



GRAA

Welcome to the December issue of digital *Golf Range Magazine*!

Inside this issue, you will find the following features:

- Range Renovation: Fiddler's Elbow Completely Reinvented its Range En Route to Redefining the Business Plan
- Range Operations: Training Staff in Range Service and Upkeep is Key to Satisfaction
- Teaching Tech: Mike Fay on Using Tech to Get a Message Across and Building a Brand
- Video File: David Nesbitt on what it Takes to Create a Series of Instruction Videos for Business Promotion

Keep it fun and thanks for supporting the GRAA.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink.

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Golf Ranges: Where the Fun Starts

Golf Range MAGAZINE

PRACTICE • TEACHING • FITTING • MARKETING



Volume 21, No. 12
December 2013

Redefining a Club From the Range up

**A New Business Plan,
Started with a New Range**



Also in this issue:

- How Tour Players Rate Ranges
- Mike Fay in the Twittersphere
- Range Service Tips for Outside Staff



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Page 36 Range Experts



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Golf Range MAGAZINE



Volume 21, Number 12

December 2013

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Range resolutions can make for a happy new year

With the holiday season in full swing, now is the time of year when many of us make resolutions for bettering ourselves in the coming new year. This issue of *Golf Range Magazine* features a story on a golf club that resolved to make itself better through a range reinvention, and how that's set up the facility for many happy new years to come.

Starting on page 28, you can find out how Fiddler's Elbow Country Club, in Bedminster, N.J., looked to a major range renovation to reposition itself in a tough market for private clubs. The 54-hole facility has been a popular and successful club for decades, with many members coming from New York's corporate community. As with many clubs, the financial meltdown of 2008 was a wake-up call that business as usual wasn't a good plan for future success.

As you'll read in the story, the club looked to a major range improvement as part of a larger long-term facility renovation that could eventually cost up to \$18 million by the time it is finished in 2015. The range was a centerpiece of the project because it was a sore point at Fiddler's Elbow—only 12 golfers could warm up at a time on a range that was only 250 yards long, and the landing area drained so poorly that many balls had to be replaced after plugging upon impact.

Thanks to a forward-looking membership and smart design work by architect Stephen Kay, that weakness has been turned into a strength. The new practice facility at Fiddler's Elbow opened this summer, featuring a golf academy, new practice green, a new short game area and room for dozens of golfers to hit balls at the same time. Current members love the new practice area, which will pay off in terms of member retention. And the club is touting the range reinvention in materials meant to recruit new members, with a strong early response.

It's one thing to make a resolution, and it's another to follow through. I invite you to read the entire story to learn how Fiddler's Elbow made good on its resolution, and I hope this story and others in this month's *Golf Range Magazine* help you plot a course for a successful 2014 at your facility.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rick Summers".

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A Wide Range of News

Keeping you up to speed on trends in the golf practice-and-learning sector

The **Sea Pines Resort**, home of the RBC Heritage event on the PGA Tour, is building a new 23,000-square-foot clubhouse and state-of-the-art golf learning center at its Heron Point and Ocean courses, with grand opening of these new facilities scheduled for early in 2014. In tandem with this major expansion and modernization, Sea Pines has brought in **Tim Cooke** to serve as its new Director of Golf Instruction. Cooke's previous post was director of instruction at Hilton Head's Long Cove Club. It's worth noting that top-level junior-camp administration—a growing sector of the golf instruction industry—is an area of strong expertise for Cooke, who is co-founder of GOLFPREP—an elite junior training academy.... In a further indication of the growing role of elite junior camps, **The Greg Norman Champions Golf Academy** at Barefoot



Resort is looking to hire a live-in Supervisor of Boarding Students. The job calls for a diversity of problem-solving and support skills as talented youth golfers from around the world study, train and form friendships in some cases thousands of miles from home.... In other personnel and career-change news, **Jim Ragan**, former lead instructor for the Golf Digest Schools, was named head coach of the men's golf team at the University of California at San Diego. Ragan boasts a long and lustrous record as an NCAA Division I golf coach, which made the appointment a natural one. But it's also interesting that his resume is topped off by four years as owner-operator of a training facility in Tyler, Tex., where Ragan has applied his extensive knowledge of physical training in the Titleist/TPI and Nike NG 360/Gray Institute disciplines....

Andrew Park was named Director of Golf Instruction for The Leadbetter Golf Academy. Park has 15 years of experience teaching the Leadbetter Method, and full Senior Certified Instructor status for most of that time. Among his unique qualifications are two high-level posts in China, as senior advisor for the Beijing



The **Little Linksters Association** for Junior Golf Development is looking for the best pee-wee golf swings from kids 3-8 years old. The contest is open to children from around the world. The instructor with the most students entering the contest will win a free website design and hosting for one year and a free Swingbyte. If you have youngsters who might want to participate you can send them to www.littlelinksters.com for full instructions. Entries must be in by January 15, 2014

Shichahai School of Sports and head coach of the Beijing Province team.... Carnegie Mellon University recently hired former LPGA Tour standout **Missie Bertotti** as the school's first-ever women's varsity golf coach. Bertotti left the LPGA Tour in 2000 to raise her newborn son and later moved enthusiastically into teaching. The women's golf program she heads up will begin play during the 2013-14 season with club team status and then compete at the intercollegiate level the following year.... From all indications the **Jack Nicklaus Learning League**, in its partnership with



SNAC Golf, is pushing hard to be digitally relevant and engaging for parents and kids who participate in this important youth-development project. A new deal just signed with Red Mat Media "will provide a customized mobile app that will allow sports league members and enthusiasts to access everything via one portal, on-the-go, 24/7," according to the partners. The

idea is to make it simple for coaches and players to communicate with teammates and parents, participate in league activities, organize game and practice schedules."

The inaugural **ParaLong Drive Golf Championship** was held in late October in Mesquite, Nev., allowing amputee golfers to pound away under the same rules and on the same grid as the RE/MAX World Long Drive Championship. There were 14 contestants in the field, including some arm amputees who used a prosthetic to help them grip the club and others who used just one arm. Jared Brentz, a multiple leg amputee from Nashville, Tenn., was crowned the ParaLong Drive Champion with a drive measuring 358 yards.... At Mountain Air Country Club in Burnsville, N.C., **Breanne Hall** is the new PGA Director of Instruction. Hall is the first ever to win the Michigan Women's Open as an amateur.... An asking price of \$6.5 million has been placed on the 42-acre Rangeway Golf driving range and miniature golf facility in Taunton, Mass., which ceased operations in 2013. Recognizable to golfers (as well as to kids in minivans) by a 12-foot purple dinosaur at its front gate, the range and putt-putt operation opened in 1996. Lack of revenues from the range side was blamed for the failure of the business. Its sellers have indicated that non-golf use of the property, which is located in a commercial zone, is most likely. ■



