



GRAA

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

Inside the February issue, you will find the following features:

- A Focus on Ranges as the Golf Industry Gathers – Great ideas for promotion, new products and profitability were a big part of the conversation as the U.S. golf industry came together at this year's PGA Merchandise Show.
- Public Range Profile: Orange County National – When the PGA Merchandise Show rolls around, this range becomes a Woodstock for golf gear—the rest of the year it serves as a central Florida magnet for skill development.
- Instruction: Proper Impact, off the Mat – Range mats provide a consistent, durable hitting surface, but they do raise issues regarding clean contact. Here's how veteran instructors address the problem.
- Video File: Take Your Teaching Business on the Road – The accomplished golf instructor will often take business trips that bring him or her to the winter retreats of regular students. Here's how to take advantage of that proximity.

Keep it fun and thanks for supporting the GRAA.



Best Regards,

Rick Summers, CEO

GRAA

rsummers@golfrange.org

Golf Range



M A G A Z I N E

Volume 20, No. 2
February 2012

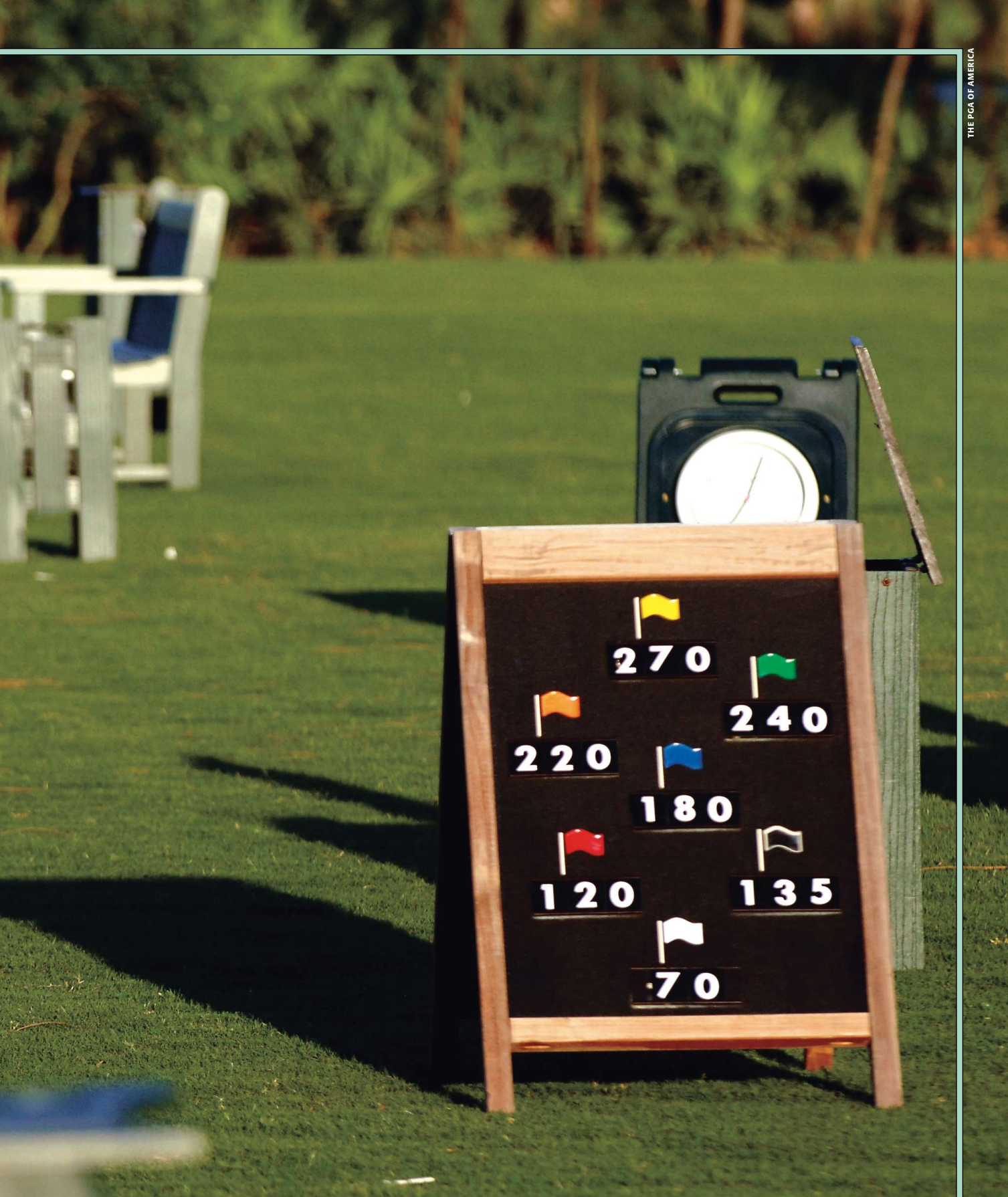
GRAA at the PGA Show



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- Delivering Great Customer Experiences
- Promote Instruction to Boost Profits
- Why Ranges Matter Now
- Best Practices (To Get Them Practicing)





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Golf Range

M A G A Z I N E

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Golf Range Association of America:

2600 Philmont Avenue, Suite 324, Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006; Phone: (215) 914-2071, Fax: (215) 914-2076

Chairman & CEO: Richard K. Summers; **President & Publisher:** Kirk Pagenkopf; **Chief Operating Officer & Art Director:** Peter J. Sansone; **Vice President Sales:** Brian Folino; **Editorial Director:** David Gould; **General Manager, Operations:** Patrick Cherry; **Production/Pre-Press:** Frederick Yantz; **Design:** Jim Gerhard, Matt Hulnick, Steve Higgins; **Operations:** Zack Tertel, Julie Yuen, Tom Gauss, Isaac Seidman; **Editorial Assistant:** Tony L. Starks; **Accounting:** George Kotlyar

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Off to a Solid Start

Having published just one issue of the new *Golf Range Magazine*, several weeks of GRAA Best Practices and experiencing a great week at the PGA Merchandise Show, it's way too early to announce that the new Golf Range Association of America is a success. But it is not too early for me to report some very encouraging signs. Consider:

- For the initial digital issue, *Golf Range Magazine* had over 3,000 on-line visits with more than 50,000 pages viewed.
- Over 8,000 individual readers have already opened our GRAA Best Practice e-mails, with each week's e-mails averaging 5,000 readers.
- At the PGA Merchandise Show, we signed up more than 400 new GRAA members and had great exposure at Demo Day and on the show floor.
- GolfRange.org has now been re-launched and will be expanded in the future.
- We've welcomed Mike Malaska, the 2011 national PGA Teacher of the Year, Susan Roll, the 2011 national PGA Merchandiser of the Year for Public Facilities, and Del Ratcliffe of Sunset Hills Golf Club in North Carolina to our Advisory Board.



