

COLLADODATE PROPONENT GROUP

PROPONENT GROUP NEWSLETTER \$20

APRIL 2019

MEMBER SURVEY DELIVERS NEW DATA ON CLUBFITTING

By David Gould, Staff Editor

Even as off-course, “storefront” specialists expand their presence in the clubfitting market, Proponent Group members show continued enthusiasm for that aspect of game improvement. That’s the conclusion one would draw from the results of our most recent survey on the topic. The 26-question survey was completed last month and the tabulated results have been loaded onto the member-only website.

As always, a note of thanks goes out to all who participated. The fitting survey and report is an every-third-year project, so data was previously gathered in 2016 and 2013. Many questions are repeated in part to allow for trend-tracking.

We did ask an all-new question this year, basically to find out how members identify themselves vis-a-vis the art and science of fitting. It was

somewhat of a surprise to see over 20 percent checking the box that says, “I am a gear specialist at my academy, and handle most (or all) of the clubfitting.” The most common answer selected was, “I fit clubs on a regular basis for my students and I enjoy the process.” All but a few of the remaining respondents selected this answer: “I’m a capable clubfitter and acknowledge its importance, however I don’t enjoy fitting the way I enjoy teaching.”

It should be noted that the members whose responses we’re looking at would theoretically be more enthusiastic about clubfitting than members in general, simply by the fact that they chose—or were chosen—to fill out the survey.

So, how’s business out there? Quite healthy, from the replies we got to the question of sales volume—although bear in mind that survey-takers were asked to group clubfitting activity and overall club sales together. Clubfitting and hardgoods sales “have increased significantly from last year” was the answer given by 39 percent of respondents. Another 36 percent said they had

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CHANGES TO RULES ON WHO GETS PAID OVERTIME NEARLY FINALIZED

Last June's issue of this newsletter contained a brief report on changes to the regulation of overtime pay that were set in motion by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). Several weeks ago, the DOL took another step in this process with a proposed ruling that fills in details and dollar amounts. Rules-makers have markedly changed the landscape on overtime. Golf-facility employees who earn what most people would think of as managerial-level compensation are now due time-and-a-half pay for every hour in a week over 40 that they work.

Previously, it was laborers at or below the \$455-per-week level (\$23,660 annually) who got time-and-a-half—employees paid more than that were due no bump for hours 41 and above in a given week. Now someone who meets a payroll is required to extend the time-and-a-half pay practice to anyone who makes up to \$679 a week (which equals \$35,308 annually). It means that an employer will soon be looking at many more people on staff that must be given overtime pay. Obviously, when you pay the extra 50 percent per hour to workers whose straight pay is relatively high, each hour over 40 has a bumped-up cost considerably stiffer than you've been used to on OT pay.

This latest proposed rule is notably better for employers than the previous version of it, which proposed an increase to the ceiling of \$47,476 annually. The rule just released is now out to the public and industry and a 60-day comment period established. It's expected to go into effect by summer.

(Clubfitting Survey, continued from previous page)

"increased a little," while 21 percent reported no change from the previous year. Less than 3 percent saw any decline in gear sales.

One question, which called for write-in responses, aimed to understand the overlap between fitting and teaching, as Proponent members view it. Among the many interesting responses was this straightforward statement: "Every initial assessment of a new student is a clubfitting, and every clubfitting is also a lesson"

A similar comment—"Initial assessments include equipment analysis, because equipment is always a consideration in the process of improvement"—points to a possible correlation between the rising popularity of New Student Assessments and the sense of an ongoing need for equipment to be checked and ill-fitting sticks to be taken out of the equation.

Here is a yet another response to the question, one that states the necessity of fitting in a truly matter-of-fact way: "it just sort of happens automatically. Very few people that show up have a good set that fits them so its natural to show them what does fit and they realize shortly how beneficial it is." Visit Proponent's website to see the complete results. **PG**

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WHAT OUR MEMBERS ARE WATCHING

MOST-VIEWED PROONENT VIDEOS THIS MONTH

One of the most popular benefits on our member website is the Webinar/Video Archive, loaded up with presentations from Proponent events over the past 11 years. Check out the top speakers in the industry, sharing their insights to help you improve.

