

COLLADODATE PROPONENT GROUP

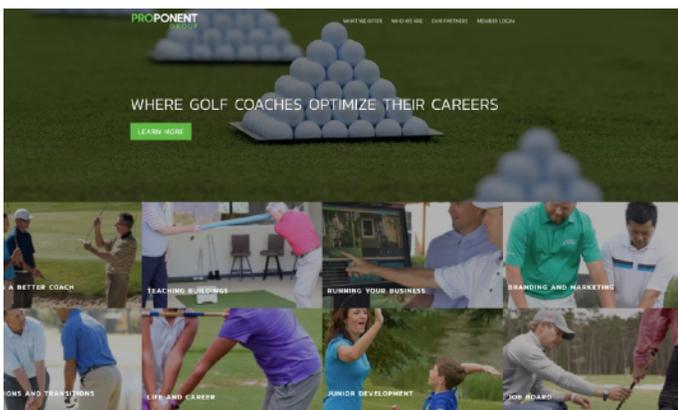
PROPONENT GROUP NEWSLETTER \$20

JANUARY 2019

NEW, IMPROVED PROPONENT WEBSITE SOON TO GO LIVE

Best practices of every kind are a priority for any business or organization intent on success. That's why there's continual messaging from Proponent Group to its members about staying current, upgrading, improving and modernizing. All well and good, but it also means looking internally and practicing what we preach.

For Proponent in 2018 that meant reviewing our existing website, looking at how our members use the site and brainstorming about ways to make that user experience much smoother and by all means as productive as



possible. So, beginning last spring and continuing into the summer, we examined our seven-year-old warhorse of a website and created a plan to redesign and rebuild it. The obvious key advantage of this member-only resource—

its vast storehouse of assets, tools, guides, templates and archived articles—had also become a stumbling block. Providing easier and more logical navigation was clearly a baseline need.

When the new site goes live between now and the upcoming PGA Merchandise Show, you'll notice major changes in the architecture and functionality that address that core need. The crux of its new organizing principle is a Home page with eight panels, titled according to their purpose and content. They represent what we've identified as the central requirements for a teaching business that efficiently performs up to its potential. Our resources and tools are all carried over to the new site and remain available exclusively to you. As always, we welcome your comments and reviews, and we'll use them to make further improvements.

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DATA JUST IN FROM TEACHING BUILDING SURVEY, SHOWING TRENDS AND SHARING BEST PRACTICES

We aren't quite to the point where a cable network like HGTV will expand its programming to include teaching buildings at golf facilities, but there's certainly a lot of "house envy" out there in the golf landscape, with one project of this type looking to equal or out-do the next. Proponent Group covers this phenomenon more closely than just about anyone, in large part thanks to what our members tell us. Recently the results of a new edition of our member survey on teaching buildings came in, with the most up-to-date intel on the subject available anywhere. Look for a full report reflecting that data in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, studying the results in their raw form, we found a collection of facts and comments well worth highlighting on a preliminary basis, as follows:

- Proponent members and their facilities spent anywhere from \$5,000 to a pretty stunning \$5 million on structure, infrastructure and furnishings for their academy buildings.
- As for the technological "guts," the dollars invested to cover that element came to anywhere from \$4,000 to \$250,000, according to what you reported in your questionnaires.



Baltusrol Golf Club, Springfield, NJ

- As for timeline, it's remarkable to note that 34 percent of members' teaching buildings came online since the beginning of 2015.

Experience is a great teacher, it's universally agreed, and few experiences teach more lessons than construction of a building for golf instruction and practice. As part of the survey, we open it up for respondents to type in comments about what features they've designed and built and would encourage fellow coaches to strongly consider. Among those features are:

- Lighting by (the creatively named vendor) Big Ass Lightning
 - Felt carpet for putting
 - Big bays, high ceilings, outlets on the floor for devices
 - Artificial turf in front of the hitting bays
 - Storage garage in the back of the building
 - Vaulted ceiling with large cross beams for lights
 - Larger hitting bay for clubfitting
 - Large video wall

As always, we offer sincere appreciation to all members who spent time not just executing these projects but filling out our questionnaire thoughtfully, to share what they learned. Watch for a full and final report on the survey soon. **PG**



Celebration Golf Club, Celebration, FL

2019 PGA SHOW: FULL PROPONENT GROUP PRESENTATION LINEUP

Proponent Group's meeting room W109B will be busy for three full days during the 2019 PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando. The full schedule is below:

Tuesday, Jan 22

Junior Development Forum Presented in conjunction with College Golf Connect.