The above provides a "macro" picture – the picture from 30,000 feet. Even more important is the "micro" picture – the reaction on the ground. And that picture has been equally special, maybe even more so. The enthusiasm we have heard from range owners, PGA Professionals and other managers, teachers, sponsors and range industry experts leads us to one conclusion: We are on the right track. They have embraced the editorial quality, the digital presentation, the Best Practices, and our desire to regularly deliver the message that ranges everywhere can benefit by working together.

We have found no shortage of successful facility owners, managers and sponsors who have stood up and said that they were ready to help make the GRAA better than ever. Hopefully you feel the same way.

That's a pretty solid start. Thank you.

Rick Summers
CEO, GRAA
610-745-0862
rsummers@golfrange.org
Golf Ranges: Where the Fun Starts



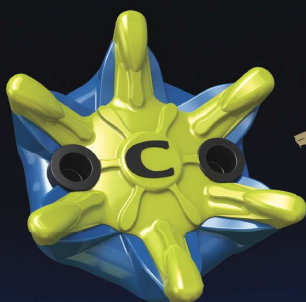
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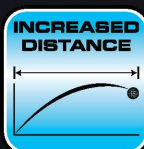
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What Golfers Want: The Top 10

Surveyed golfers rank the amenities that are most important when considering where to practice **BY TONY STARKS**

If you happen to be doing some late-night channel surfing, you are likely to come across David Letterman on CBS scrolling through one of his satirical “Top 10” lists. During the holiday season, one of Letterman’s topics was the “Top 10 Signs You’re at a Bad Mall.” While these lists are done in good fun with humor in mind, some of the signs such as “A dozen Starbucks, no bathrooms” have a pinch of validity. A mall with bathrooms that aren’t easily accessible from the food court probably isn’t the best idea and definitely isn’t the most functional design.

This month, *Golf Range Magazine* presents its own Top 10 list, actually two of them. And the answers are no laughing matter for operators hoping to optimize the customer experience. Based on a research study published by the National Golf Foundation in 2000 (*see the January 2012 issue of Golf Range Magazine for more information on the study*), we present to you the **Top 10 Most Important Features in a Range**.

Although there’s a slight variance in order, both stand-alone and on-course

range users ranked the same amenities among their top five: Grass tees in good condition; accurate yardage markers; practice putting green; range balls in good condition; and targets on the range. If you’re looking for a way to revitalize your range business or just boost the traffic, perform a quick audit of your practice facilities to make sure these five essentials are in place.

Stay tuned for an updated consumer study from the GRAA to see if range visitors’ views have changed over the years. ■

TOP 10 MOST IMPORTANT FEATURES IN A RANGE

On-Course Range Users:

1. Grass tees in good condition
2. Putting green
3. Accurate yardage markers
4. Range balls in good condition
5. Targets on range
6. Chipping area
7. Grass putting course
8. Sand practice area
9. Practice holes
10. Merchandise shop

Stand-Alone Range Users:

1. Grass tees in good condition
2. Accurate yardage markers
3. Putting green
4. Range balls in good condition
5. Targets on range
6. Night lighting
7. Putting course
8. Chipping area
9. Practice holes
10. Covered tee stations



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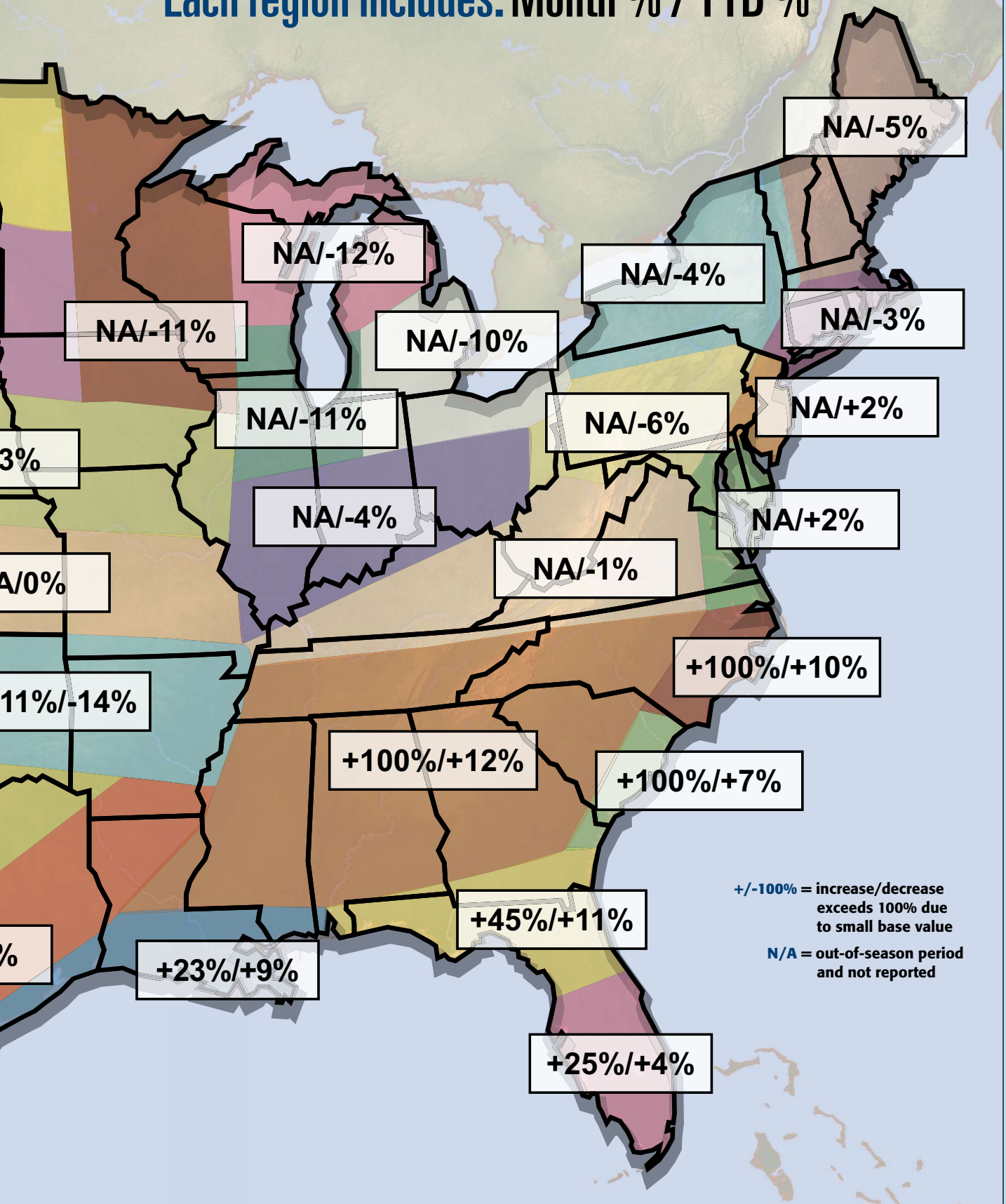
In cooperation with Pellucid Corp, a leading industry insight and information provider, each month *Golf Range Magazine* will present research which demonstrates how the weather has impacted the number of "Golf Playable Hours" in multiple regions of the country. While ranges may be somewhat less influenced by the weather than golf courses, the above information should still

provide a performance metric worthy of review. This map shows the percentage increase or decrease for the month shown vs. the comparable month from a year ago followed by the year-to-date results from January through the current month reported.