In March, these were the 10 most-watched videos:

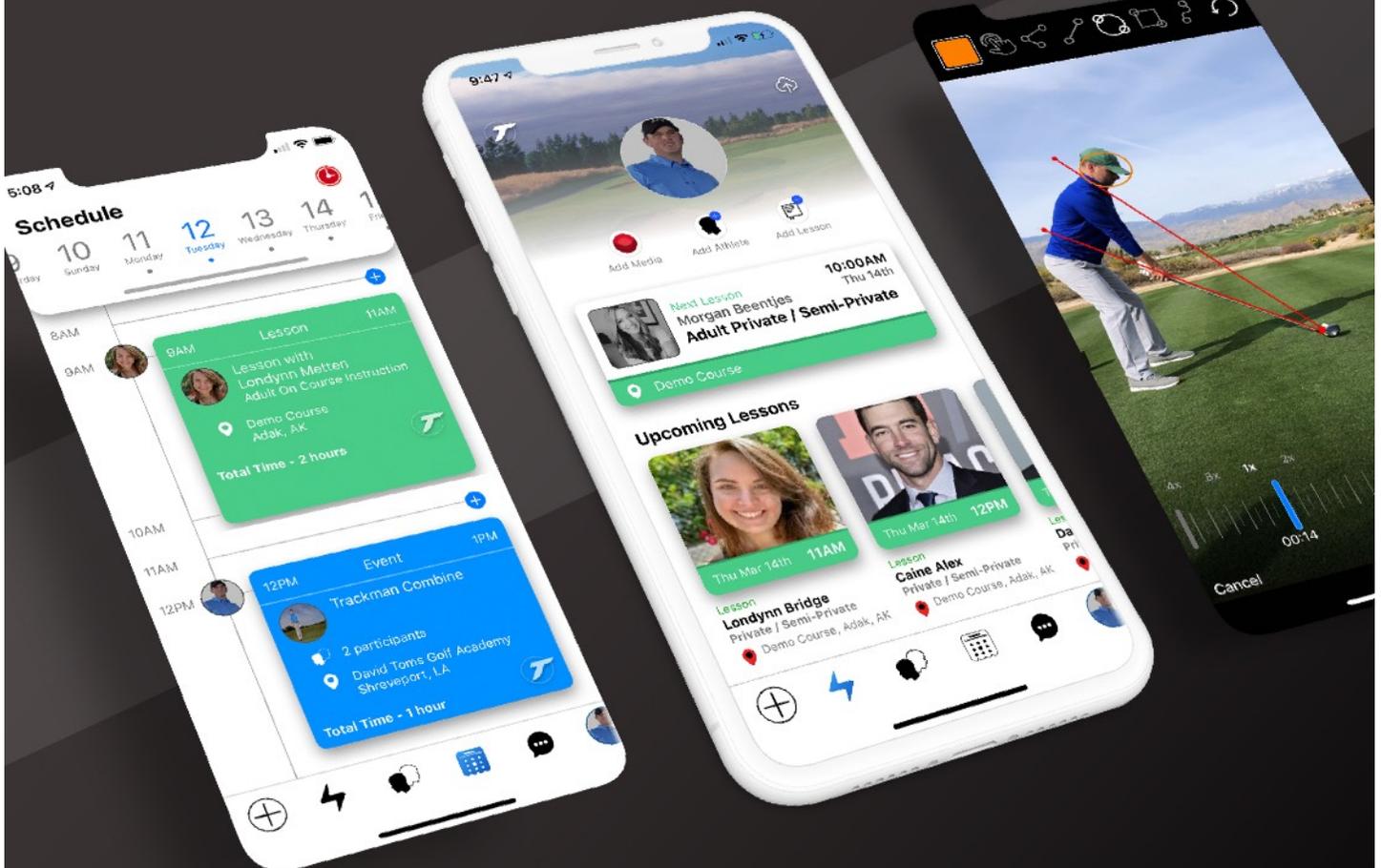
- 1) **Iain Highfield**— Incorporating Mental-Game Techniques in Practice for Your Students
- 2) **Will Robins**— The 5 Hurdles to Overcome When Transitioning from Hourly Coaching to the Results-Based Coaching Model
- 3) **Dr. David Wright**— Maximizing the Application of Force: 'Recruiting' Power Begins at Setup with Core Symmetry (Part I)
- 4) **Jeff Penson and Lorin Anderson**— Secrets to Creating Long-Term Students
- 5) **Trent Wearer**— Golf Scrimmages
- 6) **Don Hurter**— Introduction to DECADE
- 7) **Brendan Ryan**— How to Structure Effective Practice
- 8) **Marc Sheftic**— Teaching with Boditrack (Part II)
- 9) **Chris Rowe**— Keys to Teaching Success at a Private Club
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WHEN COACHES MOTIVATE, COACHES SELL



By **Andy Hilts**, *Director*

My neighbor's son signed up for Pop Warner football. At the orientation, his coach made it known he would sometimes speak forcefully to the players. "This is football, and I'm going to push them," he said. "They may cry. If that makes you uncomfortable, this league might not be right for you."

He is known as a high-quality coach who lays out expectations in order to avoid issues down the road. Many parents have conceded that a little of his fire-and-brimstone might not be so bad.

Hearing my neighbor recount this made me think about all the times I've told young golf instructors that success won't happen unless they, as the coach, control the lesson scheduling process. Mr. Smith goes in your lesson book for a certain day and time, and—to the best of your ability—you keep him there on a pre-set interval.

You're the coach. You set expectations. That's part of motivating. Golfers don't realize the effort it will take to relieve their frustration and pain. Real improvement is fun, but it's a serious endeavor, too.