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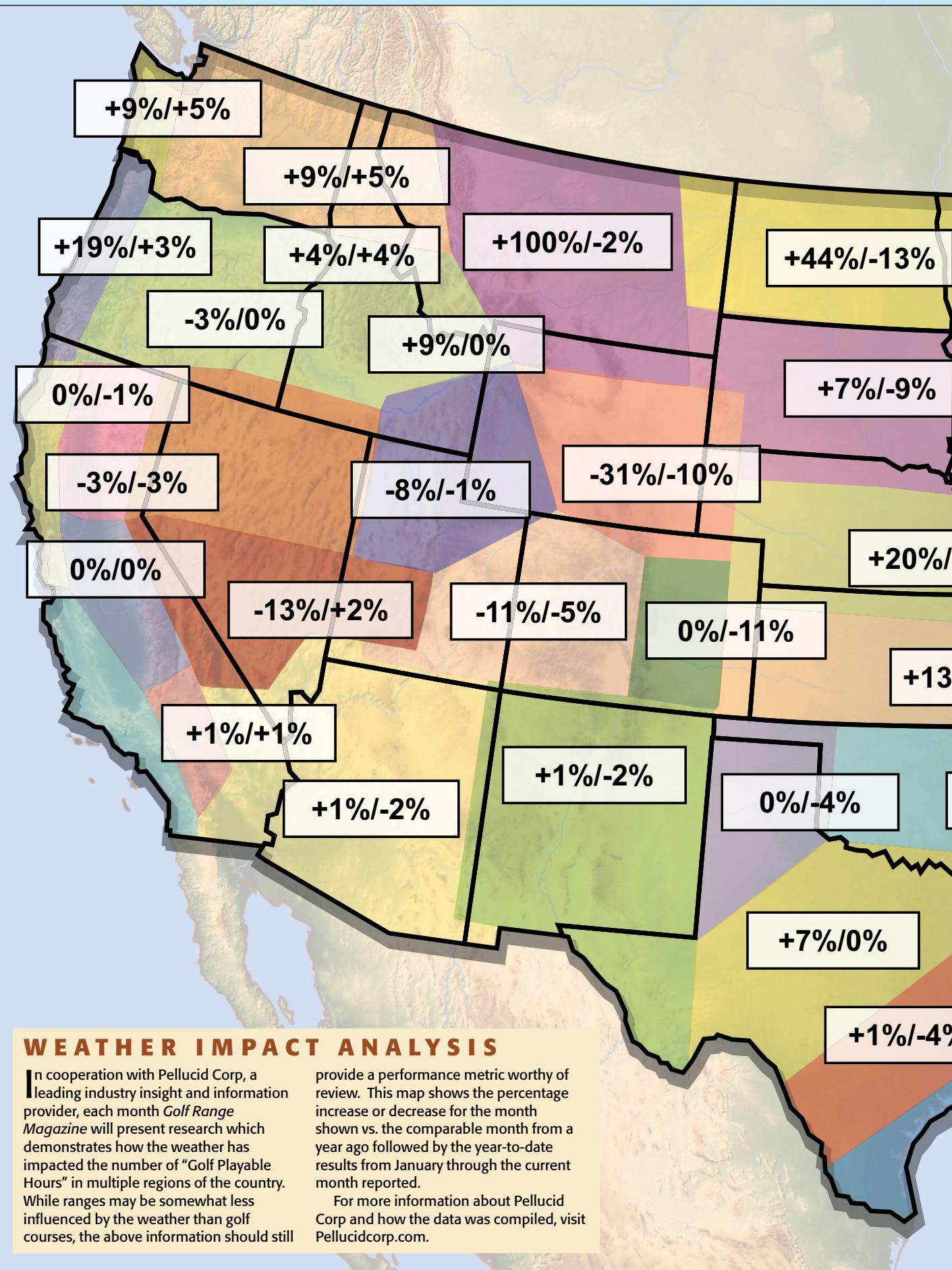
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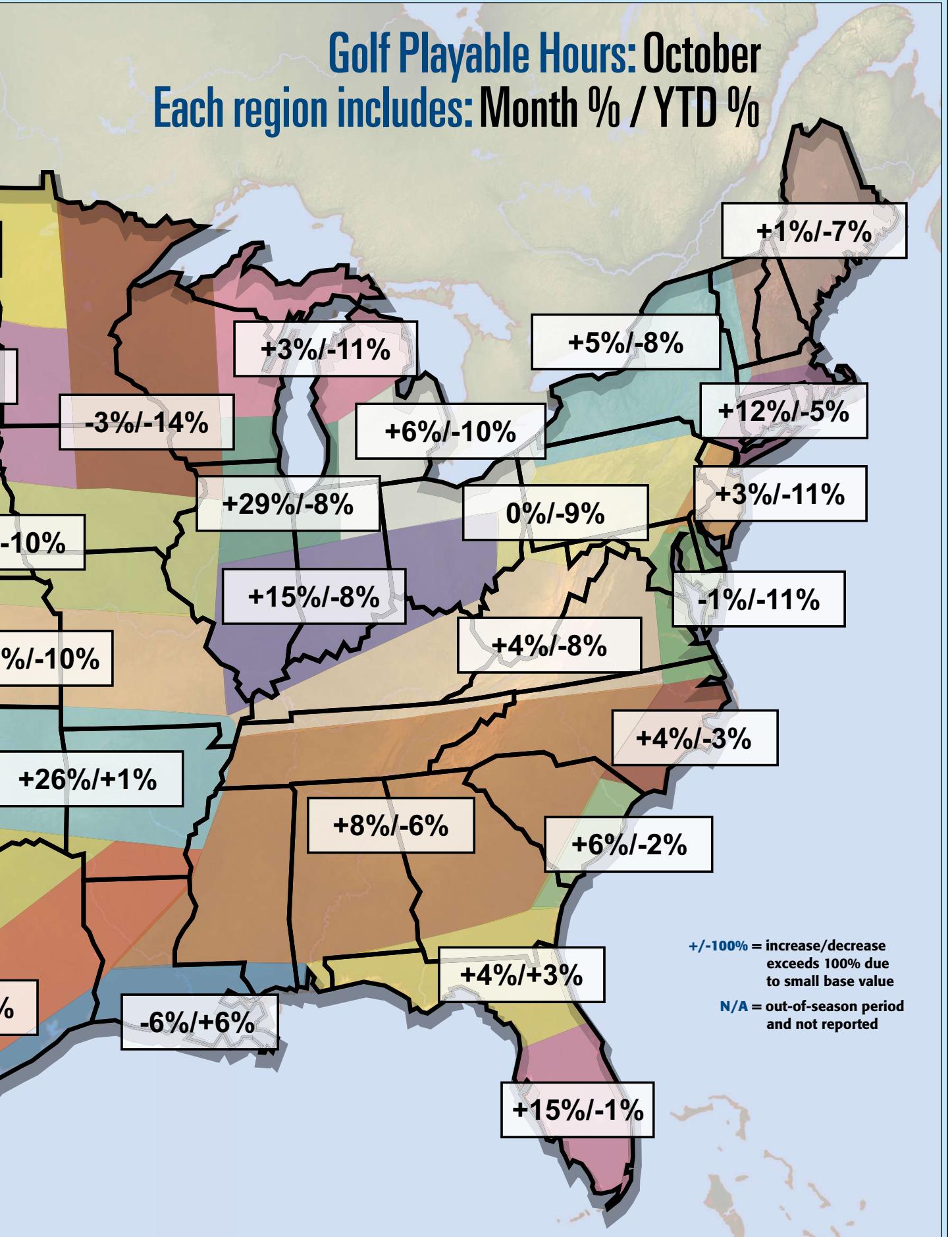


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Steady Growth for Custom Fitting as a Game-Improvement Tool

Fixing golf swings now includes substituting the right club specs for the wrong ones. A new survey of teachers reveals steady progress for this technique and what it means for business. **BY DAVID GOULD**

When the first clubfitting carts appeared on practice ranges in the 1980s, top golf instructors shunned them. Field reps for some of the earliest fitting systems—companies like Slazenger and Henry-Griffitts—were initially surprised by this. Before long the reps recognized something they called the I-can-teach-them-to-hit-it-with-a-broomstick syndrome.

From one standpoint it made sense. Brand-name teachers didn't want any confusion over how a student who had arrived shooting 95 lowered his scores to the mid-80s. But magazine articles, word of mouth and the prominence of tour vans gradually spread the news about fitting. Eventually the role played by properly fit (or poorly fit) clubs came to be understood. Today's teaching professionals see that equipment does affect swing motion and they accept fitting's role in game-improvement. That's why data from a recent survey conducted by the Orlando-based Proponent Group shows fitting to be a routinized part of the diagnostic and training process, even as methodologies differ from place to place.

Along with the quantitative data in this report there were interesting write-in comments from the surveyed professionals, who are part of a 350-member organization designed to support their business operations through various activities and platforms. The comments suggest that a very early check of the golfer's gear is now common. "During the first lesson I'll always figure out if the student has been fit for clubs," one teacher wrote, "and then at some point I'll start addressing it. But if the clubs are badly mismatched for a player I'll discuss clubfitting almost immediately."