For more information about Pellucid Corp and how the data was compiled, visit Pellucidcorp.com.

Golf Playable Hours: December

Each region includes: Month % / YTD %





Let Families Frolic, and Hype Your Events

Turn a range into a temporary course for kids and parents? Brilliant. Cram your calendar with great events and market them tirelessly? It's a proven formula.

BY TONY STARKS

What we learn from this month's visit with traffic-hungry ranges—one down in the tropics and another in Southern California—is how to push the envelope. You can do this by redefining your range, temporarily, as a place where people play instead of just a landing area. Or you can keep the standard setup but surround your practice facility with every style of event and make sure area golfers know all about them.

Turning Them Loose, Family-style

At resort facilities, increasing customers' range use as a revenue-builder can be a tricky task. The typical resort guest tends to warm up briefly prior to play or simply head to the tee for their 18-hole round. But PGA Professional Rod Cook saw this as an opportunity rather than an obstacle for the Four Seasons Resort Costa Rica. "Most of our rounds are played very early, from about 6:30-8:30 a.m.," says Cook. "Then things slow down until about

1:30 in the afternoon, when the first level of twilight rates kicks in." Out on the links go the twilighters, at which point Cook's range sits empty. "I saw that dead time in the early afternoon as an opportunity to turn the range into an activity center for families," he explains.

Right at 2 p.m., he and his staff convert the range targets into a five-hole par-3 course for families. In addition, they've constructed an 18-hole all natural putting course

adjacent to the driving range that they also foresee as a big draw for family play. "The resort and I are doing our best to help introduce families to the game," says Cook, who previously served as PGA head professional at the Four Seasons Resort Dallas. As this creative piece of programming gets a thorough test, there is no charge for use of the putting course or the five-hole par-3 course—both are included in the room charge.

"Let's say a father takes his 5-year-old son on vacation with him. He's not going to want to pay an additional green fee to introduce his son to the game of golf," describes Cook. "But if we offer something for free, or on a feasible price scale, where this kid can learn the game of golf alongside his dad and have some fun at the same time, we're doing a service to the game, the industry and our facility." Family vacations are the times when memories are born for

parents and children alike. By making golf a part of those memories for the kids, Cook hopes that golf becomes a special part of their lives down the road. And that they'll always remember that the Four Seasons is where they first learned the game.

Mark the Date!

The Carlsbad (Calif.) Golf Center hosts upwards of 50 events a month for its enthusiastic clientele. These special opportunities include "Drop-In" classes—one-hour clinics that require no registration, only that participants show up 15 minutes prior to the start and pay \$20. Elsewhere on the weekly schedule are specialty clinics with catchy titles like "Wedge-u-cation" and "Driver Ed" and classics like Happy Hour for golfers with range memberships.

With as many as four events on some days, a 3,000-square-foot golf shop, a 58-bay driving range and a vibrant clubfitting business, needless to say, things can get pretty busy at the Carlsbad Golf Center. That's why it's so important for them to have

everything mapped out well in advance, for both staff and customers. "We make it easy for our customers to mark the dates for events they want to attend by posting a calendar on our website, which includes dates, time

"We keep hammering them with reminders because we know a lot of people sign up last minute."
—Susan Roll

and details on every event we offer," says Susan Roll, PGA member and owner of the facility. "We plan our calendars about a month in advance, and post it about 10 days prior to the upcoming month."

The calendar not only helps

customers outline which events they want to attend, it also helps staff members coordinate their schedules. If they know they're slotted to lead a clinic on Friday at 5 p.m., they'll plan their individual lessons accordingly. According to Roll, the 2011 PGA Merchandiser of the Year for public facilities, just because the information is there doesn't mean consumers will search it out. For that reason, she also sends biweekly newsletters to remind folks of the upcoming events.

"We keep hammering them with reminders because we know a lot of people sign up last minute," says Roll. "For some of our bigger events, we'll send out reminders as late as one day before. So you just have to keep on it, posting the information or sending it once is not enough." One strong benefit of posting the calendar of events online is gauging consumer interest. Using Google Analytics, the facility can quantify exactly how many people view their calendar. According to Roll, they average approximately 600 page views a month for the calendar alone, a number that is sure to grow. ■

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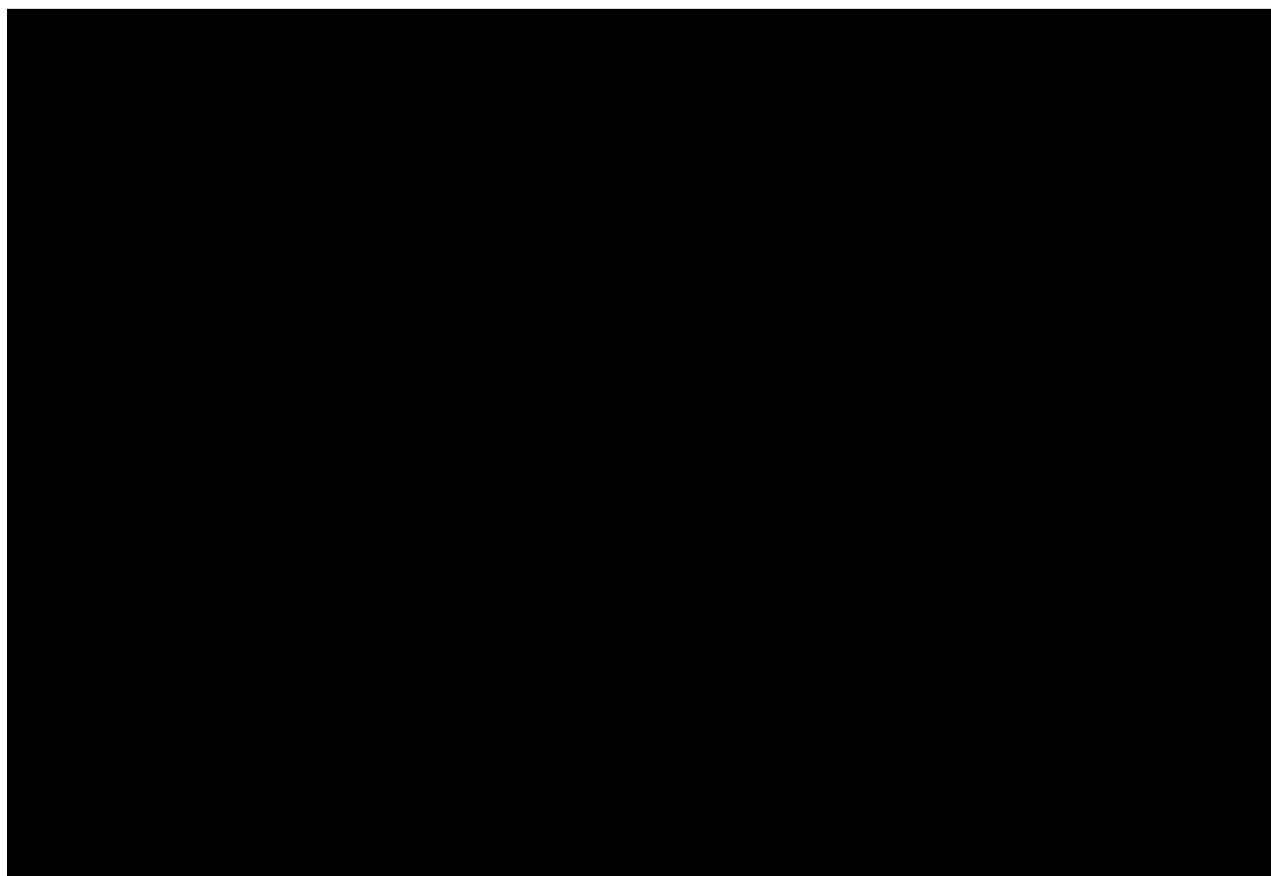
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Take Your Teaching Business on the Road