Meanwhile, to keep golfers motivated, you have to know what makes them tick. That takes familiarity, which requires regular sessions. The practice programs you'll be giving them need to balance failure with success, or they won't be productive. People are all different, so you have to calibrate this accordingly. Even with a single student, you adjust according to what mood they're in, whether they've hit a plateau, had a breakthrough, and so on.

You need reps, and the only way to get your reps is to get in front of people regularly. To do that, you must

be able to sell. You have to get them coming to you consistently over a lengthy period. If you can't do that, all your other coaching chops won't be of much use.

Selling and motivating are two sides of one coin. You motivate by discovering a student's frustration and pain, and regularly circling back to it. They came to you knowing something needs to change. They wanted to do something for themselves, although often they'll feel they are doing something for the coach. That's because the coach is the one telling them to hit 15 downhill chips, 15 uphill, 15 sidehill, etc. Again, making those practice protocols engaging and game-like reinforces motivation. It shows the value in coming back each week.

In my early days I used to sugar-coat everything. I wanted every session to be "positive." I guess I thought that constant happy-talk was needed, in order to keep students signing up for more lessons. Over time I changed my approach. One student really triggered that shift. "Don't tell me that last swing was better, Andy," he said one day. "I can see on video it wasn't. I need accurate feedback." That clued me to the fact that expectations are a two-way street—students take part in the process.

One coach I know signed up two golf buddies who told him, "We're not going to practice, but we'll come for lessons every week." Which they did—for 25 years! They were both awful, and they became reasonably good, dropping 30 strokes or so. It took years longer than it would have had they been willing to practice, but they didn't care. They liked taking golf lessons.

We like people who like taking golf lessons. We encourage them to mark it on the calendar, every week or two, along with yoga, pilates, massages and chiropractor visits. If people give us that commitment, their golf games will improve so much that other people will take notice. Then those people will start showing up at the lesson tee, all motivated to get better. **PG**

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KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AID DECISION-MAKING

THE KPI CHASE: METRICS COACHES USE TO MEASURE BUSINESS SUCCESS

By David Gould, *Staff Editor*

Numbers and metrics are integral to golf coaching and training. On lesson tees everywhere you'll find launch monitors, force plates and 3D sensors kicking out quantitative data to assist the learning process.

Meanwhile, any business can use numbers to evaluate how the operation, itself, is performing. Proponent members have been experimenting in this area, seeking to make informed decisions about their schedules, pricing, programs and the various forms of business investment that might help the cause.

It's great when students increase clubhead speed and optimize attack angle. It's also critical for the coach or academy to translate teaching prowess into financial return—on the hours, the sweat and the money spent on technology, certification training and so forth. Any small business can search online and find extensive advice about KPIs, or Key Performance Indicators. For a golf coach, it would be time well spent to peruse some of these articles, especially the ones aimed at professional-service companies and agencies.

Business KPIs aren't yet in wide use by teachers, but the numbers Proponent members do monitor get a pretty close look and are taken quite seriously. For example, in studying a winter-season program he's offered for multiple years, Corey Krusa is pleased to see a sales increase he had been working to achieve. It's an eight-week offering at Pennington (N.J.) Golf Center, the 17-acre range and learning center where Krusa has housed his academy for 18 years. Three winters ago the program attracted 48 students at \$329 each—those numbers provide him a benchmark. Last winter there were 55 students at that same price and this winter there were 62—again at \$329 per.

Revenue growth (especially with no price discounting) is an obvious KPI, and in Krusa's case it's trending positive. Another KPI the experts might turn to here is one called Sales Pipeline, often studied in tandem with Sales Funnel Drop-Off. To apply them, Krusa would take his winter-program customers and compare their final roster of 62 against the number of golfers who took any measurable steps toward enrolling.

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Sheryl Maize's KPI questions cover spend-per-customer at her facility plus a benchmark on an entry program for girls.

The next step is to study how far toward final commitment the various non-enrollees went. Over time this exercise would reveal the number of people who had to enter the funnel in order for the tally of actual signups to hit 50, 60 or some other total. Digging a little deeper would mean looking for stages along the way where a potential customer bails out. You would then categorize those checkpoints and see which one or two showed the biggest "defection." Final piece of the puzzle is sketching out marketing messages to be inserted into the purchase-consideration process at appropriate points.

Along with what the KPI consultants advise, golf-instruction businesses have some stats and measurements unique to their situation. For Krusa, there's a "horizontal" sales funnel within the operation that's all about students of his who become clubfitting clients of Rick Lutzow, who owns the facility and fits clubs but doesn't teach. Krusa's working relationship with Lutzow is longstanding and has worked to the benefit of both parties. Therefore it might be concerning to

note the decrease, percentage-wise, in custom-fitting clients of Lutzow who were referred directly by Krusa. “At one time it was probably 50 percent,” says Krusa. “But over the years Rick has gained a very strong reputation, won awards, and been able to attract people directly, rather than having them start with me and then go to him.” This is a case of a down-trending KPI that simply calls for a bit of study, to understand its logical context.