Other write-in comments shed additional light on how and when the golfer's sticks get looked at:

- "I have our staff clubfitter sit in on any lessons and provide his judgment. From there it goes very easily."
- "I am always evaluating equipment during a lesson. If I feel the equipment is not allowing the student to get the best results then I'll suggest we phase into a clubfitting session. There are even times during a lesson when I will stop and tape the sole of the student's iron and have them hit off a lie board, to validate the need for a fitting."
- "I will introduce new equipment during a golf lesson that I feel would benefit the student's swing. I will then have them demo the clubs in a more informal or realistic environment on the golf course to see actual ball flight and roll results off of grass."

A timeout from teaching to diagnose the effect of club specs is more common than ever before.





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Left: Dynamic fitting on the range got a major boost from launch monitors.
Below: The low-tech lie board is still an essential tool.

ranges five years ago and the brand is at 35 percent of them now. Nike went from 32 percent down slightly to 26 percent. Ping was at 53 percent in 2008 and improved to 60 percent in 2013. The Titleist fitting cart had been at 79 percent of this group's facilities five years ago, now it's at 74 percent. There is no brand name with any level of relevance in the most recent survey that wasn't also well-represented a half-decade ago.

Converting a fit to a sale is certainly part of the reason for professional clubfitting. In that regard, set sales data shows more strength across the board than five years ago. In the 2013 survey, 60 percent of respondents sold more than 20 sets a year. In 2008, only 45 percent could claim that degree of sales volume. It's likewise among the 40-sets-or-more sellers. In 2013, almost 24 percent of survey-takers said they reached that volume level. Back in '08, only 17.2 percent could make that claim.

It's interesting to note that the club manufacturers with a commitment to custom fitting retain their presence at the range very reliably, despite ups and downs in the gear marketplace overall. Proponent Group members featuring Callaway's fitting system in 2008 represented 58 percent of respondents—this year that percentage was 60. Mizuno was on 42.4 percent of their

Those latter two write-in comments are related to one survey question in particular, which reads: "Dynamic clubfitting met resistance years ago when golfers taking lessons would object to having new clubspec's introduced during the learning process. Is that still the case?"

Only 10 percent of teachers said that attitude seemed "just as common." The remaining 90 percent were more or less split down the middle between "somewhat reduced" and significantly reduced," as their take on golfer attitudes. The point is clear: Smart teachers have an array of interesting methods for covering clubfitting as both a game-improvement service and a profit-making line of business within their overall operation.

Looking at the historical trendline, this 2013 survey shows that charging for an initial clubfitting session is slightly more prevalent among group members now than it was in a similar study from 2008: The percentage moves up to 79 percent from 74.4 percent. The practice of refunding professional fees for conducting a fitting is a bit more common now than it was five years ago, when 66 percent said they never refunded it. In 2013, the "no, never" answer was given by 59 percent.

A question about personnel showed the most consistency between 2008 and 2013. "Who does most of the clubfitting at your facility?" was asked in both surveys, and "Director of Instruction/Teaching Pro" was checked off by 51 percent in '08, then by 48 percent this year. The selection, "Everyone on staff does some clubfit-

ting" was chosen by 34 percent in both surveys. The answers for "Head Professional" and "Assistant Professional" were similarly consistent.

Compensation showed one notable change. The straightforward matter of conducting a fitting and getting "paid entire fitting fee" is less common. In 2008, 41.4 percent said that was their arrangement. In 2013, only 29.2 percent said it was. Meanwhile, "Paid a percentage of fitting fee" rose over the five-year span, from 24.1 percent to 32.3 percent.

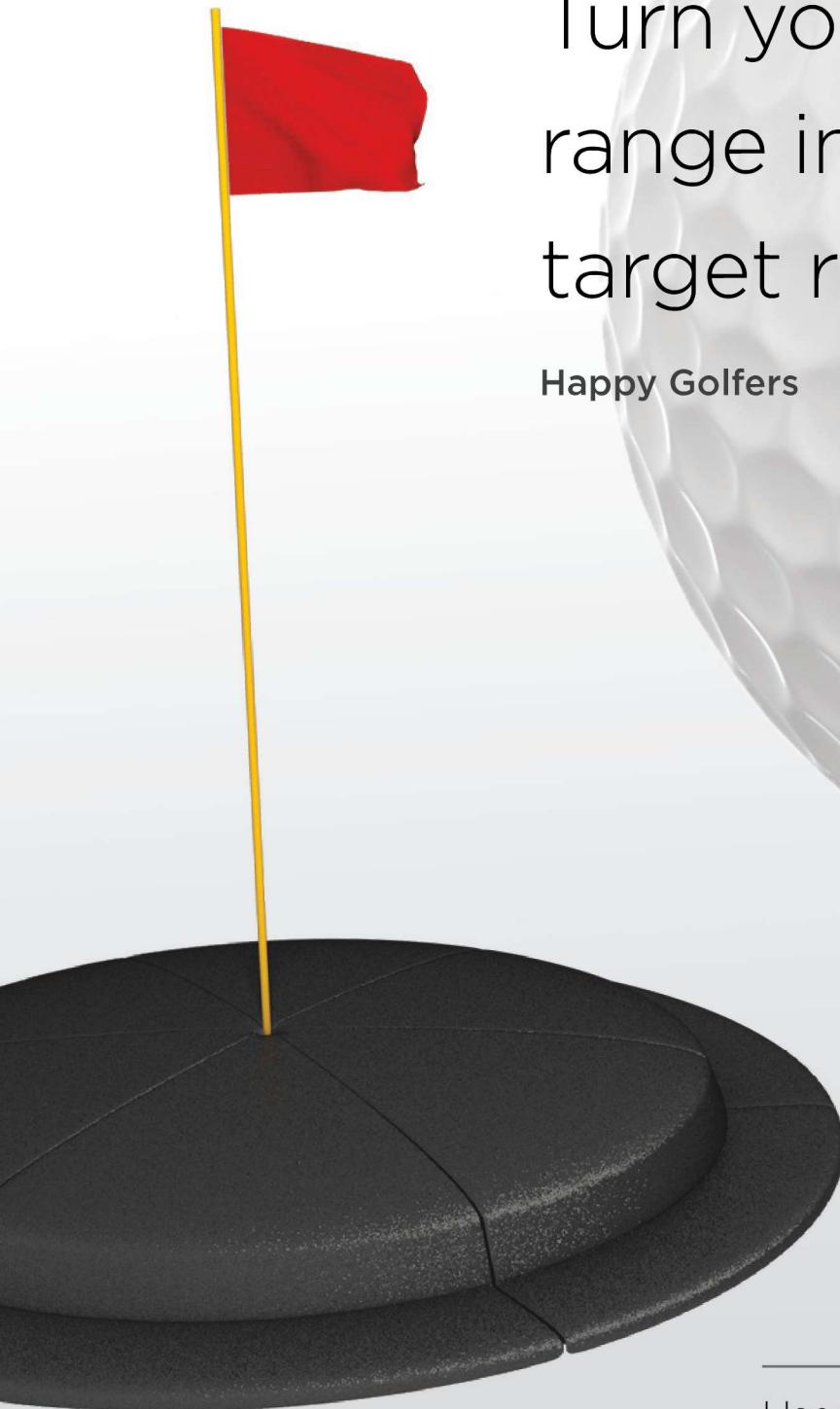
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At Last, a Video to Help You Create Videos

Creating a series of instruction videos for business promotion—that's a New Year's resolution for many teaching professionals. David Nesbitt goes on-camera to provide the basics.

One day not long ago a student appeared on David Nesbitt's lesson tee in San Jose, Calif., having decided to book a lesson with him after checking out Nesbitt's style on a short YouTube instruction video. We get to meet that golfer—and he's not the only student recruited by Nesbitt this way—on this month's featured video.