The accomplished golf instructor will often take business trips that bring him or her to the winter retreats of regular students. Here's how to take advantage of that proximity.

Building instruction revenue sometimes means turning a negative into a positive. Lou Guzzi, award-winning PGA instructor from the Philadelphia section, had to put a “Closed” sign on the door of his four-season teaching center in Pennsylvania (featured in last month’s issue of *Golf Range*) to take care of business down at the PGA Merchandise Show, including Demo Day, seeing vendors and meeting with his GRAA Advisory Board colleagues. Naturally he was aware that heading south in the winter is something many of his loyal snowbird students do. In this video, Lou explains the always-on-duty approach he takes to his students and his teaching business. You’ll have to buckle yourself in for this ride across Florida (as your host does some in-transit video recording this publication doesn’t necessarily recommend). ■



11

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True Targeting Keeps

Random ball-pounding is unproductive, but spotty or inaccurate target systems are partly the cause of it. In a world of GPS precision, range operators need to give golfers something to shoot for. **BY JOHN TORSIELLO**

The golfers who lead the world in practice time—tour pros—use rangefinders to scope out the carry distance of most every shot. Staying on the range and staying engaged in a practice session basically requires knowing how you’re doing for accuracy and distance control. Obviously, most range users don’t carry laser-shooting devices that gauge distance to the foot, so they rely on the range operator for targets and yardage info.

And getting what they need in the way of accuracy and targets is a big deal to people. A survey by the National Golf Foundation asked customers to prioritize various features of the range experience. Those who patronized stand-alone ranges named “accurate yardage markers” as the No. 2 benefit they seek. Patrons of ranges at golf



Lush turf that's easy to pick is the order of the day at Miles of Golf (large photo), but a dense array of laser-measured targets is what keeps golfers around for that extra bucket, say managers. Inset photo shows the target diagrams used at PGA Golf Club in Port St. Lucie, Fla.

Golfers Engaged

courses rank it No. 3—in both survey groups the distance-measuring component was more important than even “well-conditioned golf balls.” Having attractive targets on a range ranked fifth in both surveys.

Some range customers still may be content to bang balls into a field or plunk the guy driving the ball picker. But serious players want to know exactly how far their shots must travel to reach targets so they can transition their practice sessions to the course.

“Accurate targeting is the bedrock of TopGolf,” says Scott McMahon,

“We are constantly trying to upgrade our target systems to enhance the guest experience.” —Scott McMahon

regional marketing manager for the company that has seven locations

worldwide. Every hitting bay at TopGolf facilities is calibrated to give accurate readings to each zone within targets placed at intervals between 25 to 250 yards. “We are constantly trying to upgrade our target systems to enhance the guest experience,” observes McMahon. “We strive to be on the cutting edge of technology and constantly explore new ways to improve the experience.”

Craig Zimmerman, general manager of Red Tail Golf Center in Beaverton, Oregon, says the eight target greens at his facility’s landing area



A natural look plus lots of accurate signage simulates on-course play for practice-happy golfers at Genesee Valley Golf Club in Rochester, N.Y.

have been laser measured. The target greens range from 50 to 300 yards. Each tee station has a diagram of the landing area, the target greens identified with exact distance to the center of the green. In addition to the target greens and yardage signs at each individual tee station, yellow distance markers are placed every 50 yards down the center of the range.

"Targeting is extremely important to the more serious players," says Zimmerman. "We took extreme care insuring that yardage was accurate from every hitting bay. They are exact to the yard." Zimmerman believes realistic target greens are also vitally important. "The more you can simulate the situation on the golf course within your driving range the better practice experience your customers will have."

The target greens at Red Tail were built during its construction phase. Zimmerman personally laser-sighted target greens from each of the range's 78 tee stations. "Targets are extremely important to a quality range facility," he says. "They significantly enhance our customers' experience and allow them to practice with more confidence and impact on their games."

Red Tail went a step further, installing 14 Trackman hitting bays complete with "Flight Analysis" monitors that allow users to pinpoint a target and track the exact distance of each shot to within one foot. "This is a totally different level of targets and accuracy beyond simple yardage signs," Zimmerman says.

Doug Davis, vice president of golf range operations at Miles of Golf in

Ypsilanti, Mich., says his facility has "built up" target greens and yardage markers. "Our yardage signs change every 20 to 25 feet to display the correct distances to each. We want the targets to look like a real golf course. We have target greens from 50 yards to 275 yards from all tee slots." He adds that the distances to all targets and yardage signs have been carefully lasered.

As with any amenity added to a range, there are financial considerations; the time, effort and money it takes to install target greens and accurately measure distance from each bay. "There are financial conditions no matter what or how you do it," says Davis. "But we feel quality targets are very important in meeting our customers' satisfaction level." He reports accurately measured targets are consistently among the top two or three reasons customers say they visit Miles of Golf.

McMahon says the response to accurate targeting at TopGolf facilities has been positive. "For the serious golfer, we provide real time feedback. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, we are making practice fun. Outside of the most hardcore golfers, repeatedly hitting bucket after bucket can cause a player to lose interest, especially when there are no targets."

Zimmerman concurs, "We almost exclusively receive positive feedback on our range targets and have never had a complaint about the number and accuracy of our targets."

While some range users may get a hoot out of denting the range picker, owners and operators need to consider the significance of accurately-measured and numerous targets to the serious golfer in order to drive business. ■

MAKE MONEY OFF PRECISE FEEDBACK

The operators of Pease Golf Course in Portsmouth, N.H. are bringing golf to the winter-weary masses, and profiting handsomely. Simulators by aboutGolf have created a vibrant new revenue source during the usually spare days of the New England off-season.

"A large part of the success is directly related to the feedback that the equipment delivers," says general manager Scott DeVito. "Every player wants to know how far they hit it and with this technology they can experiment

while playing and practicing. They can see the feedback with the numbers the game displays and can work to increase swing and ball speed without having to rely solely on their eyes and yardage markers."