One online source of help worth checking is KPIlibrary, which puts a strong emphasis on the metric known as Average Spend per Customer. This is a data point Proponent Group has been working to develop as a tool for members to help them learn about the revenue “ripple effect” enjoyed by the facilities where they teach. Sheryl Maize, a member whose base of operations is Crystal Lake Golf Club in Lakeville, Minn., has repeatedly attempted to work with her general manager there in tracking this KPI, so far without success.

The good news is that she’s continually told how valuable her instruction business is to the overall operation. The frustration is that any actions that would put real numbers to that contribution are seen by the GM as a too heavy a lift. “I’ve been hearing the show-your-value message loud and clear, and I’d love to be able to quantify what I bring to the table,” says Maize. “Often I’ll be on the range looking at 11 golfers who just bought range balls, and 10 of them will be my people.” So far, even basic ideas like a fountain-drink coupon tied to lesson-taking have been politely declined, based on insufficient staff time available to set it up and put out a report.



Corey Krusa benchmarked a winter program, then grew it.

Tracking business data can draw any coach pretty deep into the weeds, pretty quickly. But bear in mind that there are many business KPIs that aren’t really applicable to golf coaching. Many of them involve profit margins on goods sold, which is generally not relevant to golf instruction. But again, knowing what the specialists recommend, then picking and choosing what seems most pivotal to your operation, is likely to improve efficiency, profitability, and the all-important factor of job satisfaction.

When Tim Conaway digs into the metrics of his Conaway Golf Academy in Sarasota, FL, he focuses right away on what KPI gurus call Billable Utilization, generally calculated as Billable Hours recorded over 2,000—which is the round number used to state how many hours a year the typical accountant, lawyer or other professional works. This KPI is an indicator of how well you are utilizing assets, including staff coaches, and it can shed light on the effectiveness of your various programs.

“My hours engaged in the business of the academy are basically like seats on a plane,” says Conaway. “I’m measuring revenue versus capacity, and I want to be at capacity.” The overview version of this KPI exercise is to check the lesson book for hours when Conaway is ready and willing to teach but has no student slotted in. For the peak season that’s currently winding down, unsold hours in his book have been infrequent, generating an impressively high utilization



The KPI known as Billable Utilization is being monitored by Tim Conaway several ways.

rate. The more detailed version of this KPI is one that Tim expects to look at as the season winds down and time allows.

“I could get more in-depth,” he says. “I sell some lesson series at full rate, I sell some at a package price, and I’ve got one at no-charge, which is basically my cost of acquisition. So, I’ll be totaling that revenue up and dividing by total hours taught, to determine a net average per-hour.”

It’s important to note here that full rate for Conaway went up prior to this season, from \$100 to \$125, with no perceptible drop-off in demand as a result. Meanwhile, to



His KPI measuring Instagram ROI was all good for Nick Bova.

fully complete this KPI exercise, Conaway will be dividing his teaching revenue by total hours worked, not just hours taught. “The more I teach the more the emails from students pile up, also the phone calls. To deal with that I am putting in additional work hours, so that has to be considered. What the numbers mean about work-life balance is also real important.”

Sheryl Maize has been pondering a KPI-type analysis of a similar nature. It’s focused on her LPGA Girls Golf Club, which last time through engaged with 110 students. Of those youngsters, some “stuck” and others didn’t.

“My percentage of girls who became actively involved was about 40 percent,” Maize notes. “There were students I saw weekly or maybe every other week. It gets me wondering about the other 60 percent—where are the disconnects? Is it a schedule issue,

or is there some hook that would make the difference for a good number of them, so that they stayed on past the initial experience?”

The important word in cases like this, again, “benchmark.” Consultants who track KPI numbers would never expect that 110 out of 110 Girls Golf Club enrollees would move on to the next level. What they would look for is enough history—and perhaps some comparable situations with other coaches and academies—that would establish a percentage indicating strong retention within what’s reasonable or practical. Armed with a reliable benchmark, the instructor can then adjust marketing efforts in a way that doesn’t have someone like Sheryl chasing her tail, so to speak.

Proponent member Nick Bova has been hitting home runs with an Instagram marketing effort—the revenue per dollar spent on this program is a KPI he’s well satisfied with. “What I post is an Instagram video that shows the golfer my process,” he explains. “They see the student’s swing before, they see some work I do with that student, including drills, and then they see the much-improved swing afterward.” Viewership has been dramatically high.

“The analytics show me that 45,000 people have seen it,” Bova reports. “From those views, in one single week, I took in four new clients for lessons here at my facility—Anchor Golf Center in Whippany, N.J.—plus eight new online clients.” KPI data that measures marketing ROI would go off the charts in this case. “I spent \$150 in marketing dollars and earned \$2,000 in new income,” says Nick. “That’s just counting the revenue from initial visits,” which he’ll be able to build on as satisfied golfers come back for more.