We also hear from the man himself, discussing the process of getting into video production. Nesbitt tailors his presentation especially to those fellow professionals who haven't yet taken the plunge. Procrastination is the issue for some golf instructors, for others it's a matter of not fully understanding the value and application of the instruction video as a marketing tool. As Nesbitt describes it, going into this kind of show business is still a move that can set you apart—although eventually it will be almost a requirement for the serious lesson-giver. Anyone who is holding back out of concern for the time factor or the need for costly equipment should click right ahead. You'll hear from Nesbitt about the three basic tools (which you may already possess) that are all you need to get started with production and take those first steps toward going viral. ■



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Roll Playing

Non-traditional drills can help your students make more putts

BY BRIAN DOBBIE, PGA

WITH DON JOZWIAK, SENIOR EDITOR



PGA Professional **Brian Dobbie**, the PGA teaching professional at Montclair Golf Club in West Orange, N.J., is the 2012 New Jersey PGA Section Teacher of the Year.



Now is the time of the winter golf season when players at their Sunbelt club are starting to see kinks in their games and panic is setting in. Instead of having that breakthrough year where they reach their golf goals — club champion, a single-digit handicap, emptying their buddies' wallets — reality has hit and their handicaps are rising. What went wrong, and how can you help them? You can start by helping them realize they might be overlooking the area that makes up 43 percent of their score and is also the key to achieving all their goals: Putting!

Why don't golfers practice putting? "It's boring... Anyone can putt... I need to fix my drives, not my putts." I've heard all the excuses through the years, and you probably have, too. But the fact remains, the quickest way to lower scores is to make more putts.

As an instructor, I've found that my students are more motivated to practice their putting if I give them fun drills that aren't too technical. In the past,

I would get out the video camera and all the training aids I could find. But I've since realized a trio of simple putting drills can help your students improve their impact, give them that nice fluid stroke they've always wanted and help them make more putts. Your students may think these drills are crazy, but they'll be thrilled when their mechanical thoughts fade and more putts start to drop.

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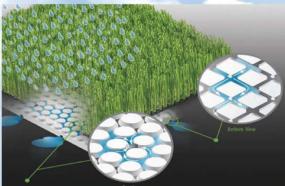
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PUTT WITH THE TOE

If you want to get attention on the putting green, this drill is for you. Have your student turn their putter 90 degrees to the left (for right-handers) and try rolling a few using the toe of the putter instead of the putter's face. Your student will need to be using a blade-style putter, not a mallet, so be ready with a blade putter in your bag if you're going to suggest this drill. The first thing your student will notice is what happens when they strike either the right or left side of the ball – the ball will jump to the right if you hit it on the inside left part, and jump to the left if you hit it on the outside right. The only way to make the ball go straight is to make contact in the center of the ball. After the student is rolling the ball straight using the toe of their putter, have them turn the blade back to the standard position. They'll have a steadier pendulum stroke and better rhythm thanks to making contact with the center of the putter face.



PUTT WITH YOUR DRIVER

Oversuse of the hands in the putting stroke is the main cause of offline puts, causing poor contact and a loss of distance control. One of my favorite drills to help both impact and direction is putting with a driver. The wide sole of a driver helps a golfer's hands stay very quiet during the stroke. The face angle stays straight and moving towards the target line, while the right wrist (for a right-hander) stays bent and the left wrist leads. Try this and watch how your students make impact. Tell them their goal is to make the ball go straight. After getting the direction dialed in, work on controlling the distance they roll the ball. Having touch and feel is a vital component to good putting, and this drill will help in that area as well. Once your student makes a few putts with their driver, have them switch back to their putter and try to make the same stroke with quiet hands.



PULL BACK

This is a very simple drill that will improve impact position and help train your students to let their hands control the clubface. Have the golfer set up to the ball and make a putting stroke, telling them to pull the club back along the target line the second they make contact with the ball. It may take your student a few tries to get the timing down, so be prepared to give them a few minutes. Once they are able to pull back after contact, they'll see the ball starting to roll straight off the clubface with their right wrist (again, for righties) staying bent and the left wrist flat. The goal is to keep the golfer from flipping his or her hands and "scooping" the ball at impact. As with the driver drill, make direction the first goal and distance control the second goal. Because the right wrist stays bent and back through impact, the ball is compressed more and the golfer will be less likely to leave putts short. ■

This story originally appeared in the May 2013 issue of PGA Magazine and is used with permission.



Happy Landings for a Practice Center Designed

Fiddler's Elbow, for decades the epitome of a New Jersey corporate club, completely reinvented its range en route to redefining the business plan

BY STEVE DONAHUE

When a person is too anxious and fidgety to even stay in their seat, you can break out a rustic expression and say they are “up and down like a fiddler’s elbow.” This autumn at a New Jersey golf facility that takes its name from that colorful phrase, impatience and anxiousness were all about. A major deficiency of the 54-hole private club had finally been remedied with the completion of a brand-new practice complex—but steady rain was preventing its scheduled grand opening.



to Spark a New Era



An investment of \$1 million along with clever repurposing of acreage produced a member-attracting range for Fiddler's Elbow.



When the picker can't pick but the members are desperate to start hitting balls, you must improvise. The staff at Fiddler's Elbow Country Club in Bedminster, N.J., opened up their new range and stood by as practice balls flew. By the time the turf-drained workers had gone out and hand-picked 30,000 balls. "This new range is really a big deal for us," says Fiddler's Elbow General Manager Thomas Hurley, underscoring the obvious.

The club's goal was to provide members with the best and most effective practice facility possible. Mission accomplished, is the verdict. "A lot of members are already saying it's the best range they have seen," says PGA Director of Golf Joe Galan. "That's high praise since many of them travel and play the world's top courses. The area's other clubs all had better ranges than we had, but not anymore."

Work began in November 2012 on the new \$1 million range, a central component of a massive club-

improvement project that is expected to cost between \$12 million and \$18 million by the time it's completed in 2015. This practice haven is a corner-

With dirt piles and earth-moving equipment in the background, the concept of using a practice complex to kick-start major renovation is clear to see.

"We've had people join the club as a result of playing in an outing and experiencing the new range."

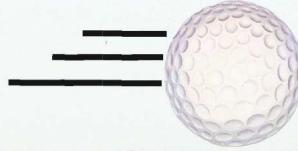
—Joe Galan

stone of the club's switch from a mid-20th century model to something more suited to modern times. From its 1965 opening until just a couple of years ago, Fiddler's Elbow was as cor-

porate as a club could be. Populated by perk-blessed executives, this opulent outpost was 100 percent underwritten by the business expense account. In the wake of the 2008 financial crack-up and resulting recession, Fiddler's Elbow has reinvented itself for today's reality-based golf marketplace, primarily by offering family and individual memberships. "It was pretty obvious it had to be done," says general manager Thomas Hurley. "The club knew they had to make changes in order to survive."

As often happens with practice facilities at established clubs, infrastructure and rerouting of golf holes takes up a decent portion of the project's renovation outlay. In this case, nearly \$700,000 was spent to build three groundwater retention basins and alter several holes of the Meadow

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Course so as to accommodate the range. Professional design talent was required to produce the product that club officers desired, which led to the hiring of veteran course architect Stephen Kay. "What golfers want is to be able to legitimately practice every part of their game," says Kay in the aftermath, "and the new range at Fiddler's lets you do that."

He was able to convince Fiddler's brass that a fully functional practice facility could be laid out on a relatively small site by showing them blueprints of the compact range he had designed at Philadelphia's Llanerch Country Club, home of the 1958 PGA Championship. Kay took a group, including Hurley and Galan, to Llanerch for a closer look. "Llanerch's range really opened our eyes to what we could do here," Galan says.

Without going into the labyrinthine details, suffice it to say that Fiddler's new range is built on land the club sold in the mid-1980s to a corporation, which eventually leased back some of the tract to Fiddler's, which then purchased back about nine more acres. Then the county granted the club a 99-year land conservation easement under which the club must leave the oft-transacted property as green space and not develop it. Got it?

Once the range's site was secured, Kay and the various architects for Fiddler's other improvement projects had to coordinate their individual plans and timing. The reworking of the Meadow Course was really a chance to build a great range while perhaps even improving that 18-hole layout. Kay eliminated the flat, 210-yard fifth hole to make room for his new short-game practice area. Because that hole's green was considered one of the Meadows' best, the putting surface was sod-cut and moved to the site of the new practice green.

