four days, we'd go hang out our friend. I knew people down here. And every time I came down, it was just like, "Dude, you might as well just get out and come here." I like, "I like you UNCC, I've been on their campus, been to a couple of your football games years ago." I was like, "Let's do it."

Austin Swanger: Excellent. I got a couple friends from New Jersey, South Jersey.

Vincenzo Mattei: Yeah, it's fun.

Austin Swanger: They did the same thing. They just liked it better down here.

Vincenzo Mattei: It's a beautiful area, it's a beautiful campus and it's gonna be fun next three years, four years, however long it takes me.

Austin Swanger: I know how that is. But it seems like you got a good handle on what you're gonna do with, have actual goals. I kind of structured everything different this time round, as far as I want to get this done, I won't be done by this time, I want to get this course.

Vincenzo Mattei: You almost got to take it day by day.

Austin Swanger: And then rearrange your life. I have to commute two hours to get here.

Vincenzo Mattei: Oh, I take the light rail. That thing is ...

Austin Swanger: We didn't have that the first time either, and that helps a lot too. But, that's another thing, is just your distance from someplace also affects. When I was here the first time, I lived on campus. I could get right off campus. So, you're more likely to not be as serious because you just here all the time. Whereas now, I've to drive two hours to get here, two hours get back home.

Vincenzo Mattei: And you're just trying to get done and get over it.

Austin Swanger: So, when you're here you're just focused. It's almost like a job per se. You're here certain times. You got to do your job, which is learn and pass the course, and finish. I mean, this is a different outlook, I guess.

Vincenzo Mattei: Hundred percent.

- Austin Swanger: I guess, I'd say the biggest thing is having some kind of structure. It's definitely helped me. I'm not good at remembering exact dates and stuff like that. I have to write everything down.
- Vincenzo Mattei: Campus calendar man, [00:12:37].
- Austin Swanger: Yeah. That's another thing, they have a lot more stuff now. They didn't have back when I was in school the first time, which I think helps a lot.
- Vincenzo Mattei: Yeah. What made you come back so many times?
- Austin Swanger: Well, as far as like ... I mean, I left for a good ... four years.
- Vincenzo Mattei: Yeah. What made you come back?
- Austin Swanger: Come back to school and finish?
- Vincenzo Mattei: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Austin Swanger: Well, I had lots of friends that were in related fields. And I just found it very interesting. And you can't get into those jobs unless you have the degree or the knowledge. And, it wasn't necessarily like the money or anything like that. It was just, I found this interesting. It was better than working what I would consider light dead end jobs or whatever. I wanted to have something that I could actually give to an employer like, "I have this." It proves that you've done something-
- Vincenzo Mattei: Well, you're investing in yourself at the end of the day.
- Austin Swanger: ... Yes, that's the factor. Plus, like I said before, where I was in a point now where I could go back to school, I wouldn't probably have that same opportunity 10 years from now when I get into some kind of groove.
- Vincenzo Mattei: Exactly.
- Austin Swanger: You got commitments, you might have a family. Now I could afford to be a full time student. So, the main goal is just to complete what I've started because I already had invested in it. So, finish and have something to show for it.
- Vincenzo Mattei: What are your thoughts as you get to graduating? Now you're closer. You're only a semester away. What do you think of it now? Because, last couple of years you've been getting in the groove of school, and now you're about to get it and go back into the real world.
- Austin Swanger: Right. Like I say that I was afraid going back because I hadn't been in school so long. But once I got back into school, I kind of figured out it's really isn't as hard as I was thinking it was going to be. And now that it's almost over, I'm just thinking of what I want to do afterwards. I know some of my class facial I'm going to graduate school and all that. I don't know if I want to do that. But I'm thinking more in terms of where do I want to be? Do I want to stay here? What kind of job do I want to have? Something looking at potential employment. Basically, which is exciting at times. But I guess that's the focus now, is I'm

almost done. I want to ... It's like the home run and be done with it and move on and have bettered myself for ... Not trying to sound cheesy, but, you know.

Vincenzo Mattei: No, seriously, you're investing in yourself, that's what school is.

Austin Swanger: You say you had your goals but like, I guess what really motivates you to go to-

Vincenzo Mattei: To get out and stuff?

Austin Swanger: ... I guess. I lot of people that just stayed in the military, never did any of user benefits or anything.