Course owners installed in their new clubhouse three aboutGolf PGA TOUR Classic simulators...and boom! The simulators were booked at 80 percent of capacity from January through March of 2011, netting \$93,000 from simulator hours and an additional \$20,000 in food

and beverage revenue. While DeVito admits simulators will never replace the visceral thrill and feedback of hitting balls on the range, he believes they are a "great complement for this type of business," and that a launch monitor or some type of computer feedback area can attract new customers. "Nothing compares to hitting balls outdoors," DeVito allows. "But players want to get better, and if you can give them some help with what technology can deliver it is a win for the customer and your business." —J.T.

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Florida's All-Round Great Golf Range

On the eve of the PGA Merchandise Show, this range becomes a Woodstock for golf gear—the rest of the year it serves as a central Florida magnet for skill development **BY SALLY J. SPORTSMAN**

Photography by Russell Kirk/GolfLinks



Phil Ritson is a rare mix—equal parts nerdy swing technician and charismatic promoter of the game. The acclaimed South African golf instructor designed only one golf facility, Orange County National Golf Center and Lodge, where his master plan placed a massive, 360-degree practice range front and center.

Beyond this 42-acre golf range are a clubhouse, hotel, function space, two fine 18-hole courses and a 9-hole short course. By making his fairgrounds-style practice area the gateway to it all, Ritson sent a message that quality instruction and enjoyable practice sessions are the basis for any golf operation.

“People appreciate the well-defined target green on our range, the flexibility of the design and the natural beauty all around,” says Alan Walker, PGA, director of golf at Orange County National. “There are no homes or development surrounding the property, just nature as far as you can see.”

Orange County National is located slightly southwest of Orlando city limits in Winter Garden, about a 20-

minute drive from local theme parks. Consistently ranked among the top public golf facilities in America, it offers year-round play, a capacious clubhouse, a dining facility serving daily breakfast and lunch as well as catered dinners, and an on-site 46-room lodge with accommodations for golf purists who decide to stay put overnight. Travelers often find themselves side-by-side on the range with local golfers and some Orlando-area golf professionals, such as current PGA Tour player Greg Owen and former PGA Tour player Eduardo Herrera, both regulars.

“To my knowledge, we have the largest circular driving range in the world,” says Bruce Gerlander, PGA,

general manager of Orange County National, who with his team operates the entire golf facility. “Practice is a form of golf. Players don’t always have time these days for a full round, and as a result, practice is becoming more important, desirable and accepted. That’s a direction we are seeing.”

It is no secret why practice at Orange County National appeals to local and visiting players. In addition to the usually sunny Orlando weather and 360-degree range, golfers receive good value. An individual bucket of 70-75 balls costs \$9 and a twilight bucket of 30-35 balls is \$3.99. Half-day and full-day plans are offered, as well as the Bonus Value Card. With it, golfers get 72 buckets, discounted same-day golf, complimentary walking on the Tooth executive course and discounted twilight play.

The driving range and golf courses at Orange County National were designed by Ritson, Dave Harman and Isao Aoki. The range, the first

amenity built, opened in spring 1997, and Panther Lake Golf Course opened for play in September of that same year. The back nine at Crooked Cat opened in 1998, and the front nine followed in September 1999, along with the nine-hole Tooth course. The land on which the golf facility sits is leased from Orange County, Fla. and the city of Orlando, with the current lease set to run through 2049. Some elements of the golf operation were initiated to fulfill specific stipulations of the lease, such as a scholarship program offering complimentary youth instruction and several parks-and-recreation and scholastic programs.

"The original developer of Orange County National, Phil Ritson, saw the range as the cornerstone of a world-renowned educational facility," Gerlander says, in explaining the impetus for the large circular range design. This included college students, academy attendees and international students. "I was not here when it first opened, but I do remember my first impression upon seeing it, which was the same as many others: simply, 'WOW!' As great as our

golf courses are," says Gerlander, "the scale of the range leaves as big an impression on our guests as anything else."

The practice facility includes, in addition to the 42-acre circular range, a 22,000 square-foot lighted putting

"Practice is becoming more important, desirable and accepted. That's a direction we are seeing."


— Bruce Gerlander

green, a 25,000 square-foot short-game area and the par-29 nine-hole Tooth course, which allows for practice of every shot. The range itself, about a mile in circumference, has 600 total tee spaces, two tiers on each, and nine

target greens. The carefully-maintained turf and high-quality range balls reflect the caliber and consistency Gerlander and his team insist on providing golfers. This attention to detail throughout the facility, along with Orange County National's location and self-contained design, has drawn some high-profile events to the site. The facility was host to the PGA Tour Q-School Finals in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2010, with future opportunities a possibility.

"Unlike most courses, our range drives a tremendous amount of revenue at a higher percentage of contribution relative to the overall golf revenue," says Gerlander, "although it is offset to some extent by high expenses. The size and overall design afford us the opportunity to host some unique events and generate this unusually high level of revenue."

Orange County National also is known as the site of the PGA Merchandise Show Demo Day. In 2011, the Orange County National range marked its 10th year as host site of the largest trade demo in world. Encircling the landing zone were 80-plus



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Above: Aerial view of the full-circle layout at Orange County National, including target bunkering. Below: Chipping on Demo Day, where the industry's new gear gets the ultimate test.

golf equipment makers with their newest products available for testing by PGA Professionals, international attendees and media. "The first year of Demo Day, when the concept was new and the event lasted just half a day, we exceeded expectations," Gerlander says. "The feedback was fantastic. It has been a full-day event ever since and has grown each year in the number of exhibitors, amenities and participants. Last year we had 8,000 people here for Demo Day. It's quite a twenty-four-hour transformation annually."

The transformation includes music, on-site food and beverage options, several pre-built exhibitor stages, hot-air balloons, a vendor village, enhanced security, off-site parking, busing from the Orange County Convention Center – and a tangible excitement throughout the property. It is estimated that half-a-million golf balls are hit during Demo Day each year. Annual preparation for Demo Day entails extensive planning and detailed execution on the part of Gerlander and his staff.

"We usually have sold-out tee sheets on both golf courses during the PGA Merchandise Show each year, and when you add Demo Day, it takes on an amazing atmosphere," says Gerlander. "The labor and management components are challenging, but it all comes together successfully."