"That green really enhanced the new short-game area and was a lot less expensive than buying sod," Galan says. He and superintendent Matt Willigan designated the sod-scraping of No. 5 green a momentum-starter for

The new learning center complements a classy and functional clubhouse plus 54 holes of fine golf.



Above: Long supported by corporate expense accounts, the club is using golf instruction and practice to help it convert to individual and family memberships. Below:Something you don't often see: A practice hazard that is ideal for working on fairway bunker shots.

the whole project, and off they went. Kay also transformed the par-5 sixth hole into what is now the 325-yard par 4 fifth. This change was called for because sliced shots on the old range were imperiling players as they played second shots on that hole. To replace his eliminated par 3, Kay built a new 141-yard gem, now the sixth hole, on the site of a former practice green.

"Now we have a self-contained range the members are really proud of," Galan says. "It was only 255 yards from the tee to the end of the old range, so on a downwind day the lack of length was an issue. Also, the drainage was poor. Lots of range balls plugged deep in the wet ground and we had to keep buying more stock."

Kay, who has designed new courses and ranges and also undertaken a long list of course renovations, loves the result. "The old range at Fiddler's was horrible," he says bluntly. "The drainage was so poor you could barely mow it. Meanwhile there was just so little capacity. Here you had the largest private club in New Jersey, trying to attract a new wave of members,

and you could only get a dozen golfers on the range at a time. Picture a day with a 54-hole shotgun event. You can imagine how unworkable it was."

Once Kay began rough-grading the flat range site he had Galan come out and hit golf shots with various clubs. Whenever the golf director would tell Kay that a shot had landed and he couldn't see where, Kay would have

his crew scoop dirt from near the tee area to the middle of the range, then push it toward the sides as far as possible. "That gave us a very impactful set of targets, with fairways and rough leading to the visible targets so you can practice yardages you'll have on the course and see how the ball lands," Galan says.

The list of features within this well-received amenity is impressive. A new Golf Academy building is adjacent to the primary 45,000-square-foot (slightly more than one acre) South



Tee, which has 45 hitting stations—both grass and synthetic mats—surrounded by synthetic rough. There are five target greens with six flags, with reflectors on the pins and Laser Link on two-pronged tee stakes that provide exact target yardages from each station. For flatstick and chipping work, there's an 8,300-square-foot putting green. Kay did the fade or draw player the distinct favor of setting up visual dogleg-left and dogleg-right fairways for driving practice. Meanwhile, each station's bag stand includes space for aiming sticks and there are in-ground target stones set 10 yards apart for practicing partial and full wedge shots.

Meanwhile, the new short-game area, which measures about three-quarters of an acre, features a North Tee with 30 grass and synthetic-mat teeing stations that can also serve as an overflow warm-up tee during outings. The short-game section also has a practice putting green and fairway bunker, an area for practicing shots out of rough and a contoured space for working on uneven-lie shots. Plenty of shag tubes are in stock so that golfers finish-

ing practice can retrieve tour-quality range balls and leave practice greens ball-free for others.

"Lesson demand has been great, and we expect to do more clubfitting." —Joe Galan

"It's visually the best practice facility in the area, if not the state," Galan says, "but what really sets it apart is it provides everything a golfer needs in terms of real practice. Every aspect is there. You don't have to improvise. Only a couple of other clubs have Academy buildings, and the range and practice facility gives us the opportunity to do golf schools, hold regular member clinics, custom clubfitting, you name it."

The club is even educating members about range etiquette. In a recent

newsletter, Willigan demonstrated the proper divot pattern to use at grass teeing stations so that you minimize your total divot-digging. He also explained how to properly maintain teeing areas by filling in holes with divot mix after each session.

The club is hopeful the new range will result in more new members. "We've had people join the club as a result of them playing in an outing and experiencing the new range," Galan says. "No matter what day of the week, the driving range is always busy. With the growth of our membership the lessons demand has been great and will continue to grow, and with that it shows members we are the experts in custom fitting, so we expect that component to also grow."

The club did a late-summer, one-piece mailing to prospective members and received excellent response, Hurley says, adding that Fiddler's convenient location directly off I-78 gives them the benefit of expanding its membership base much farther than a 20-mile radius. "The new range has certainly created a lot of buzz," Hurley says, "which bodes well for the future." ■

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What Pleases a Range User? Tour Pros Put Their Two Cents In

Playing professionally means adjusting to whatever practice facility they put in front of you each week. Over the years, tour players develop interesting likes and dislikes. **BY SCOTT KRAMER**



We live in dynamic and fast-changing times for golf practice. Same goes for the design of practice facilities. On course projects with extremely large budgets, architects like Lester George, Tom Fazio and Brad Faxon have experimented energetically with what a practice complex could look like—and how the golfer might use it. George has turned heads with his range design at Kinloch Golf Club, on the outskirts of Richmond, Va., while Fazio did some bold reinventing of the concept at real estate developments like Berkeley Hall in Bluffton, S.C.

To see Faxon's take on the ultimate practice grounds, you would make a visit to The Bay Club in Mattapoisett, Mass., an upscale community near Cape Cod. It was in tandem with design partner Brad Booth that Faxon laid out The Bay Club's handsome 18-hole course, but he indulged his own instincts and preferences in designing the Bay Club range, along with its self-described Short-Game School Facility. Faxon, a noted wedge-and-putter maestro, conceived the multi-acre scoring-shot facility so that it would present every type of chip, pitch or putt found on the big course. The ultimate "no excuses" practice amenity, you might say.

For Faxon to go one step beyond with his range and short-game center at The Bay Club makes sense, given the exposure one gets from playing pro golf the world over. Architects like Fazio spend their lives and careers learning the art and science of landscape construction and design, an education that's beyond reach if you're busy competing between the ropes. But practice-facility design is all about touch, targets, proportion

and subtleties of the turf surface. It's not surprising that a Brad Faxon would be able to masterfully gather all these nuances in one compact corner of a golf property, not missing a trick.

"Shadow Creek in Las Vegas has trees on the range, which gives you something to shape your shots around." —Fred Funk

So yes, knowing what the best players look for in a practice complex is important. Interestingly, some don't make a big deal about heavily contoured landing zones—visibility of the far landing area tends to trump that. The qualities and traits of the specialty-shot and short-game areas do come in for scrutiny. These and

other insights recently came to light when a set of questions was put to several touring professionals—beginning with the basic, straightforward query: "What do you like or dislike about the practice ranges you come across?" Within the players' answers are some thoughts that may tweak your opinion as to what makes a range appealing.

Rickie Fowler scouts out as many options as he can find, especially for honing touch shots. "I like to go to work on my short game at a practice area that lets you hit all the little shots you will face on the golf course," says Fowler. "The actual driving range doesn't need to be anything crazy. Just take a flat piece of land, plant some targets in it and go from there. But it's nice having a short-game facility that gives you contours and greensite features to work with." If great short-game play is based on imagination, what Fowler seeks is chip-and-pitch experiences that he can store up in his muscle memory and then repeat under fire. "I like to put myself in a situation to simulate course situations," he says. "That's how you discover new ways to pick up strokes in competition."

Fowler identifies two ranges as particular favorites. "My No. 1 is the place where I grew up, the Murrietta Valley (Calif.) Golf Range," he says. "That's always going to be special. And yeah, it's really a level piece of property with a bunch of flags and targets out there. They also have a chipping green and putting green, so it's the best type of place I can think of to learn on." It's





When playing a course with small greens, as Jeff Sluman (above) did in the 2011 U.S. Senior Open, tour pros may have to work at visualizing smaller landing areas on the range. Below: It's a subtle point, but the bagged practice balls handed to tour players do out-class a plastic bucket.

not surprising that familiarity can breed affection in a top-rank golfer who spent so many solitary practice hours in childhood and youth. "Outside of that, there are some great practice facilities throughout the country," Fowler adds, singling out his current home base, Medalist Golf Club near Jupiter, Fla. "They just put in a new short game facility at Medalist, and did a nice job," he notes. "The Bear's Club in Jupiter is also a very good facility to practice at."