Like Tim Conaway, Bova has recently kicked up his per-hour, also with results that are only positive.

“I moved to this facility from a private club in Westchester County, N.Y.,” he says, “and I set my rate at what the other coaches were charging, \$120 per hour. Some time went by and I made a rate-change decision, which I told people in advance I was planning—up to \$175.” As with Conaway, this rate bump had zero negative effect on business volume. Bova, who has a

young child, is currently analyzing all his time/revenue KPI data to see about an altered work week in which he is home all day on Mondays and Tuesdays, yet still banking a big income.

“I’ve been working on a cash flow forecast,” he says—and that’s a KPI the experts hold in highest esteem. “Can I run the business at a high rate of net income,” he wonders, “and still have the family time I want to have?” Spoken like a true expert in the world of KPIs and business success. **PG**

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WHAT I'VE LEARNED: ED OLDHAM

ED OLDHAM GOLF, THE RANCH COUNTRY CLUB, WESTMINSTER, COLORADO

INTERVIEW BY PAUL RAMEE, JR



His tenure at The Ranch Country Club began in 1982 and throughout those 37 years Ed Oldham piled up one teaching award after another. And yet, it was only last year that the suburban Denver club gave him the title of Direction of Instruction.

That's because Oldham had been running the golf operation most of that time as head golf professional, until he finally got his wish to go all-in with teaching.

There aren't many golf professionals who could handle head-pro duties and still make every Golf Digest Top Teachers in State since the list first appeared in 2000, as Ed did. Along the way Oldham has also earned PGA Master Professional status, been named Colorado PGA Teacher of the Year two times and, most recently, made the coveted 2018 list of Top 50 Kids Coaches compiled by U.S. Kids Golf.

A long list of players can testify to his skills in developing raw golf talent. Ed has been a coach to high school, collegiate, state and national champions. His students have won

Ed Oldham has one of the longest-running tenures at any one location among our members as he enters his 38th year at The Ranch Country Club.



Colorado Player of the Year awards on nine different occasions and he has coached two different golfers into the top 20 individual ranking in Division I golf, including the current No. 1 player in Division I.

Among the golfers for whom Oldham has been a longtime instructor is Jennifer Kupcho of Westminster, the reigning Women's NCAA Division I individual champion and currently No. 1-ranked women's amateur in the world, who will become a member of the LPGA Tour in the late spring. As for Oldham's all-round skills as a club pro, they are proven out convincingly by a pair of Professional of the Year awards from the Colorado PGA section.

Oldham's fellow Proponent member, Paul Ramee —another director of golf who teaches as much as humanly possible—conducted this interview.

You come from an education background, correct?

Yes it is. I grew up in North Platte, Nebraska where my father was dean of students at the community college.



Val Skinner's father Rich, offered Oldham his first position in the industry while growing up in Nebraska.

He was also coach of the school's golf team. I played my first round of golf with my father and one of his college players when I was 9 years old. In the summertime my father would drop me off at North Platte Country Club on his way to work at 7:30 in the morning. I'd be there all day until he picked me up on his way home.

That degree of exposure to golf and the club atmosphere is often what inspires people to stay with the game as a career. Is that what happened in your case?

Actually, my plan was to go to the University of Nebraska and graduate with a degree in architecture. But during junior year of high school the North Platte Country Club head professional, Rich Skinner, approached me about working for him that next summer.

Rich's daughter, Val Skinner, was a top local player and, as most people know, Val went to enjoy a 20-year LPGA Tour career that included six tournament victories. I accepted Rich's offer and spent the summer doing assistant-pro type work. Rich would open the shop every morning and I would close it every night. So, it was that experience that inspired me to get into the golf business.

You were the son of a golf coach and then you became one, yourself.

Ironically, after my father retired from his administrative role at the community college, he got into the golf business full-time, working at clubs. By the time he hung it up for good and entered full retirement, he had been

head professional at three different clubs, despite the late start. I would always joke with him about "following in my footsteps."

What about your own career path?

I went from working for Rich at North Platte to an assistant's job at The Ranch Country Club. I was an assistant at The Ranch until 1991 when I was offered the head golf professional position. I managed to spend a good portion of my time on the range, teaching 500 to 700 hours a year. Last year I finally gave up my duties as head professional and took the title of director of instruction.

Do members still approach you with questions or comments about the operational side of the facility?

In all honesty, since we made the change I have only had two people come to me asking about operations. So, that's been nice.

Are you still an employee, or did the club ask you to become an independent contractor?

I am still a club employee. I receive a salary and also medical benefits. My lesson income is paid to my company, Ed Oldham Golf, which is an S Corp.

How has business been going for you since you made the change?