While Demo Day is momentous

for Orange County National, plenty of other activity occupies the site year-round. New greens were installed at Panther Lake Course last summer – Champion Grass, an ultra dwarf Bermuda – and Crooked Cat will be the beneficiary of new greens this year; both new installations are expected to attract more golfers to the courses and the range. Numerous tournaments, outings and special events are held at the facility throughout the year. In addition, several entities are based at Orange County National's instructional building, adjacent to the range, including one of three locations of Professional Golfers Career College, Ziegler Golf Schools, Hawkins Golf School,

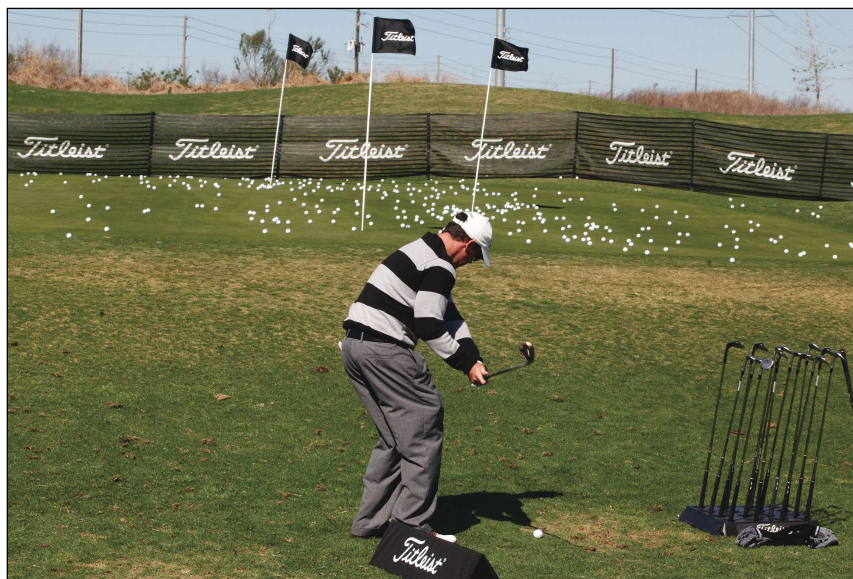
Core Golf Academy and a branch of National Golf Schools.

Operating such a spacious facility with complex programming presents certain challenges, to be sure.

"Managing such a large area with such a diverse clientele is challenging for many reasons," Gerlander says, "including the sheer amount of space, customers in many different programs, ball loss and the lengthy time it takes to pick the range. And because of our business levels, finding time to perform maintenance can be difficult also."

Those challenges clearly are being met favorably. Orange County National welcomes amateur golfers of every level. The College Training Program, a specialized package, provides college golf coaches an exceptional practice destination. The program includes overnight lodging for the team, a private range teaching area, unlimited practice facility use and golf balls, unlimited walking on the 9-hole short course and club storage. Although college teams from all over the country take part in the College Training Program, most participating schools are clustered in the Midwest and Northeast.

Special events and programs aside, Orange County National offers a year-round, high-level multiple-option practice experience and memorable golf. Increasingly, players are seeking out this Orlando-area haven; they don't mind its one-of-a-kind aura. In fact, they seem to like it that way. ■





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Range mats provide a consistent, durable hitting surface, but they do raise issues

BY MIKE CULLITY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RUSSELL KIRK/GOLFLINKS

off the Mat



Randy Brooks, teaching off an artificial mat at Ansley-Settindown Creek Golf Club in Atlanta, helps keep his student from getting too steep on the angle of attack.

regarding clean contact. Here's how veteran instructors address the problem.

In the 2011 golf film, “Seven Days in Utopia,” a struggling pro in rural Texas encounters a grizzled rancher played by Robert Duvall. It turns out Duvall’s character was a tour pro long ago and is willing to mentor the young journeyman. They meet for a lesson on a makeshift driving range consisting of two Astroturf mats at the edge of a cow pasture. Perched on horseback, the cowboy guru watches his charge hit a few 5-irons, then in true Hollywood fashion dispenses pithy advice about finding conviction.

Real-life instructors rarely saddle up for lessons, but most of them teach on synthetic mats. And while mats at the modern practice facility more closely simulate natural turf than their rock-hard predecessors, teaching on them can present challenges.

Asked whether he prefers teaching on grass or a mat, PGA Master Professional Walt Chapman doesn’t mince words. “I prefer the grass,” says Chapman, the director of instruction at Fairways and Greens Golf Center in Knoxville, Tenn., which offers both surfaces. “You get better feedback as far as hitting the ball solidly [with irons], getting the divot. On mats, the club tends to bounce, and sometimes students get a false sense of whether they’re hitting the ball properly or not.”

Perhaps for that reason, students sometimes hesitate to take lessons on mats. “My main challenge is people’s mentality,” says Brian Liberati, PGA head professional at Carl’s Golf and in

Plymouth, Mich., who spends the winter teaching on mats inside the facility’s heated stalls. “They almost feel like they’re going to get worse if they practice off a mat. It’s a big phobia.”

Despite some of the misgivings, teaching and practice in the U.S. would grind to a halt without mats to hit off. Based on recent interviews, here are some valuable tips for synthetic success:

Adjust your mindset: The bounce or “riding” effect that occurs when a player hits the mat before the ball isn’t necessarily a bad thing, especially if your student is a beginner. On natural turf that error would result in a fat, chunked golf shot and a demoralized golfer. On a mat the shot gets nicely airborne. “They’re not digging down, and they’ve got some bounce that’s going to provide some impact on the ball, which to me builds confidence and success in a much quicker manner than hitting off turf,” says Doug Wert, PGA general manager of Sportz Skillz,

an indoor golf and tennis facility in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Listen up: Although the visual feedback of hitting fat shots off a mat might be deceiving, the soundtrack usually isn’t. “It will make almost a thud or a thump if a student hits the mat first,” Liberati says. “So even if the ball looks good coming off the face, you know just by the sound if it was solid contact.” Although experienced players usually can discern poor contact off a mat, a beginner whose instructor is willing to point out the thud—and prescribe drills that address fat-shot flaws such as swaying in the backswing and releasing the club early—won’t be fooled for long.

Visual feedback on fat hits off the mat is deceiving — skilled teachers judge the strike by sound.

Use the mat to your advantage:

To teach solid contact with irons, Liberati removes a mat’s rubber tee, places a ball about three inches behind the tee hole and instructs students to swing over the hole after striking the ball. “Instead of worrying about hitting the ball, they’re focused more on going through it,” he says. Mats can also be a helpful alignment tool, adds Susan Roll, PGA/LPGA head professional and co-owner of the Carlsbad (Calif.) Golf Center, which offers mats exclusively. Roll uses the seam between a mat’s longer-fiber hitting panel and shorter-fiber standing panel to align students to their target.

Reinforce progress on grass:

Overcoming students’ fear that the techniques they’ve learned on a mat won’t transfer to the course sometimes requires a little reassurance. Before ending a lesson, Roll suggests having a skeptical student hit a few shots from the grass in front of the mat. ■

Skilled instructors use clues of all kinds—including the mat stain pattern—to diagnose swing flaws.