Fred Funk probably wouldn't mind Fowler's flat-and-simple landing area, given his antipathy toward ranges that lack visibility beyond 200 yards. "Visually, most ranges are not very good," says Funk, an eight-time PGA Tour winner. "You typically can't see the ball land. They don't put enough importance on that aspect."

Along with seeing balls land so he can evaluate carry and spin characteristics, Funk also likes to hit off a surface that will indicate how the soles of his irons are coming through

impact. "The turf is always an issue," he feels. "What I hate is turf that just sits there and as you try to make divots it doesn't really give. The sod catches your club. Then all of a sudden you have a sore or broken wrist. But usually the biggest problem with ranges is a visual thing -- you can't tell how far you hit the ball."

Funk makes steady use of the practice complex at TPC Sawgrass in

Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., his home base. "They actually just renovated that facility, and they improved the visual aspect," says Funk. "But it's still not great." One practice refuge he does look forward to visiting is at Shadow Creek Golf Club in Las Vegas. "They have simulated fairways out there," Funk says. "You're looking at trees in the middle of the landing area, which is cool. You can work shots off the trees. There are even some little chutes that you hit out of."

Ian Poulter is principally concerned with the length and distant landing areas of a range. He wants to be able to hit driver onto firm, visible ground with targets or landmarks that show him the true condition of his tee game. Second priority is a range "where there are good greens, in terms of targets to hit at," says Poulter. "And then what I like is to practice shots where the ball is sitting above my feet, below my feet, as well as uphill and downhill lies—with various different clubs." Whenever he comes upon this type of feature, Poulter will spend some of his practice time thinking about fairway shots at Augusta National during The Masters. "I'm always looking to try shots with my 3-wood on uphill slopes, to simulate fairway conditions at Augusta," he says. "I also favor a practice grounds that has two or three really great short-game greens. That's ideal. And I'd like to be able to practice from different bunkering."

It isn't always that way, during a





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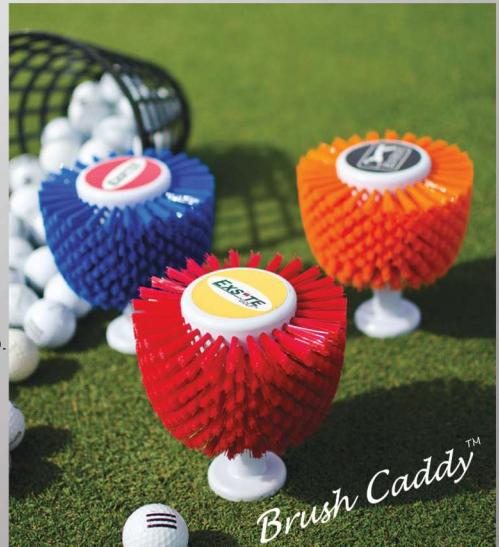
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As shown by the tee line at a recent Senior PGA Championship, tour professionals often must squeeze into the available space and hit toward whatever targets they can pick out.

long season of touring. “To a good extent, we find ourselves on resort courses. And even when we’re at private clubs, the ranges aren’t very big and that makes it difficult to hit the full variety of shots.”

Recently interviewed by a British monthly, Poulter commented that his adopted home club of Lake Nona in Orlando is extremely well-targeted. “I can practice there and work shots among six different pins and use a range finder to get accurate yardages,” he says. “I know exactly what the distance is. So I can look at the shot and say, ‘Yeah, that’s a full sand iron shot’, or ‘that’s a full lob shot.’” Again, the familiarity factor.

With all of the swing technology, high-speed video and futuristic software available to Tour pros, you might think they would use it whenever possible in practice. With Fowler, at least, that isn’t the case. “I do use a Foresight machine, which is a launch monitor that checks the ball and gives you numbers on launch conditions,” Rickie says. “And I do

use Trackman every once in a while on the road, to make sure everything’s working correctly.” But when he’s trying out new clubs to play, Fowler simply prefers the old-fashioned method—hitting shots while evaluating ball flight and feel.

For his part, Poulter admits to owning a Trackman unit and using it religiously on the range. “Every practice session is Trackman-based,” Poulter says. “I look over all the data and make sure of my club path, swing path, ball speed, launch angle, vertical landing, I look at all of those numbers to make sure they’re in line.”

Perhaps it’s because he came up in the pre-digital era, the 57-year-old Funk is more old-school. “I don’t do anything with technology,” he says. “I don’t even use a launch monitor, unless I’m at TaylorMade’s learning center working on my swing or something. When I’m out there on the range, I figure the ball doesn’t lie. I know how the ball is flying, and whether it’s a good shot or not. You know when you’re hitting it well—you

don’t need a computer to tell you that.”

Interviewed at the 2011 U.S. Senior Open after firing his low round of the week, Champions Tour competitor Jeff Sluman was asked about the visual challenge of taking dead aim. He explained that the greens at Omaha (Neb.) Country Club, where the Senior Open was played that year, were as small as any he had competed on for some time, which meant that practice shots on the range had to be aimed precisely—at whatever compact target the eye could define. Sluman might have relied on the guidance given by noted instructor and broadcaster Peter Kostis to students who complain about a minimally targeted range. “You don’t need greens and flagsticks,” Kostis has been known to say. “Pick out a golf ball and hit to that—just one golf ball is all you need.”

At a time when practice facilities are being designed with every nuance you could ask for, that sort of old-school advice provides a reminder that the hardest worker, on any type of range, generally makes the most progress. ■



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Training Staff in Range Service and Upkeep is Key to Satisfaction



The atmosphere of the practice facility lends itself to special touches and kind treatment of the golfer. When staff members keep that in mind the operation is sure to thrive. **BY STEVE PIKE**

However warmly or coolly a golfer gets treated by a staff member on No. 1 tee, that interaction is bound to be brief. When it's over the player sets off on a 7,000-yard adventure with many twists and turns. At the range, however, things are different. Often a player will arrive, set themselves up and stay a while—intent on a productive practice session. If he or she is undertaking their pre-round warm-up, the visit may last 10 or 15 minutes—still, it's a critical first impression. Meanwhile, if the session is devoted to grooving the swing or incorporating a new technique it could cover a much longer span of time. In that scenario, this so-called “touch point” becomes especially significant. At least that's the opinion of Tim Collins, Director of Golf at The Breakers resort in Palm Beach, Fla.

“At our Ocean Course we have a full-time range attendant,” says Collins. “His job is to meet and greet most every player practicing and take his or her bag to wherever it's needed. We look for an individual who is a front-of-the-house service person who knows a lot about the property because we view this as the start of the golf experience.”