Unreal. If anything, it probably got to the point where I was a little too busy. I sold out every available hour of my time in June and July. That likely would have continued through the summer but I broke my ankle and missed some time.

After splitting operational and teaching duties for decades, Oldham moved to full-time teaching last year.



How is the winter business in Colorado?

So far, so good. We have three indoor bays where we hit into a net. For technology I use K-Vest and TrackMan. We can do some good work over the winter months.

As you made this transition to full-time teaching, did you ask around for advice?

Oh, definitely. I reached out to Andy Hilts, Brian Jacobs and Henry Brunton.

What kind of suggestions did they have for you?

They were very helpful, each in their own way. Andy and I talked about the sales process and how people really want to be led and guided. He encouraged me to sit down with people and put together a program. I knew Brian through the Proponent Group. He had a successful teaching business in a cold climate so I thought he might have some great suggestions for me. When Brian and I spoke I got a great idea of the programs he was doing, why he was doing them and why they were successful. When Henry and I spoke he told me about the opportunity with new competitive golfers in the 9-to-13 age range. He mentioned how important it was, in working with that group, to get them on the golf course as soon as possible.

Nothing like quality mentoring. What was your experience with mentors, early on?

I got lucky in that respect. In the early years of my career, the head pro that I worked for didn't have much interest in teaching. That left the field wide open for me, and in turn it led me to search after information and guidance with a lot of urgency. I remember being at PGA Business Schools and being captivated during the instruction segments. At Business School 2, Hank Haney was leading the instruction portion and he did a good job of educating us on cause and effect in the swing. Along the way I got to spend some time with Dr. Jim Suttie. The hours I've spent either observing or taking lessons from Mike Malaska and Jim Flick are too many to count.

Having just wrapped up your first year in your new role, what are you working to improve in 2019?

This may sound like a stock answer, but as I reflect on my first year I find that I would like to improve on all aspects of what I do.

Along the way I got to spend some time with Dr. Jim Suttie. The hours I've spent either observing or taking lessons from Mike Malaska and Jim Flick are too many to count.

What are some of the programs you offered, in that first season?

I am not really a fan of one-off lessons, I try to set up programs that actually help people get better. The plans I currently offer are two or four hours a month, along with an option to receive one private lesson and then four supervised practice sessions. Extending from that is a package of either two or four one-hour lessons along with six hours of supervised practice. The idea is to



Oldham student Jennifer Kupcho is currently the top ranked woman amateur and reigning NCAA Champion.

have my students getting instruction as well as practice-session coaching each month.

It must be exciting to coach the No. 1 ranked woman in the amateur ranks. Talk about that.

Yes, Jennifer Kupcho has been a lot of fun to work with. She came to me when she was in the 8th grade and told me she wanted to become one of the best in the world. She did it, too. It was great to see her make the Curtis Cup Team and win the NCAA Championship.

What did Jennifer have that some others seem to lack?

Mental toughness. She is bulletproof. She is totally not afraid to shoot low.

No mental issues when she's four under and no mental issues if she's four over. She will simply come back the next day ready to play well. I have always said if you want to be a top player, you have to do a lot of things well, and along with that you need to do one or two things especially well.

Any other successes that come to mind?

One spring I had a student come to me who was a 90s shooter, and he wanted to shoot par. We started working together on a total coaching program and by the end of the season he had posted a 68 and a 69.

What was included in the coaching program?

We covered everything: Full swing, chipping, pitching, bunker play, putting and on-course. We then used ShotbyShot to post and track his scores and see what areas needed work.

She is totally not afraid to shoot low. No mental issues when she's four under and no mental issues if she's four over. She will simply come back the next day ready to play well.

Any good books you would recommend?

I have been on a bit of a run with golf books lately. I would encourage people to try Tyler Ferrell's "The Stock Tour Swing," Adam Young's "The Practice Manual," and either of James Sieckmann's short-game or putting books. As far as classic coaching books go, one of my favorites was "The LAWS of the Golf Swing," by Suttie, Adams and Tomasi which I still often refer to.

If I came to you for my first lesson, how would it be structured?

I would ask a line of extensive questions, then use video, K-Vest and TrackMan to diagnose the swing flaws. From there I'd create a practice plan with drills, and send feedback to you through V1 and TrackMan. I sometimes wear a microphone during lessons so I can tape what I am saying for the student.

Do a lot of your students send you video?

Yes, I really encourage it, I want to see how they are doing and to make sure they're making enough progress that we can move on to our next step, at the next lesson. Plus, it allows me to find out whether or not they're practicing. **PG**

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CASE STUDIES OF TEACHER - STUDENT COLLABORATION

JUNIOR WITH TOUR POTENTIAL LEADS HER COACH DOWN A FAMILIAR (TRICKY) PATH

By David Gould, Staff Editor

Outside a suburban Chicago home the ground was knee-deep in new snow. Inside, a girl just 6 years old was in tears, worried she wouldn't achieve her dream of reaching the LPGA Tour if the weather kept making practice impossible.