Vincenzo Mattei: So, when I was in, I loved it. Don't get me wrong. I was in an awesome unit, great brotherhood, it was fun. I was active, I was in great shape. My best friends are in the army. But, I went on a deployment in Afghanistan, I did my time. I just remember looking at my platoon sergeant, and my first sergeant. Like, those guys are heroes. They've been in Afghanistan since the '90s or in 2001 when we started going in, and they've been in the army since the '90s.

But, it's sad, they never see their kids, nothing. My first sergeant, he came up to me when we were downrange news. And he's like, "It's my kids 12th birthday." And he's like, "I only been to three of her birthdays." It was ridiculous. You don't see your family, I don't see myself, because I thought I was going to do 20 right off the bat. I joined at 17, 37 get out with a nice pension. But I just didn't like the lifestyle down the future, because I'm always thinking future. I did not think about school because I didn't want to go to school, because last time I failed miserably. But I didn't try in high school. And now that I've had that military background, that discipline installed in me, I was like, "Let's go for it."

And then when I was still in the army, and I came back from deployment, I went to Hopkinsville Community College, and I took two to three classes at night, every night. And my leadership was tracking that I was doing that and they're proud of me. It gave me that reassurance, you could accomplish anything. Like it's just schoolwork. It's just, last time you did this, you were just scared because you didn't try, and that's all you remember.

Austin Swanger: All right.

Vincenzo Mattei: So, that's like a big thing. And my brother and my family, definitely motivate me. They keep me going.

Austin Swanger: So, you've got some support.

Vincenzo Mattei: Of course. And then, whenever it gets harder ... Well, it's not hard, it's just time consuming, that's what school is. And a lot of kids or people, they don't know how to do that. So, they struggle and then once they finally get to do that their senior year and they're like all about to go and adapt and adjust, there's something else in life.

Austin Swanger: Right.

Vincenzo Mattei: But, it's all about how you do in school and study a lot of stuff.

- Austin Swanger: So, what's your purpose that you felt that you needed to have a higher education?
- Vincenzo Mattei: Yeah. Well, I got out and I had a lot of job offers, making good money, almost six figures just 10 G's shy but you would never move up. Those are great jobs, don't get me wrong. But, you won't move up because you don't have a college degree.
- Austin Swanger: Right.
- Vincenzo Mattei: But they'll promote Jimmy because he's got a four year degree at a community college or a great university. It doesn't matter for job companies to move up and go farther and faster you need the education background but you also need your working background. And I already have the working background of the army. It looks good. So, when I get my degree and then I could just XL and then maybe go to grad school, maybe. The GI Bill pays for my school so I don't pay for anything, which is good.
- Austin Swanger: So, you might as well take advantage of it, right?
- Vincenzo Mattei: Exactly. If it's there, use it. But, definitely it was a great choice. And I always talk to my buddies that are still in. And they're like, "Dude, you're doing a big ... Keep it up." And when I actually got out ... Before you get out of the military, a lot of leadership used to be like, "No, stay and re-enlist because you're a good soldier." But a lot of officers, a lot of my senior leadership, they're like, "Dude, congrats, you're bettering yourself, good. You're the man, do that." It was just a good feeling to have for sure.
- Austin Swanger: So, I guess just having a good support is a good motivational factor.
- Vincenzo Mattei: Of course.
- Austin Swanger: I always had no play appeal, that either stayed in or when they got out and went to school. I can't say that the people that stayed in, they now wish that they had tried something else. Because you can always go back.
- Vincenzo Mattei: Oh yeah, I'll do the National Guard. So, it's like one weekend a month, two weeks in the summer, which is ... It gives me my little army weekend of the month which is good and depressing at same time. But, yeah, it's a good transition. As a young student, I have a lot of years ahead of me at UNCC, but I'm excited to see where it goes, because every day is a new challenge, new lesson learned, new life experience. You just push forward with it man.
- Austin Swanger: Sounds like you know what you're doing. Sounds like you got a better handle than I did the first.
- Vincenzo Mattei: Yeah, it's like a different background man. I was in the army when I was 17. It made me do some crazy stuff.
- Austin Swanger: That's right. I mean-

Vincenzo Mattei: Priorities, I was a leader at a young age too. So, a lot of self will, a lot of sacrifices to put things in front of a man before you, you know what I mean? You got to take that leadership role. So, I'm insured pretty quick, but I think maturity is a big factor in college.