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Meeting Members and Vendors



The first PGA Merchandise Show for the new GRAA provided give-and-take with decision-makers from ranges nationwide plus suppliers and industry representatives. **BY DAVID GOULD**

Photography by Russell Kirk/GolfLinks

Fifty feet from the GRAA booth inside Orlando's convention center was Cool Mist Station, an intriguing new vendor in the range market. One of its co-founders, Herb Winches, offered a quick but convincing run-through of this patented shade-and-misting system. It had the look of a game-changer for upscale facilities that lose business in the sticky

months of summer. Next door to GRAA's outdoor booth during Demo Day was another new product aimed at ranges trying to set themselves apart. Range Cart is the product and Mike Gilbert is the sales-and-manufacturing exec who described how this hand-crafted "total club cleaning and amenity storage solution" makes members and the greens crew equally happy.

in Orlando





Video-conferencing is cheap and fast but almost nothing beats a trade show for quickly connecting the dots among industry folk in need of customers, vendors, partners or just some wise words about how to tweak their product. The 2012 PGA Merchandise Show was marked by the same creative urgency companies have displayed since the golf market's contraction began several years ago. The aisles of the immense show—and the tee stations of Demo Day range—were humming with speculation between one show-goer and another about forming relationships for mutual benefit.

Framing all those one-on-one conversations were forums, roundtables and reports showing a need for creativity and change at all levels. The search for easier, more accessible and more enjoyable forms of golf continues in earnest. At the PGA State of the Industry Roundtable with several dozen media members, Jack Nicklaus showed video of a Sunday morning member

event at no less than Muirfield Village Golf Club, Jack's monument to golf traditions in Dublin, Ohio. Something new had been cut into the greens that day—special-order cups measuring 8 inches across. MVGC golfers in the video displayed unbridled enthusiasm for the alternate format.

“The search for easier, more accessible and more enjoyable forms of golf continues in earnest.”

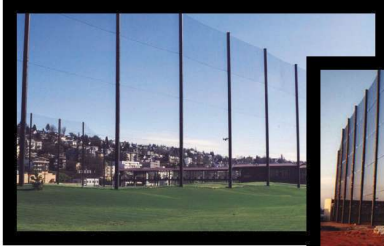
“The members were living it up, putting to those big cups,” Nicklaus commented. He finished his remarks with a confession—unprompted by

reporters—that “courses we built in the 1990s were too hard, and I was one of the main culprits.” Representing the USGA at the Roundtable was its executive director, Mike Davis. He responded to the Muirfield Village video by declaring: “Surprising as people may find this, the USGA has no objections to alternative forms of the game.” The USGA's major announcement that morning was its cooperative effort with the PGA to help grow participation through a major youth-golf program in partnership with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America. “This is our 117th year of existence,” Davis noted, “and it's the first time the USGA has ever actively participated in an effort to grow the game. We've given lots of grant money, but in this case we are finally part of the process.” Those kinds of comments should be music to the ears of range owners, managers, and teachers everywhere because finding new players and driving more rounds will certainly only happen if we have more people visiting

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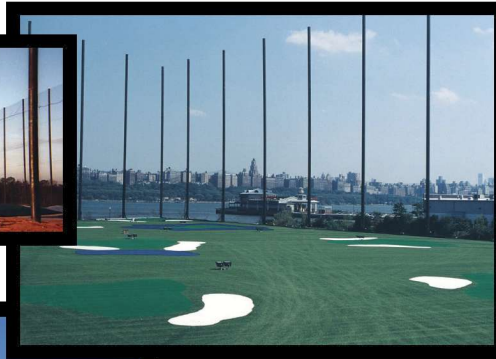
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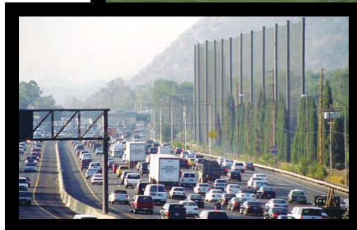
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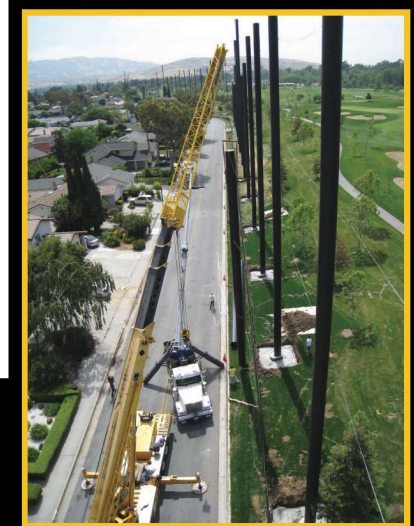
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"Golf instructors were excited to find new and less expensive digital teaching tools."

The GRAA Advisory Board was able to duck off the show floor for a brief meeting. Two first-time attendees, the award-winners Mike Malaska (PGA Teacher of the Year) and Susan Roll (PGA Merchandiser of the Year - Public Facilities) introduced themselves to board members who had convened last year during the launch phase. The association is pleased to have these two new members in tow, and all the more so to have a renewed GRAA PGA Show experience in the books. ■

(and spending) at golf ranges.

The show had some sales oomph to it, to judge by in-the-aisles conversation with vendors. All of Friday had a hum to it, along with parts of Thursday and Saturday. The show's middle day was "the busiest day we've had here in five years," said Annette Scarperia of Tex-Net. "Once it got rolling, we did nothing but write business all day. When we got to 6 o'clock closing time there were still people in the booth." Range owners who have been putting off improvements and upgrades seem to be done waiting, she adds.

Golf instructors were excited to find new and less expensive digital teaching tools. One such product is the new Swingbyte analyzer. If you've got an iPad and a golf swing and about \$150 to spare, you can add this brilliant little device to your swing analysis repertoire. Not much bigger than a

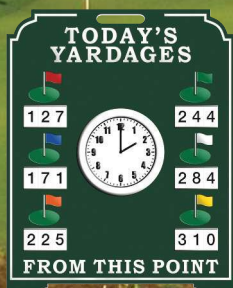
flash drive, it attaches to any club shaft right below the grip. The student