Four years later, that precocious child, Abbey Carlson, showed up at the Mike Bender Golf Academy in Lake Mary, Fla., to begin a decade-long training program under Cheryl Anderson, MBGA's director of instruction. Abbey's almost bizarre certainty that she was destined for golf stardom was still fully intact at that point, and it was quickly clear she had the talent to give it an excellent run.

"Abbey's parents actually bought a house here in Orlando, to be near the academy," says Anderson. "They kept their home in Illinois and split time between the two." It was a fairly high-stakes scenario, in which mediocre training results could easily produce regrets all around. On the plus side, you had the student's personal qualities: "She was and is a super nice person," says Cheryl, "warm, friendly, curious—wherever she goes she ends up part of a nurturing group of girls who all share great friendships."

Along with those gifts came a high-powered intellect—particular evident in her analytical and problem-solving skills. "Her mother's a math teacher and her dad is a building contractor," Anderson says. "Abbey has the kind of mental approach that allowed her to develop a very good short game at a very young age, which is rare."

She competed in the Florida Girls High School Championship at age 11 and finished top-10 against a stacked field. She ended up a two-time AJGA Rolex All-American and a first-teamer in 2013. When she graduated, she was the 22nd-ranked player in the high school class of 2016, thanks in part to a pair of AJGA wins and runner-up finishes at the Rolex Girls as well as the PGA Girls Junior.

Anderson's coaching challenge through Carlson's teen years involved club delivery being out of synch with

a particularly fast-rotating torso. The girl's miss was a straight block that floated to the right. "I didn't want to slow down her power source, so I had to speed up the rest of her motion and keep her hands from running out to the right," recalls Cheryl, who did a fair amount of research and some experimentation to find a reliable fix.

Diligent fitness work on Abbey's part helped all this along. A hard worker by nature, she attended a private school that worked off an extremely flexible schedule. This provided long stretches of time early on for coach and student to develop motor skills that really stuck. Not one to need endless range time ball-hitting, she could do her tune-up work, enter competitions and finish high up.

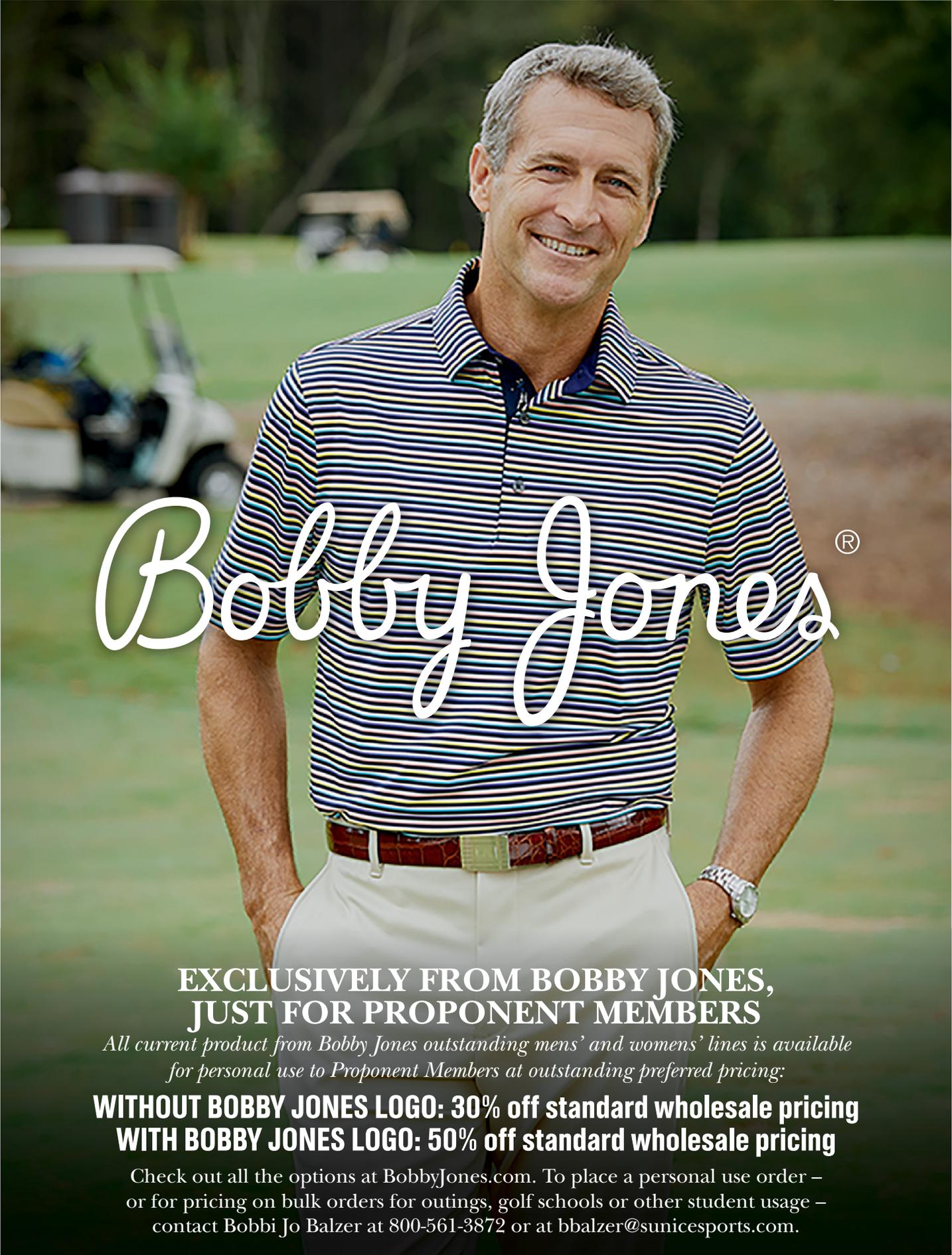
Then her school purchased a light aircraft kit and looked for a group of students interested in assembling it. Abbey Carlson went so all-in for the project that building the plane turned out not to be enough. "She decided she wanted to fly it, so she went through pilot training and got her license," says Anderson admiringly. During this period her golf performance slipped. "She was 'escaping' golf, you might say," Anderson recalls. One day there was a new life goal—to become not a pro golfer but a brilliant