Presenting Sponsor: K-Motion.

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 8:30-9:15am | Kris Hart – What You Need to Know about High School Golf |
| 9:15-10:00 | John Dunigan – Fundamental Motion - A Quick-Start Guide to Building a Swing Right from the Start |
| 10:15-11:00 | Mark Oskarson – What You Need to Know about the AJGA |
| 11:00-11:45 | Ryan Dailey and Matt Reagan – What OP36 Can Teach Us about Growing the Game |
| 11:45-12:30pm | Preston Combs – Teaching Putting to Junior Golfers |
| 1:00-1:30 | PING Clubfitters – What We Learned about Fitting Juniors |
| 1:30-2:15 | Mike Bury – 0 to 1 Million Views: My Social Media Journey |
| 2:15-3:00 | Dr. Joe Baker – The Science of Greatness: What We Learned from the Best Players |



Jim McLean

All-day pass for Tuesday's Junior lineup below is \$75 for Proponent members. Non-member fee is \$99. To register contact: brendan@bmrmanagement.com

Wednesday, January 23

Sales Training Workshops

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 9:00-Noon | Andy Hilts – Maximize Your Sales Opportunities |
| 1:00-4:00pm | Andy Hilts – Maximize Your Sales Opportunities |

Each session will cover the same content and there will be a nominal fee of \$75 to attend. Register today on the members' website by clicking on the Show Registration link in the left-hand menu.

Thursday, January 24

Presented in Conjunction with Golf BioDynamics

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 9:00-9:50am | Paul Dewland – The Principled Approach: Is it the Same for the Elite Junior, Club Golfer and Tour Player? |
| 10:00-10:50 | Brandon Stooksbury – Teaching the Wedge Game |
| 11:00-11:50 | Debbie Doniger – Women In Golf: My Journey |
| 1:00-1:50pm | Dr Rob Neal – Developmental Swing Mechanics: A Journey Through the Ages |
| 2:00-2:50 | Jim McLean – My Approach to Mentoring Teaching Professionals |
| 3:00-3:50 | Jim McLean, David Leadbetter, Mike Diffley, Jason Sutton and Sam Wiley – Expert Panel: The Business of Mentoring Young Professionals |

WHAT OUR MEMBERS ARE WATCHING

MOST-VIEWED PROPONENT 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 December, these were the 10 most-watched videos:

- 1) **Dr. Rob Neal and Layne Savoie** - Wedge Craft: Friction, Spin and Launch
- 2) **Tyler Ferrell** – A Good Release: The Shoulder or the Wrist?
- 3) **Don Hurter** – Introduction to DECADE
- 4) **Dr. David Wright** – Maximizing the Application of Force
- 5) **Nick Clearwater** – The SwingTRU Motion Study - How Big Data is Improving Golf Instruction
- 6) **Dr. Rob Neal** – Biomechanics in Action
- 7) **Mark Sheftic** – Teaching with Boditrack (Part IV)
- 8) **Jacob Davidson** – Junior Golf and Club Companies: What You Need to Know
- 9) **Trent Wearer** – Golf Scrimmages
- 10) **Dr. Greg Rose** – Power Development for Golf

EARN PROFITS & PERKS FOR CLUB FITTING REFERRALS

FROM CLUB CHAMPION

By Luke Edelman, PGA

Being a Professional is more difficult than ever before. Your job description forces you to work harder and deal with many diverse responsibilities. It is impossible to be an expert in everything. Any assistance you can get is beneficial. Club Champion has designed a program that allows the Professional to benefit from that assistance. It allows you to realize additional revenue, devote more time to other profitable work, plus gain useful perks for the entire staff.

Club Champion is the #1 premium club fitter, builder and retailer of the best brands in golf. Our master fitters and builders are unrivaled experts. They deliver a Tour-quality fitting that produces longer, more accurate shots with a nearly 100% satisfaction rate. The approach is unbiased; no specific vendor is promoted. The only goal – find the best combination of components to produce lower scores. With over 35,000 hittable combinations, Club Champion will build the perfect clubs for your students.

When you partner with Club Champion to assist with club fitting, **you receive a lifetime commission** on referred sales, a credit back to your member or a combination of both. 2017 PGA Teacher of the Year David Leadbetter agrees, "You have clients who are searching for something extra that will improve their game and they often go outside of your facility to find it. Club Champion's Professional Partnership Program allows them to receive a Tour-level club fitting while you generate additional revenue. No matter the skill level, your golfers will thank you for suggesting custom-fitted clubs."