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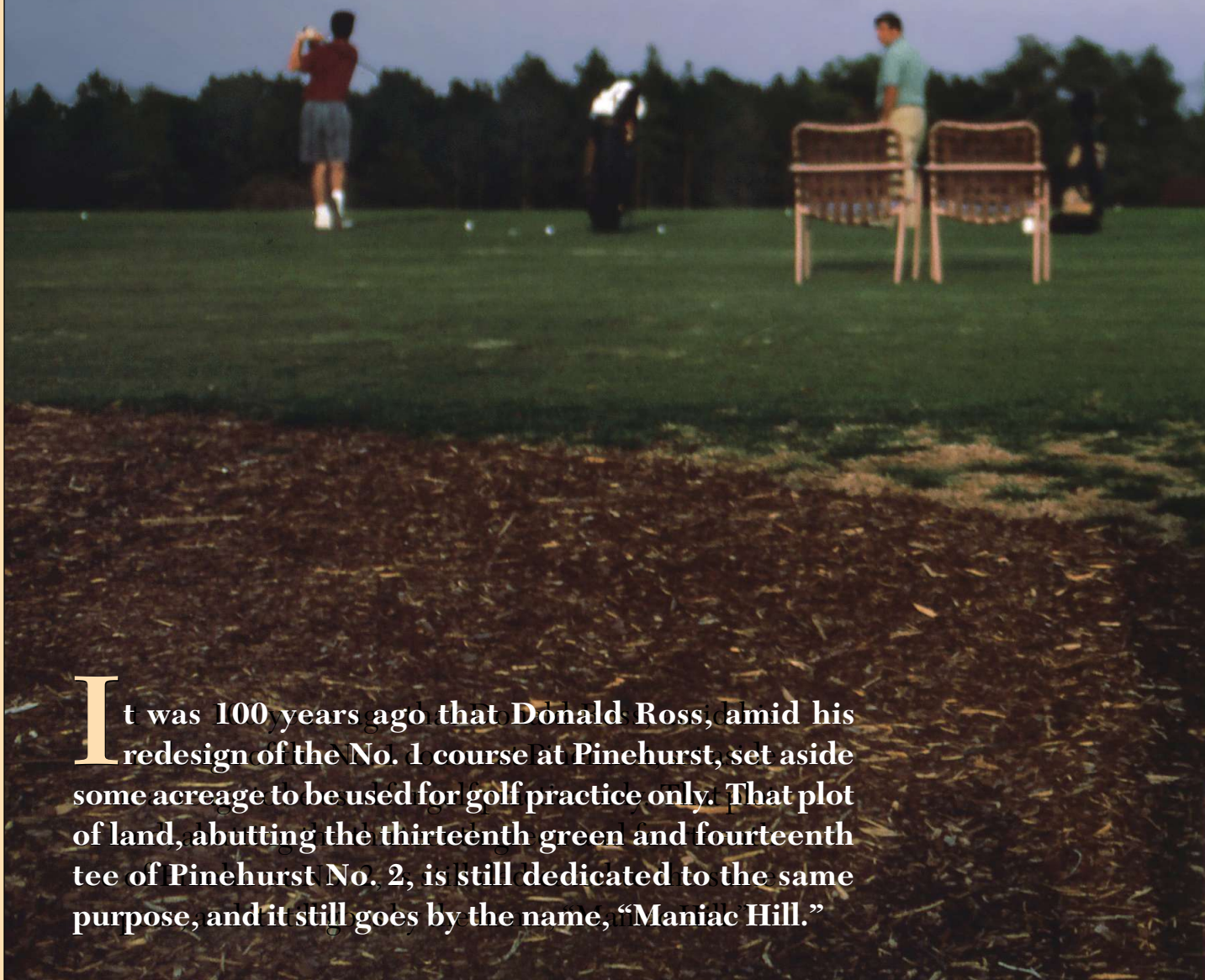
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The Pinehurst Proving

BY DAVID GOULD

PHOTOGRAPH BY RON CROWLEY



It was 100 years ago that Donald Ross, amid his redesign of the No. 1 course at Pinehurst, set aside some acreage to be used for golf practice only. That plot of land, abutting the thirteenth green and fourteenth tee of Pinehurst No. 2, is still dedicated to the same purpose, and it still goes by the name, “Maniac Hill.”

Grounds, Maniac Hill



MANIAC HILL

The Pinehurst practice range was built in 1913 and dubbed "Maniac Hill"-one assumes in honor of all the golf nuts who attempted to learn the game here. "Maniac Hill" is to golf what Kitty Hawk is to flying," Tommy Armour once said of the practice tee upon which early pros would congregate to discuss the infant business of golf instruction. "The North and South Open was the Oxford and Cambridge, the Yale, Harvard and Princeton of advanced golf education. I paid a lot of tuition there, but every cent I lost was a good investment."



Golfers intent on diligent practice find many diversions at Pinehurst Resort.

The archives of the Tufts Library in Pinehurst contain Ross's reference to the new amenity, as stated in his 1913 report to the resort's board. "The changes will leave Nos. 1 and 2 holes on No. 1 course available for practicing purposes," Ross wrote, "and I would also recommend that the first three holes on the proposed 9-hole course be given up for practice grounds. This space will supply all the requirements for teachers and members."

Pinehurst was a laboratory of innovation from the beginning, when the Bostonian entrepreneur James W. Tufts purchased the enormous tract of clear-cut land that would become the resort town of Pinehurst. Along with Ross's idea for a practice-only parcel there was an ensuing notion, one that these days we would categorize under "alternative golf." In 1916, according to the resort's official history, James Barber built the first American mini-golf course at Pinehurst, the so-called "Lilliputian" course.

In his book, *Tales from Pinehurst*, author Robert Hartman takes the word of longtime denizen John Derr regarding how the toponymic came to be. "Nobody named Maniac Hill," Derr told Hartman. "It named itself." Derr was a well-traveled golf writer who climbed into a tower to do the earliest TV broadcasts of The

Masters. In his chronicle, Hartman points out that teaching was hamstrung by the need for shaggers and the lack of a dedicated supply of practice balls—presumably the new practice grounds would amend that. Then again, there's a reference in *Tales from Pinehurst* to another early obstacle to high-volume instruction businesses—that being expertise.

The first patent for a wheeled ball picker was still 30 years in the future when Maniac Hill opened.

According to Fred McLeod, winner of the 1908 U.S. Open, the teaching art was rudimentary in that era. "The first five years we were pros," McLeod confesses, "we should have paid the pupils for taking lessons." That wasn't the case, and what could be called by no other name than "lesson hustling" reportedly took place whenever pros came to Pinehurst to play a tournament or passed through during the tourist

season. In those early days, the week of the annual North and South Open was a peak period for impromptu lesson-vending by the mostly Scottish professionals.

These days the oversight of a range operation includes golf ball inventory management and logistics. We have to wince when we realize that the first patent for a wheeled ball picker was still 30 years in the future when Maniac Hill opened, making the old practice of hand-picking a daily reality. Meanwhile, the golf ball itself was a tender commodity. Two B.F. Goodrich employees, B.G. Work and Coburn Haskell, patented the so-called Haskell ball in 1899. It consisted of rubber thread wrapped around a solid rubber core, with a gutta percha cover. It was much easier to launch and control than its Haskell predecessor. In 1905 William Taylor applied a molded dimple pattern to the Haskell's cover. Wound balata, the still-problematic generation of golf ball next to come, was pioneered by Phillip Young, who in 1930 developed a machine that could uniformly wind rubber thread around a rubber core.

Even if it had been established a decade ago instead of a century, the Pinehurst Resort teaching and practice complex would be something to write home about. Managers like Brad Kocher, the resort's senior vice-president of grounds and course management, stated the matter thusly: "Ours could be one of the busiest facilities in the country. The volume of balls is astronomical. It creates wear and tear not only from hitting, but also from picking them up." Kocher winces when he thinks of the divot-digging that takes place. "We are to the point that, once a year, we're going to have to completely strip the tee and re-sod it," he says. Kocher's colleague, director of instruction Eric Alpenfels, estimates the number of balls hit on Maniac Hill annually at roughly 3.4 million. Did Donald Ross know in his Dornoch soul that such mania would endure and grow to so exponentially? A question to ponder as you spill out your next bucket. ■

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