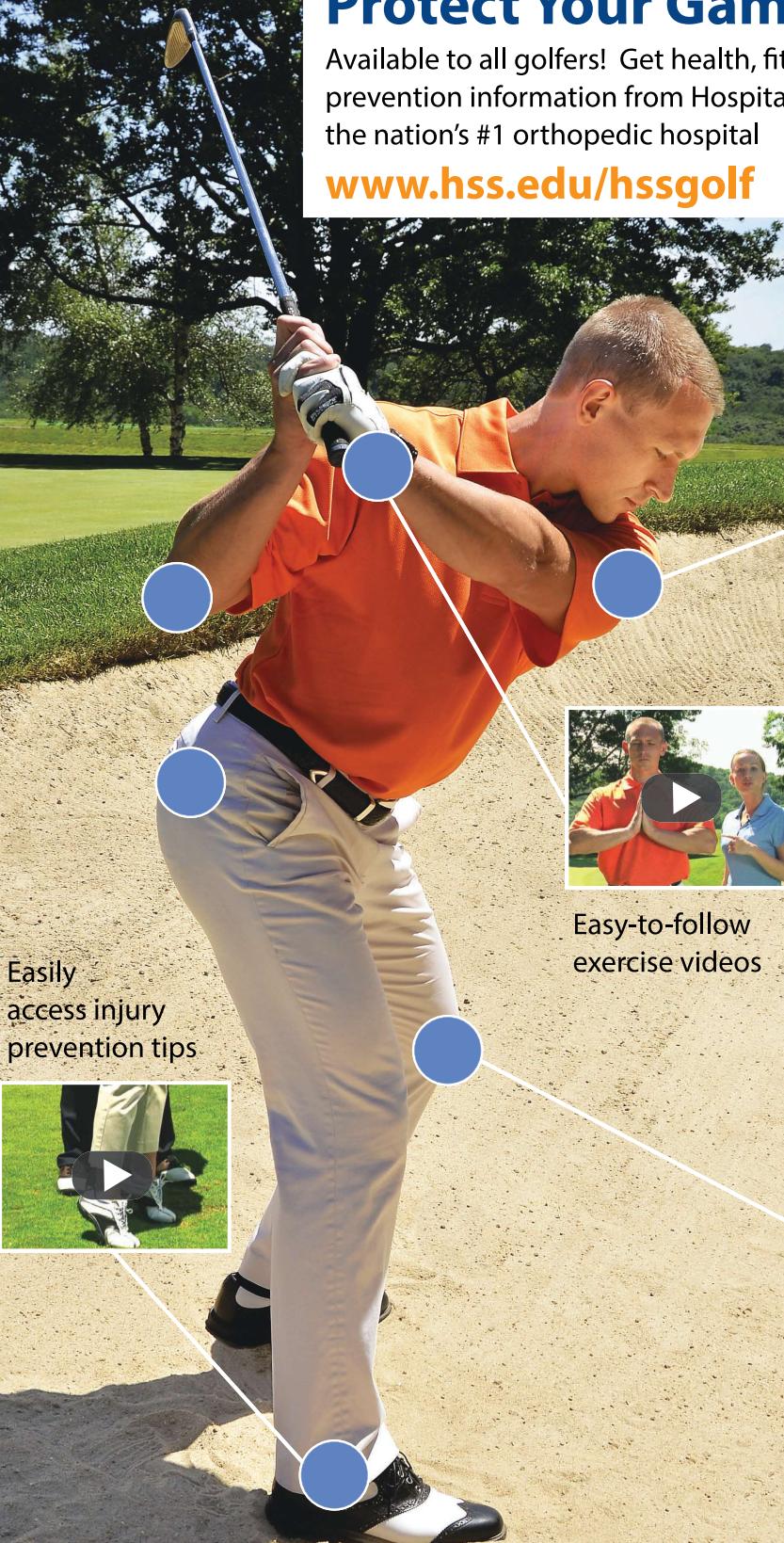
It's no secret that great conditions at a practice complex have been the

Some staff member at the Keith Lyford Golf Academy in Lake Tahoe hustled to rake this bunker properly and set up the practice stations.

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leading benefit in the minds of club management and paying golfers, too. The facility should be a positive reflection of the course in terms of maintenance and agronomy. Under that scenario, the well-groomed range will get a golfer excited to head out and play 18. Most would agree that a practice range's grass tee and its greens should be the same strain of grasses as the golf course. To the better player, it's frustrating to practice on one type of turf and play on another. The same holds true for bunkers—and it's easier to cover that base. Practice bunker sand should be the same type and consistency as what's found on the golf course.

Emphasizing a great experience for guests and members at the practice complex would ideally involve a dedicated attendant. It's not possible at all times on all courses, but the advantages are obvious. You're first and foremost talking about a greeter—one of the first people the guest or member comes in contact with. That's particularly important during peak hours—generally in the mornings—according to PGA professionals who employ these range attendants.

If you can't devote an outside-services worker to the range for all or most of the busy periods, you can still work on a part of the equation that separates the routine golf visit from the outstanding one. We're talking about "creature comforts," which can be anything from a cool, wet towel on a

"When our staff members aren't busy with something else, they're re-setting the range stations."

— Tim Collins

hot day to a swing tip from the teaching professional walking the tee line.

Another vital attribute: Continuity from station to station. "As you look out at your stations—whether there are 15 of them or 50—every one of them should have a pyramid and a bag rack that's properly positioned,"

Collins says. "At our Rees Jones Course, when our staff members aren't doing something else, they're re-setting the stations." As upscale golfers travel from club to club and resort to resort, they get used to other little amenities and extras dressing up the practice areas. Here are seven upgrades to remember as you work to create that improved experience:

- 1) Have a launch monitor available so guests and members can see their true swing speeds. It helps in giving lesson and selling golf clubs. Atlanta National Golf Club schedules launch monitor fittings every Friday, Saturday and Sunday. "We do it free for our members," says Atlanta National General Manager Larry Hayes. "As a result our club sales have gone through the roof."
- 2) Provide golf club washing tools and extra sand buckets so that they are visible and easily accessible to players and staff members. No, that doesn't mean a couple of ugly white buckets and some stained towels. Keep the water

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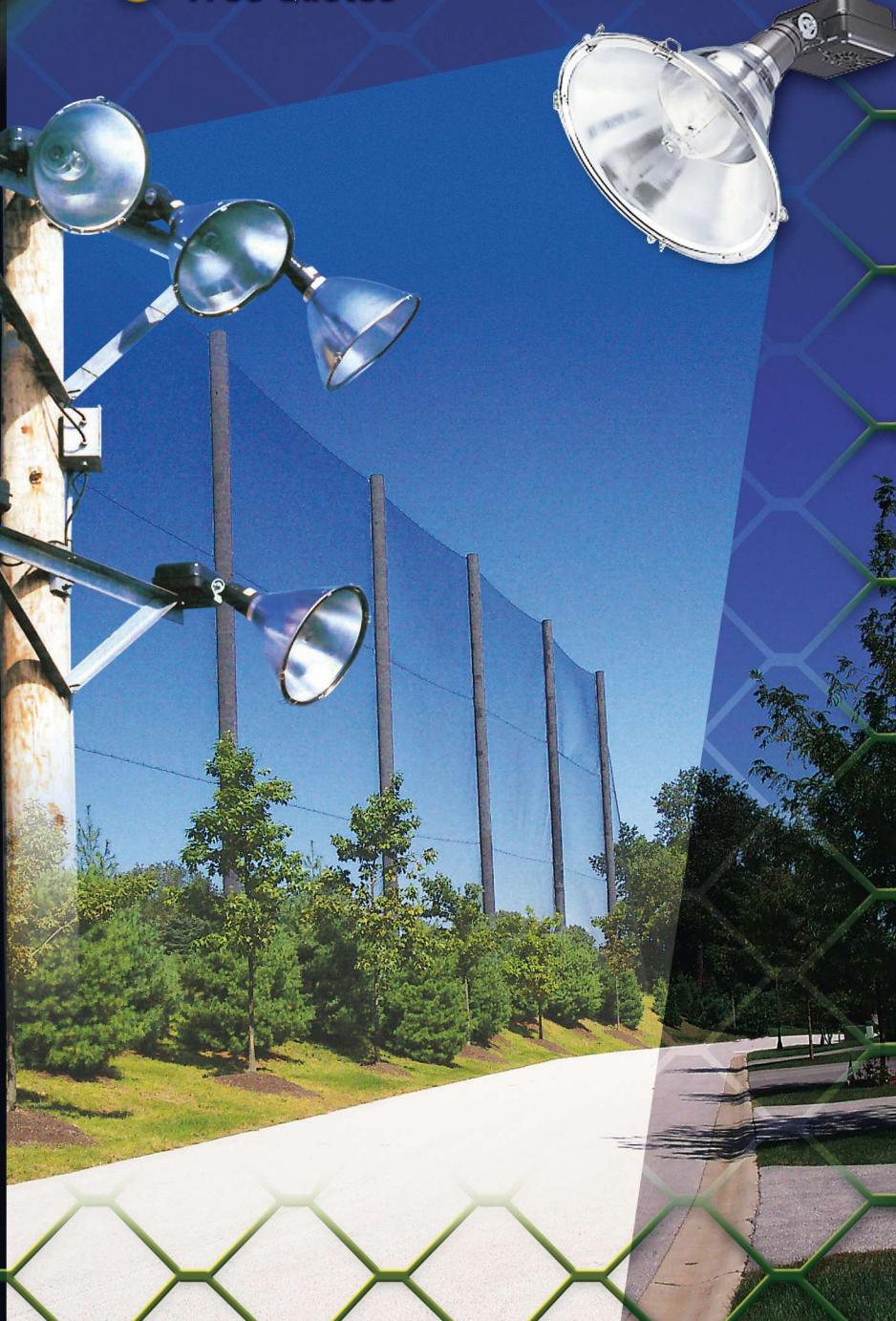
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Above: One of those practice-ball sweepers made of PVC pipe in a U shape with handle is needed to clear this green for the next player. Below: Clearing the green of a little fresh snow is part of what service people do at Sweden's Volkswagen GolfArena.

fresh and the towels clean.
3) Provide comfortable chairs at each station or every other station so players can take breaks after a few minutes of hitting. Given a chance for some rest, they'll stay on the range longer and won't get into as many bad practice habits. Blackstone Country Club in Peoria, Ariz., provides

- Adirondack chairs to its guests and members.
4) Have a supply box near the hitting stations that contains pencils, scorecards, pin sheets and ball markers. It's better for players to get them before they leave the range than to have them hunting down supplies and wasting time on the first tee.