Professional Partnership Program Benefits Include:

- Revenue-share through commissions on sales
- Monthly payouts
- Complimentary fittings for entire Professional staff
- VIP Professional Pricing on equipment for personal use
- Marketing support

As Business Development Lead for Club Champion and a PGA Professional, I understand what it takes to administer the many duties of the Professional. Club Champion allows you to focus more effectively on the core aspects of your business by outsourcing a portion of your facility's equipment sales and still earn significant revenue. We have enabled you to earn even more money in the other areas of your operation.

Constant changes in shaft, head and grip technologies make it almost impossible to keep up with tech savvy members or students. Carrying a large quantity of demos, inventory and multiple fitting carts is expensive and time consuming. And you still won't have many of the options your students want or need. Through Club Champion, you provide the highest level of club fitting and equipment knowledge while increasing satisfaction.

Our unique coupling system allows us to combine any head and shaft together. Golfers hit the precise combination to be custom-built for them. Most stores use fitting carts provided by club manufacturers. While they offer options, golfers are unable to mix-and-match across carts to determine their ideal combinations. Club Champion offers hundreds of shafts, many not available through most other fitters and retailers.

For more information on the Professional Program, email Luke Edelman at luke.edelman@clubchampiongolf.com.

"I hold myself to a high standard of professionalism, care, and expertise and expect those same standards with any partnership I enter. Club Champion sets a high bar for expertise and service and they deliver. My clients have returned completely satisfied with the experience and the fits have proven time and time again to be spot on. I can say without hesitation that the partnership with Club Champion has been outstanding."



Cathy MacPherson, LPGA
Golf Channel Academy
Lead Coach at Ferncroft CC
in Middleton, MA

"My members have taken advantage of the best club fitters in the country at Club Champion. They love knowing that by doing so it also benefits their club professional. I would highly recommend you partner with Club Champion and start receiving your checks. It will be the easiest money you have ever made."



Barry Linart, PGA
Head Golf Professional
Blue Mound G & CC in
Wauwatosa, WI

"Club Champion has provided my players a unique fitting experience with the best technology available and plenty of options to choose from, if the player is looking for specific club head and shaft options available on the market. We have plans to host private fitting events for my players within my regions which is a great relationship builder for everyone involved. I look forward to a great 2019!"



Sean Lanyi, PGA
Golf Channel Academy with
Sean Lanyi in Portland, OR



THEIR RESOLUTIONS CAN COME TRUE



By **Andy Hilts**, *Director*

We've left 2018 behind and hung a new calendar on the wall. In the process, many of us have made vows about changing certain patterns and habits. In other words, we've made our New Year's resolutions. And if you think about it, these resolutions are almost always aimed at some form of self-

improvement—whether that's about weight control, a new fitness regimen, sticking to a spending budget, or any other noble cause.

It's not hard to satirize the whole process of making resolutions, given how soon many of them become abandoned, but people truly mean well when they pick out a goal that they know will improve their lives if they can achieve it.

Improving at golf is, of course, a common example. And as golf instructors, we're in the rare position of being able to help people fulfill a serious resolution for the New Year.

So take advantage of this important moment in time and of the desire golfers have to hit the ball better and shoot lower scores consistently. Get into a conversation with your golfers about it. The new year is your reason for dusting off your database and reaching out. "New year, new goals" is the short form of what you're messaging to your audience. But strike while the iron is hot—don't let January drag on.

Your own goal as you contact your students and prospects in this crucial period of weeks is to schedule a more formal time to sit down and build them a coaching plan for 2019. During your initial discussion, relay the fact that as their coach it truly is your job to make sure you lay out a plan of improvement for the coming year.

Tell them on the phone call that it's the time of year you sit down with each student to build a plan for the season ahead. This vital step will ensure they maximize the value of their lessons and give themselves the best chance to reach desired goals. From there, schedule a normal lesson with additional time on the back end of the session, 15 to 30 additional minutes, that will allow you to sketch out a detailed plan together.

If they have lessons scheduled currently, reach out and tell them you're going to tack on 15 minutes, or better yet 30, to the lesson they have scheduled. This will be devoted to a specific discussion of goals and the strategy for attaining them in 2019. I would recommend not charging for this time, as you will be using it to set yourself up for a larger sale of lessons or a coaching program in the future. Make sure to explain that this extra time will cost them nothing. It's designed to make the new season's lessons and practice as effective as possible.