builder/designer. The mechanical engineering program at Vanderbilt University was suddenly top priority. She would play golf there, ace all her courses and have a great college experience. "I doubted whether there were enough hours in the day to pull that off," Cheryl admits.

Turns out there were. As Abbey's Vanderbilt career winds down, the resume shows her making the SEC Academic Honor Roll and securing an individual title in the prestigious Mason Rudolph Championships. Recently she joined a handful of elite NCAA golfers as a member of the Palmer Cup team. Back home at the Bender academy, Anderson celebrated all this. Earlier in her teaching career, she had become entangled in family strife under similar circumstances—a super-talented junior losing her interest in playing professionally. "I ended up in that 'third parent' role, and when everyone was losing their composure I lost mine, as well," says Anderson. "You have to stay in the role of the coach and let people find their way." **PG**



Carlson (left) looks at video with Anderson



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JIM “DOC” SUTTIE INDUCTED INTO TEACHERS HALL OF FAME

The illustrious career of longtime Proponent Group member Dr. Jim Suttie received a fitting capstone last month when the editors of GOLF Magazine announced that “Doc” had been inducted into the World Golf Teachers Hall of Fame Class of 2019, as part of the publication’s award program for golf instructors. No surprise, and well earned by Doc.



Dr. Jim Suttie

PROPONENT WELL REPRESENTED ON GOLF MAGAZINE TOP 100

The GOLF Magazine list of Top 100 Teachers in America for 2019-2020 is newly released. Along with the entrance of **Dr. Jim Suttie** (see above) into the **Hall of Fame** Class for 2019, two Proponent members graduated from perennial inclusion on the so-called active list into the **Emeritus** category (awarded after one records more than 20 years on the active list) are members **Fred Griffin** and **Tim Mahoney**.

On that active list for 2019-20 are members:

Eric Alpenfels, Pinehurst, NC
Cheryl Anderson, Lake Mary, FL
Jason Baile, Bluffton, SC
Mike Bender, Lake Mary, FL

Martin Hall, West Palm Beach, FL
Sean Hogan, Champions Gate, FL
Michael Hunt, Miami Beach, FL
Kevin Kirk, The Woodlands, TX
Lynn Marriott, Scottsdale, AZ
Cameron McCormick, Dallas, TX
Mike McGetrick, Humble, TX
Bernie Najar, Owings Mills, Md
Pia Nilsson, Scottsdale, AZ
Rob Noel, Abita Springs, LA
Chris O’Connell, Plano, TX
Andrew Park, Orlando, FL
Mike Perpich, Alpharetta, GA
Gale Peterson, St. Simons Island, GA
Andrew Rice, Savannah, GA
Laird Small, Pebble Beach, CA
Todd Sones, Vernon Hills, IL
Mitchell Spearman, Rye Brook, NY
Jason Sutton, Charlotte, NC
Jon Tattersall, Atlanta, GA
Tina Tombs, Phoenix, AZ
Kevin Weeks, Lemont, IL
Josh Zander, Stanford, CA

Proponent Group is proud to be associated with these fine professionals. We extend sincere congratulations to each of them.

HOOPER COMPLETES REQUIREMENTS FOR U.S. PGA

Derek Hooper, the Australian-bred Proponent member who serves as director of instruction at Royal Oaks Country Club in Houston, has completed all requirements to gain Class A status with the PGA of America. This comes in addition to his Australian PGA status as a full member. Our best wishes to Derek on this news.

PROPONENT GROUP

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David Gould Staff Editor
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