- 5) Keep the practice putting greens free of orphaned golf balls. Nothing looks worse than balls scattered all over the green. It's also difficult – and annoying – for players to have to pick up or putt around left-over golf balls.
6) Keep training aids, and lesson that involve these devices, to one side of the range so as not to interfere with the other players.
7) Don't scrimp on the quality of practice balls. "We swap out our range balls even before they begin showing wear," says Todd Cernohous, Director of Golf at Blackstone C.C. "At the beginning of the season we start out with all new inventory and then sort through them as we go along. As we get to the latter part of the summer we mix the good balls that remain with new stock."

The range, it's worth remembering, is the place where a player most often gets his or her first impression of the golf course. It also can be a refuge for players who just want to get away from the rigors of everyday life and focus on improving their golf games. A few creature comforts make a big imprint on the player who shows up to spend time on your practice area. ■



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Using Tech to Get a Message Across (and Gain a Little Fame)

As new communications media emerge, it's not so easy to keep up. One Michigan instructor is an early adapter to wired-up ways of communicating his ideas to the world. **BY SCOTT KRAMER**

Cool Hand Luke was famous for realizing that "what we have here is failure to communicate." The Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw struck a similar theme years earlier: "The single biggest problem with communication," Shaw wrote, "is the illusion that it has taken place."

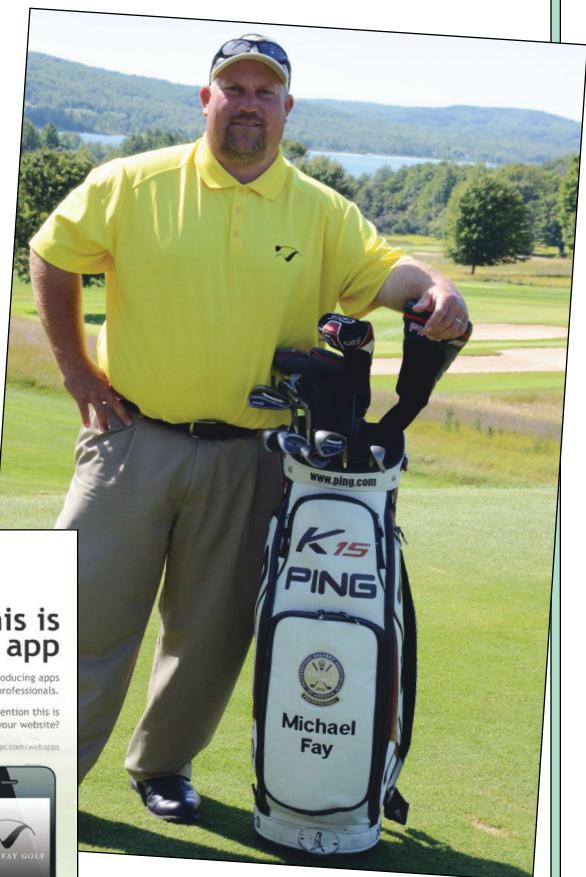
In other words, we think we have gotten our message across and in reality it has missed its mark. Or maybe the message landed—just not on enough ears. That fate can befall Mike Fay or any other teaching professional who's trying to impart wisdom on the golf swing. However, with Fay you notice a real knack for trying the next explanation or the next communications medium until the connection is successfully made.

Fay's communication tactics go far beyond in-person spoken statements—that's for sure. He is PGA Head Professional in charge of the Monument Course at Boyne Mountain Resort in Boyne Falls, Mich., a position Fay came to after an impressive period of training under top instructors like Jim McLean and Mike Adams, among others. Not surprisingly, his command of the technical side is well advanced. What separates Fay from so many other golf teachers is his interest in technology and his aptitude for using it. That starts with using tech for swing diagnostics but extends to aggressive digital communications, as well.

For instance, Fay founded and hosts a Sunday-night "Ask the Pro" Twitter session that started small and without much warning seemed to



catch fire. How popular and influential is the session? To answer that question Fay indulges in some name-dropping. "Nick Faldo has participated in answering our followers' questions," says Fay enthusiastically, "along with Annika Sorenstam, Brandel Chamblee, Charlie Rymer, David Duval and Hank Haney." The Sunday question-and-answer forum got started back in 2011, with Fay taking a stab at promoting his talents via the tweet machine. At that point a newbie to Twitter, Fay wanted people to ask him for tips and advice. Soon, he was receiving more questions than he could handle. He responded by seeking help from some of the best



Without any special training, Mike Fay has become skilled at web and mobile messaging.

golf minds in the Twittersphere, to help him help golfers solve their various problems.

"Each week, I gather the questions and send them out, and they are answered by the world's best," says Fay. "The questions that we get from people range from which ball to play all the way to highly technical swing questions, and everything in-between. I am truly honored to have the help I do. It's a really cool thing." Honored, yes, but his success stems from an established need on the part of well-known names and personalities to get their personal brand in wide Twitter circulation. When that first became a priority, Fay was one of the people ready with some extra audience for the big names to reach.

Fay says that unlike any other



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Fay's students can use his mobile app to view prior lessons and send him questions.

social network, Twitter allows people to directly connect with him. It has helped his business as a PGA professional by connecting him with new clients and keeping him in touch with current ones. "Plus, it has introduced me to a whole new world of golf professionals and others within the golf industry," he says. "Developing these relationships would not have been possible in any other medium."

Because of the short summer golf season in Fay's Northern Michigan base, he naturally developed an affinity for the technology that could extend a teaching and learning season. The tech for that is a state-of-the-art golf simulator, where Mike gives serious winter lessons. "The indoor facility is the perfect place to work on your game in winter time," says Fay. "Especially with the availability of swing-monitoring and shot-monitoring that you get with the likes of Trackman, FlightScope and V1. You can make big swing changes over the winter months that stay with that student all summer long."

Fay's mikefaygolf.com website is also dedicated to his students, and once again represents collaboration with talented colleagues. Fay went to the trouble of assembling a coaching

team to help his golfers play better through the Internet. Together, they write articles and post videos that encompass the mental game, golf fitness, Rules of Golf, and of course swing technique.

If all that weren't enough to keep Fay busy and plugged in, he has also developed a smartphone shortcut program, known as The App by Mike Fay Golf. This bit of mobile marketing allows Fay's students to access instruction tips wherever they are, or else view his latest articles, screen a recap of previous lessons or submit questions through the aforementioned Twitter sessions. Any player Fay works with can look back at prior lessons from a coffee shop, the office or anywhere, to get a quick refresher. Plus, Fay advertises himself as "Michigan's first and only Golf Channel SwingFix Instructor." Amateurs send videos of their swing to him through the website and he responds with suggestions.

"In today's world, if you don't embrace this high-tech stuff, you are falling way behind," says Fay. "Having a website and using social networking is just a start. I do what I do because my students have come to expect it—and they deserve it." This is all quite serious and effective communication to the improvement-seeking golfer—and that's no illusion. ■



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