Once you have their interest on that first call, begin to discuss the good and bad of the 2018 season—and more importantly their hopes for 2019. See if there are specifics such as bunker play, their driving game or even a milestone score they want to start breaking, be it 90, 85 or whatever. Talking 2019 allows you to progress into booking the initial lesson plus the block of time afterward, when you'll lay out your long-range plan together.

Take the mindset that you are their coach and thus you're responsible for giving each student the best chance possible to bring their game to new heights in 2019. If you're really effective with your in-person session you'll end up converting many of your students to long-term programming and—even more important—getting their commitment to take lessons on a weekly or every-other-week basis. If they work with you diligently, they have an excellent chance of achieving—or even exceeding—their goals for golf performance in the year ahead. **PG**

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OFF-SEASON IS IDEAL, BUT THIS EXCLUSIVE TOOL IS A YEAR-ROUND ALLY

LEVERAGE THE POWER OF THE 'PUNCHLIST'

By David Gould, Staff Editor

Running a business is like owning a boat. Most of the time the boat is in the water, just as most of the time the business is operating. But sometimes you need to haul a boat into dry dock and make it ship-shape again. The equivalent for Proponent Group instructors is any relatively quiet period when you can dig into our exclusive Punchlist tool and use it to streamline, safeguard and optimize your business activities.

We tend to use a second transportation analogy to encourage more frequent use of the Punchlist—the highly trained cockpit crew studying their plane's instrument panel and proceeding through a pre-set series of checks and verifications. That is their go-to process for making sure that all will go according to plan once the aircraft gets airborne and the passengers—the equivalent of your students—are in their seats expecting nothing short of totally professional service.

Since this seven-page document was first compiled and made available in 2017, all new members of Proponent have been sent a hard copy of it as part of their welcome package. Along with the document has come a message of encouragement aimed at getting members to make a habit of referring to the Punchlist and following its sequential and comprehensive reminders, which are divided into Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly, Twice-a-Year and Annual time segments, depending on the activity being recommended.

Those activities are the blocking and tackling that make the year go by in seamless fashion for anyone who teaches golf for a living. They consist of fundamentals involving your database, website functionality, personal data,

insurance coverage, marketing strategy, certifications, tax filings, instruction programming, communication with your audience and reporting to higher-ups, to name a few.

Under many of these items you will find Assets to Assist. These are guides, templates, video presentations and other tools stored in the member-



Pilots have their pre-flight checklist and Proponent members have a tool on the website called the Punchlist—designed to help your business fly right!

On Proponent Group's new website, the Punchlist can be found on the Home page just below the fold. Note: Members who get the most value from this tool download the document, print it out and keep it handy.

only section of the Proponent Group website. You can readily deploy and customize these assets to help you complete a given task. In that sense the Punchlist is really a microcosm of the entire Proponent Group website, with its vast array of relevant resources and business-supporting assets. In most cases our new members are very good in some or many of the areas, adequate in some and not very good in at least a few.

As noted, for each sub-category we provide a time interval when review and action steps would be most appropriate. We do suggest you go back over the entire list annually, and use this yearly review to re-prioritize your greatest opportunities as well as your most vital needs. With the new year upon us, it's an ideal time to do just that. **PG**

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CLUBFITTING MARKET EXPANDS AS THE TEACH-FIT INTERFACE KEEPS EVOLVING

By David Gould, Staff Editor

Golfers make compensating swing moves when a fitter hands them less-than-optimal clubs to hit. It's an instinctive reaction to unsatisfactory feel and ball flight. The most talented players make those compensations quickest—needing only subtle changes to their hand action, path, angle of attack and so forth.

The story of Cody Blick, a young tour player forced to use a thrown-together set during final-round play of the Web.com Tour's Qualifying Tournament, sheds light on how the swing, the brain, the emotions and the equipment can interact to influence a round. As you've likely heard, Blick fired a 9-under 63 that day to race up the leaderboard and earn mid-level eligibility for the 2019 Web.com season. Interesting details on Blick's round will come later, but first a check of golfer reaction on Twitter to what occurred.

This comment kicked things off: "Just goes to show ya it ain't the clubs, it's the one swinging them!" Not long afterward came this: "And clubfitters everywhere are crying in their cereal." The ultimate cliché about custom equipment and golf talent also hit the screen—"It's not the arrow, it's the Indian."