If you could set your goals down and accomplish them from one aspect, you wouldn't be able to, you know, get sidetracked and not accomplish it.

Austin Swanger: Right.

Vincenzo Mattei: I mean, that's what a lot of people do. They go to parties and go to hang and whatever, and they get sidetracked and they fail miserably.

Austin Swanger: Right. I've seen a lot of that over the years.

Vincenzo Mattei: They got to find themselves.

Austin Swanger: If you're not focused then you're not helping yourself in that regard as far as trying to complete something, whatever it is. So ...

Vincenzo Mattei: A lot of questions.

Austin Swanger: Yeah. That's what that been. I guess, is there anything that could keep you from achieving your goals? That's a good thing to least end it by.

Vincenzo Mattei: If I hit the lottery for like billion dollars probably, I'm going to say a solid no to school. I'll just buy a degree, Shack, he has a doctorate degree. There's no way shack went to Dr. school or medical school, there's no way. He's a slam dunk on people. Shack.

Austin Swanger: Is that the only factor that could-

Vincenzo Mattei: It is the only thing. This is my biggest motivator. My biggest purpose in life right now is just to get degree. That's why next four years, five years, six, however long.

Austin Swanger: I can't say it goes a lot faster or anything.

Vincenzo Mattei: I'm sure it does.

Austin Swanger: When I first came back to school I was like two years, that'll be the end of me. I can't spend two years, and it's already been a year and a half. And I'm like, "Wow! Now, it's almost over." I didn't think it would go by as quick but I think you actually have a structure because ... Before it was just, you just going to class, try to do other things on top of class and having fun and whatnot. But it's like now it's like ... Plus having to commute back and forth probably also adds to the-

Vincenzo Mattei: Yeah, that's two hours.

- Austin Swanger: Yeah. It definitely goes back quicker than you think. The bio says that but it's ... When I was in school the first time, it's like school just lasted for ever. It was like it was nothing. I was always just wanting to be ... Well, summer break, you know.
- Vincenzo Mattei: Go out.
- Austin Swanger: But now it's like, "Oh, man, breaks about to come up. Winter break is about to come up.
- Vincenzo Mattei: Yeah, that's crazy.
- Austin Swanger: I just feel like I just started.
- Vincenzo Mattei: Yeah, seriously. I feel like I started ... I feel like I was in the army like two days ago and it's like been for years. It's crazy. I know it's gonna go by quick but it's what you make your time here and what you could do. I miss the most things like leadership, like helping people out. So, all my friends when they help me out, I'll feel like give back. So, we'll see what UNC does. I wanna definitely hit the ROTC program and change that up. But definitely a lot of things to do for the next four years.
- Austin Swanger: Right. I can't say that those ... In some of course there's a lot of younger, 18, 19 year olds, and I found myself like, "You should probably do this, do that. I've tried help them out or whatever. It's like I don't want do the same thing.
- Vincenzo Mattei: Same thing you did, cause you learn from your mistakes. These kids, it's gonna either someone teaches them, they learn from it, or it happens to them.
- Austin Swanger: Well, if they find out that you're older than them, and they're like, they want to know why you're here, how you're doing it.
- Vincenzo Mattei: I had tattoos everywhere and everyone looks to me like a criminal. My teacher did. She got really ... I was a machine gunner in the army. I had this machine gun tattoo on my leg, and I was wearing shorts and she saw it. She didn't call me by my name, she just called me tattoo guy for a while. It was funny. Definitely a lot of people come up to ...
- Austin Swanger: Ill just say once people forgot that you're an older student, you'll just see that ... In my case people ... They think you know what you're doing so they want your help with assignments or like, how should I do this? Or, am I taking the right course? I've had a lot of people come up to me after they find out that ... They're first like, "Wow, you're actually 10 years older than me. I thought you're same age as me." I guess it's because you've been here before. So, they kind of want to figure out what they should be doing per se.
- Vincenzo Mattei: So ... May we we wrap it up this. I've covered it all.
- Austin Swanger: I kind of got a good maybe big roundabout way but I think kind of got most of the ... But hopefully things you're looking for.