It is either bizarre or quite predictable that people keep repeating this incorrect notion. Obviously, a vast number of golfers who once felt they weren't good enough to benefit from clubfitting have been convinced otherwise, by going through the process and coming out with woods and irons that allow them to improve swing technique and hit better shots. Nick Sherborn, founder and CEO of Club Champion, the leading "storefront" clubfitting company, believes a tipping point is possible in the coming few years, in which knee-jerk repetition of that "arrow/Indian" statement tails off dramatically.

"It's not guaranteed, because the idea is so ingrained, but we'll be doing our part to counter it and the media, along with the major manufacturers, are able to play a big role, as well," says Sherborn. Through a new agreement, Proponent Group has aligned itself with Club Champion in a variety of ways. In particular the partnership provides a bridge between Club Champion and Proponent members who aren't active fitters and want a resource where the gear side of their players' needs can be met in a high-level manner.



In Web.com qualifying last month, Cody Blick and his 63 with borrowed clubs reignited a debate.

They aren't quite in the "pop-up retail" category, but companies like Club Champion, Cool Clubs, True Spec Golf and Hot Stix are certainly able to open new locations at a much faster clip than the big-box golf specialty chains that sell everything under one roof—GOLFTEC can do so as well, and indeed it's been focused more on fitting lately.

Club Champion, according to Sherborn, is now in its 10th year and has a sizable footprint—62 stores, 150 trained clubfitters and a business that reliably operates at an annual profit. Some 20 new locations are planned for 2019, even as the other storefront fitters also work to expand.

"We made headway faster than I expected," says Sherborn. "To enjoy golf to the fullest, people absolutely need clubs that work properly for them."

Club Champion has never been in the teaching business, and has no intention of getting into it. To spread the word about clubfitting's value, the company spends ad dollars in Golf Digest and GOLF Magazine, as well as on Golf Channel and XM Radio. This kind of marketing to golfers about improving performance by working with gear experts mirrors what's been done in recent years by Golf Channel Academy to promote instruction by advertising nationally.

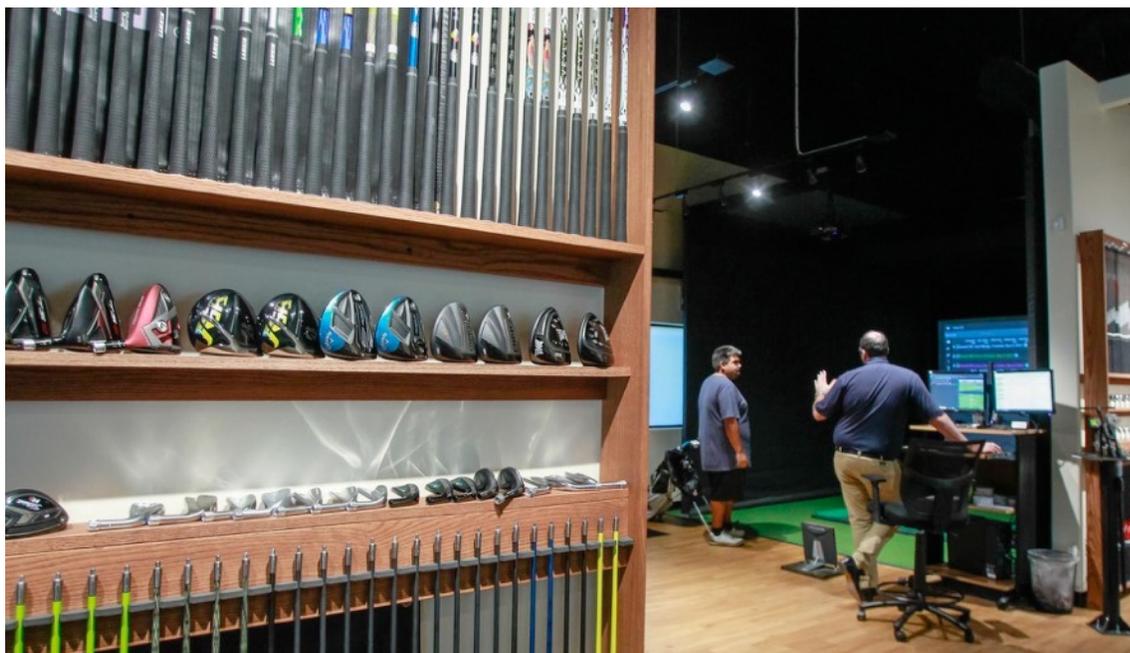
There will always be Proponent Group members who have a talent for fitting clubs, enjoy doing it and connect teaching with fitting in an organic way. One such member is Bill Abrams, director of instruction at Golf Solutions Academy in Crete, Ill. For Abrams there are multiple reasons to keep the gear aspect of golf performance under his aegis. Generally speaking, it enhances continuity in the teacher-student relationship, he argues quite convincingly.

"We give students whatever we can to help them improve, whether that's swing technique, a fitness regimen, better course management—and those things tie back to equipment," says Abrams. "A student can build their core and their upper body and at that point the clubs may need another look. With the juniors, especially the boys of a certain age, I might switch them through two or three shafts in a single year."

Cost on shaft changes of this type is no big factor, either. Abrams sources UST shafts at a discount, he uses PGA Trade-in services liberally and he's "built a library of fitting shafts over the years that gives [him] a lot of options." Shaft couplings that allow instant switch-out, no epoxy needed, also facilitate Bill's

approach. Even set configuration can be affected by what gets taught. Take the new style of on-course training many teachers emphasize, in the Vision54 or DECADE mold: Improved strategic thinking that a golfer comes to learn may lean him or her toward a couple of new hybrids that offer superior control and a better chance to play from optimal positions.

Meanwhile, fitting has an artistic side, in which the golfer sees and feels results that are simply pleasing to the eye. "The trajectory of the shot, the curve, the full flight, the hang time—all those things matter to



Club Champion stores—62 total—generate traffic primarily through word-of-mouth referrals.

golfers," Abrams says. The gear side of Bill's annual revenue comes to between 15 and 20 percent, he says. And that's not counting the loyalty factor among lesson-takers that his skill and ingenuity as a fitter helps build.

Proponent Group member and expert clubfitter Matt Wilkes, of the Mike Bender Golf Academy north of Orlando, makes similar statements about the "art" side of fitting, as well as the value of an outdoor setting and teacher-student interactions that continue over time. "How do you fit wedges indoors," Wilkes asks, "with no turf and no divot? Indoors you really can't evaluate bounce and sole grind. We have a full-scale indoor fitting bay, but it's only a few steps out to the grass range to check on things that you

Score isn't everything: Just as golfers take lessons in hopes of making their swings look better, they go through fitting sessions hoping to improve the feel at impact and to produce a ball flight that fits their eye.

can't determine indoors."

In light of all this, what happened with Casey Blick and the randomly assembled set of clubs?

Waking up four shots outside the number that was needed to earn even minimal privileges on that tour, Blick found himself with no clubs—his set had been swiped from the garage of the Airbnb he was staying in near the Chandler, Ariz., tournament site. The next two hours were a fire-drill search for 14 sticks he could bring to the first tee of Whirlwind Golf Club by 10:39 to avoid a DQ. Help came from many directions, including local Titleist reps, the golf shop staff and the wife

of the course superintendent, but clubfitting protocols went out the window, according to a source who witnessed the proceedings—no sole tape, no lie boards, no launch monitors.

By a fluke, Blick's old sand iron was available, courtesy of a former college teammate who was working the event as a coach and had the club with him. Blick also had his backup 2-iron and 3-iron, which the thieves had missed. Titleist reps came to the rescue with a driver and 3-wood which one news report described as "semi-close" to what Blick normally played. Wedges were plucked from Whirlwind's stock of demo clubs. The middle irons were the biggest wild cards—lent to him by superintendent Jonathan Williams, who does compare to Blick in height and build, for what that's worth.

The key to Blick's rash of birdies on his first nine may have been the attitude he and his caddie took to a string of approach shots with those "mystery spec" irons. Interviewed on Golf Channel's "Morning Drive," Blick said the lack of information about how the irons would perform led to a game plan of firing directly at pins, "to see what happens." He birdied three

of the first five holes on that nine and ended up with seven birdie putts of less than five feet. One obvious point was Blick's absolute need to go low. Under other circumstances the player and caddie using borrowed clubs could easily have defaulted to a strategy of aiming for the middle of the green on approach shots, not chasing tucked pins.



The range at the Mike Bender Golf Academy, where Matt Wilkes does his clubfitting, teaching and repair work, has mats and natural turf, plus a set of wedge targets. The result is an ideal wedge-fitting environment.

Matt Wilkes heard this and immediately reflected on "how we play some of our best rounds with rental clubs," based on the grip-and-rip attitude we're allowed to take when we're deprived of our cherished personal sets. In Matt's view, the benefits of this freewheeling frame of mind are quite temporary, "otherwise golfers would be asking to purchase those rental sets and looking to trade in their custom-fit sets."

From his comments, it's clear Cody Blick went through his round inspired by deep gratitude toward those who had rushed to his aid, perhaps sensing the additional satisfaction he'd feel in honoring their efforts by shooting

a heroic number. Clubfitting geeks would surely wish to perform an analysis of the emergency set to compare specifications between it and the stolen set. But, as Wilkes points out, "very talented players adapt to anything, without necessarily realizing it." On that basis, as Blick's round progressed, he would have become at least partially dialed into the irons and woods he was swinging.

By all means there was magic to the performance, but there are also some logical explanations for how it all came together. **PG**



Proponent member Bill Abrams, appearing in a YouTube video, explains lie angle and its effect on ball flight.



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CASE STUDIES OF TEACHER - STUDENT COLLABORATION

UGLY-DUCKLING COLLEGIAN GUIDED BY STOOKSBURY TO GEORGIA AMATEUR WIN

By David Gould, Staff Editor

The photo on this page shows an impressive-looking young man holding his trophy with pride and seeming every bit the classic college golfer. What the picture doesn't show is Justin Connelly's full swing, especially the takeaway and his position at the top. Connelly, three years into a coaching program with Proponent Group member Brandon Stooksbury, won the 2017 Georgia State Amateur Championship with a golf swing so loopy and awkward-looking other players would turn away when he cranked it into motion.

Every golf coach who works with elite players reaches that point in time when one of them starts asking about a swing overhaul.

"They'll talk about needing to 'break through' or 'move up' or something like that," says Stooksbury, director of instruction at Idle Hour Golf Club in Macon, Ga. "It's understandable, but believing a big change to your swing mechanics is the answer is problematic."

In fact, Stooksbury "spent three and a half years trying to get him to do anything else but." This was based on Justin having been "a world-beater as a junior" and a player whose ball-striking and ball flight in practice suggested he could continue to be an excellent tournament golfer. The longer he competed on the golf team at Mercer University, however, the more self-conscious he became about his funhouse-mirror swing. Connelly gripped the club in his palms, with a strong right hand. From address he took it straight up in the air, then laid it off with a shut face. His forward swing was a recovery act that somehow delivered him to a very sound impact position.

"In an evaluation-type setting, the ball went where it should and his miss was consistent and predictable," Stooksbury says. "In tournaments, his performance was bad and getting worse. Justin would rarely ever swing with freedom—that was his kryptonite, and it came from his belief that he didn't have a legit swing."

Stooksbury began strategizing to reverse the slide. He set up a program focused on wedge play, mainly

greenside but anywhere a partial swing was called for. "Justin's wedge swing looked much more normal than his full swing, so I would show him the video of it," recalls the coach. "I would draw lines and talk about good hand position, good plane, all these reassuring things."

Over time, Connelly became much more adept at getting up and down for par, which boosted his confidence playing second shots to par-4s. It was another pathway to "swinging with freedom," the student's longstanding trouble spot. Stooksbury did work the full swing diligently, but with an approach that focused on ball flight and impact conditions. The funky mechanics left Connelly little choice but to play a draw, so it became a matter of beautifying that right-to-left curvature and cleaning up impact angles as much as

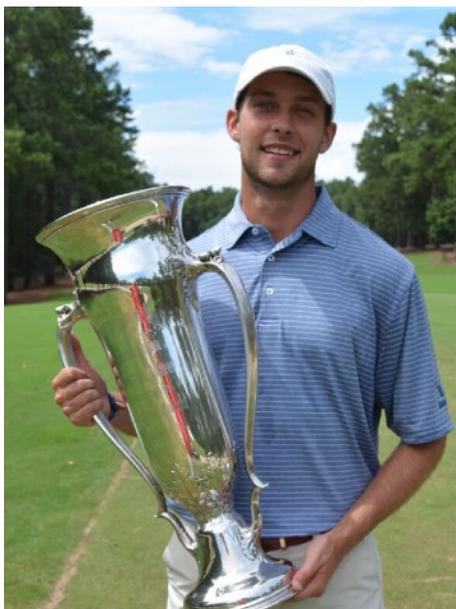
possible, in particular working to prevent a chronic de-lofting of the longer clubs. "The happier he got with his ball flight the better his swing looked to him," Stooksbury recalls. "And really the impact work did smooth him out some. He started thinking he could go to tournaments and not look so different from everyone else."

Over his last two years of eligibility at Mercer the scores improved, leading to a few top-10 individual finishes at tournaments.

Shortly after graduation in 2017, Connelly qualified for the Georgia State Amateur, to be played at West Lake County Club, in Augusta. A close friend who plays golf only casually was brought in to caddy—the coach liked the sound of that. "I could see them talking

about everyday stuff between shots, keeping Justin's mind off swing mechanics," says Stooksbury. "I got updates online throughout the tournament and I was on pins and needles the whole time, thinking one OB drive might send him over to the Dark Side."

Instead, Connelly won the event and in the process broke the tournament scoring record of 16-under, set nine years earlier by PGA Tour pro Russell Henley. "The Justin that was in there all the time came out," explains Brandon. Students make valuable changes in many ways, and sometimes, great coaching is about *preventing* something from happening. **PG**



2017 Georgia Amateur champ Justin Connelly



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WELCOME PROPONENT GROUP'S NEW MEMBERS FOR DECEMBER

THOMAS BARKSDALE, Stonebriar Country Club, Frisco, TX – *Associate Member*

TONYA DANCKAERT, Grand Slam Golf Academy at Bobby Jones G.C., Atlanta, GA – *Associate Member*

KRIS EHNES, Breezy Bend Country Club, Headingley, Manitoba, Canada – *Full Member*

JOHN GALYEAN, Ballantyne Golf Academy, Charlotte, NC – *Associate Member*

JUSTIN MARTIN, Grand Slam Golf Academy at Bobby Jones G.C., Atlanta, GA – *Associate Member*

TARA MORRIS, The Country Club at Castle Pines, Castle Rock, CO – *Associate Member*

STEWART O'MALLEY, Ballantyne Golf Academy, Charlotte, NC – *Associate Member*

Laird Small, Pebble Beach Golf Academy, Pebble Beach, CA

Chris Smeal, Future Champions Golf Academy, San Diego, CA

Kevin Weeks, Cog Hill Golf and CC, Lemont, IL

Nicole Weller, The Landings Club, Savannah, GA

Top 50 Growth of the Game Teachers:

Bill Abrams, Golf Solutions Academy, Crete, IL

Jason Baile, Belfair Plantation, Bluffton, SC

Craig Bocking, Ledges of Huntsville, Huntsville, AL

Carlos Brown, Carlos Brown Golf Academy, Rockwell, TX

Mike Carbray, Butterfield Country Club, Oak Brook, IL

Kandi Comer, Old Trail Golf Club, Crozet, VA

Alison Curdt, Wood Ranch Golf Club, Simi Valley, CA

Ryan Dailey, Operation 36 Golf Academy, Lillington, NC

Michael Dickson, Congressional Country Club, Bethesda, MD

Jim Estes, Olney Golf Park, Olney, MD

Chris George, Kingsmill Golf Academy, Williamsburg, VA

Mary Hafeman, Missing Links Golf Course, Mequon, WI

Noah Horstman, Beechmont Country Club, Beechwood, OH

Jennifer Hudson, Sankaty Head Golf Club, Siasconset, MA

Hank Johnson, Hank Johnson School of Golf, Mountain Brook, AL

Shawn Koch, Country Club of the South, Alpharetta, GA

Helen Kurtin, St. Louis Golf Academy, St. Louis, MO

Megan Padua, Bonita Bay Club, Bonita Springs, FL

Maria Palozola, Big Bend Golf Center, Valley Park, MO

Will Robins, Empire Ranch Golf Course, Granite Bay, CA

Trillium Rose, Woodmont Country Club, Rockville, MD

Adam Smith, Kinloch Golf Club, Manakin-Sabot, VA

Rob Stocke, Long Cove Club, Hilton Head, SC

Brandon Stooksbury, Idle Hour Golf Learning Center, Macon, GA

Tina Tombs, Arizona Biltmore Golf Club, Phoenix, AZ

Renee Trudeau O'Higgins, Quail West, Naples, FL

GOLF RANGE ASSOCIATION NAMES PLAYER-DEVELOPMENT WINNERS

Higher participation numbers drive success for the entire industry, which prompts the Golf Range Association of America (GRAA) to select leading **Growth of the Game** professionals. For 2018 those leaders are cited in a Top 50 list as well as in a new Elite Members roster, recognizing prior Top 50 status over multiple years. Proponent Group is well represented in both, as these two lists will attest.

GRAA Elite Member Status:

Sarah Bidney, Wakonda Club, Des Moines, IA

Brendon Elliott, Little Linksters, Deltona, FL

Ralph Landrum, World of Golf, Florence, KY

Bernie Najar, Caves Valley Golf Club, Owings Mills, MD

Rob Noel, Rob Noel Golf Academy, Abita Springs, LA

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Lori Bombka Operations Manager

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