

# What I've Learned: Martin Hall

## Ibis Golf & C.C., West Palm Beach, FL

Interview by Paul Ramee, Jr.



**Martin Hall has 30-plus years of experience as a golf professional, competing in tournaments on the PGA European Tour before pursuing a teaching career. His base of operations is the learning center at Ibis Golf & Country Club in West Palm Beach, where he serves as head of instruction. The winner of numerous awards for his teaching prowess, Hall was named 2008 National Teacher of the Year by the PGA of America.**

**Recognized as a Master Professional of the PGA of Great Britain, where he began his career, Hall is a fixture on the GOLF Magazine list of America's Top 100 Teachers. He has been part of the Golf Digest Top 50 Teachers since the inception of that rating system. He reaches a vast audience through his on-air work with Golf Channel, which has featured Hall on its airwaves for years. It all adds up to a life spent exploring the possibilities of on-course potential and studying new ways to train and coach golfers intent on reaching it. Recently, Martin and Paul Ramee put their heads together to explore that journey. Here's the edited transcript of their discussion:**

**Martin, since we last spoke in 2009, you haven't let a lot of grass grow under your feet. How about providing us with an update.**

I would say that I have used the last four years to try and get better at everything I do. That's a general statement. As you might imagine, using technology more effectively has been a focus.

**What kind of technology, in particular?**

I have been emphasizing 3D Advanced Motion Measurement, which has a very steep learning curve. It took me three years to get a handle on it and there were so many question marks along the way. But I feel I have learned a lot and in the end AMM has truly helped me in a research capacity—if nothing else it has given me a much better sense of what the hands and wrists do in the golf swing. It's a great tool, once you get used to it. Early on I was close to the throwing the whole business in the swimming pool.

**How does 3D Advanced Motion Measurement fit into your tech arsenal?**

I own a FlightScope, a TrackMan and Foresight as well. They are all great and I actually use them for different purposes. I use Trackman for clubfitting and FlightScope to find out what the ball is doing. I tend to use Foresight indoors.

**So, the more tech you have, you better the teaching—would you say?**

Actually, no. You really have to be careful with technology. You can paralyze people. They get into the habit of looking at read-outs and want to know what the numbers are on every shot. I have moved to a stage now where I teach without the device on. I can look at the ball flight and know what the device would have told me to a great degree.

**Have we gone too far with technology?**

Not yet, but we have to watch out. The younger professional needs to be reminded that teaching golf is also an art. If you were able to spend time around guys like Jim Flick, Manuel de la Torre and Bob Toski you would never lose sight of that, but if you didn't it has to be pointed out. Golf has been blessed by people who were great teachers without all the technology.

Newer teachers need to avoid using too much science and simply throwing numbers at people. They have to become adept at blending the numbers with the art of teaching.

**Talk about your television show and how it came about.**

Golf Channel had a contest and I had done some work on the network, but I really did not want to be involved in a talent search. I felt like I would be auditioning for "American Idol" and decided that I was not going to enter.

But the producers called me and told me I was already on their short list because I had done some work for them in the past. It came down to three of us, who each shot a pilot. A panel of Golf Channel viewers screened the shows then cast a vote. My pilot won.

**So you win the job, and all that's left to do is produce the episodes, correct?**

I will tell you, and Michael Breed can attest to this, filming a show is not at all easy. I have had teaching pros come up to me and



Martin Hall has been helping golfers of all levels at his base at Ibis G.&C.C. for nearly 20 years.

talk about filming two-minute segments for local TV broadcast. They are very positive about the opportunity and the experience, as they should be. But the difference between that and shooting a 30-minute show is enormous.

On the Golf Channel set I have two voices talking in my ear and one starts to count down, “15 seconds until a break, 12, 9, 6, 3, finish” and meanwhile I am trying to wrap up my chain of thought. There are five different cameras, and you better be looking into the right one.

Even if you nail what you are supposed to do, sometimes the technology does not work. All in all, a half-hour show probably takes up 20 hours of my time each week, between the phone calls, writing, travel and whatever else.

**After a while you must hear those voices in your ear, even when you're off the set.**

Not quite, but you are close. On the positive side, the TV production process has really helped me to crystallize my thinking when I am presenting information. After three years I have a lot of notes to help me write a book.

**Were you a natural in front of the camera from the start, or did you have jitters?**

The worst point of it all was filming the sixth and seventh shows, which were scheduled to feature Tom Watson and Nick Faldo, respectively. My wife and I rode up in the car to Orlando for the session and I was feeling anything but confident. At one point I told her I would prefer to head back home and get back into bed, I was so terrified. One way or another we kept going to the studio, and in hindsight those were two very good shows.

**Are you happy with the direction of the show?**

Yes, I really am. Golf Channel just decided to expand it from a half-hour to an hour. It is a program that has been developed to talk to the 15- to 20-handicapper. Going forward I am going to try to dedicate some time to give back to the tournament golfer. As I look back to when I played tournament golf, had there been a show or segment that could assist me in preparing to play tour-



**Martin Hall, on the set here with Holly Sonders, enters his fourth year as the host of School of Golf.**

nement golf it would have been most appreciated. So, this will give me a platform to share what I have learned on my journey.

**Are the skills that this medium requires any different than what you imagined?**

I would answer by mentioning how strongly influenced I was by a recent story on the comedian Rodney Dangerfield. Before reading this article I had assumed that Rodney's act was very off-the-cuff. That isn't the case at all. He would go to comedy clubs and study very subtle details in the performance technique of top comics—how they walked on and off the stage, how they sat, how and when they took a sip of water. This is actually what anyone going into a new venture should do. You can learn all the content you want from the best teachers in the world, but you should also watch how they stand, how often do they speak, when do they move in and discuss something, when do they back off? These traits are worth learning.

**What challenges do you see with the show expanding to an hour?**

When you break down a half-hour show there are only 22 minutes of actual airtime. Take away the minutes devoted to an intro and there is not much time for instruction. But things open when you go to an hour format. The extra minutes will allow us an expanded opening and more time for instruction.

**Can you explain your prep time?**

I learned early on that if you are ever invited to speak to a PGA section or chapter, make sure you are prepared, because it is a privilege to get that opportunity. You might think about this axiom: “You aren't truly prepared unless

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you are over-prepared.” Another great quote I heard was “for every word you are going to say, you need to have researched 100 words.” Only once did I go into something where my preparation was not 100 percent, and to me it was regrettable. I was presenting something I had presented a few years earlier and I was busy at the time. I gave the material a summary review and figured that once the session started it would all come back to me.

What happened was I got on stage and realized that this material was less than my best work. I don’t think anyone in the audience knew, but I did and I was mad at myself. We have to prepare for what we do the way Jack, Tiger or Phil would prepare for a major.

**What else have you been doing with yourself the last four years?**

Well, due to a faltering economy I have been able to join the Medalist, which has been great for me. With fellow members like Rickie Fowler, Tiger Woods and Dustin Johnson, the range is always full of great touring pros to watch. Two or three times I have been on the range and the only other player on the range was Tiger. It has been great to be so close to these guys and watch them practice.

**What advice would you have for up and coming golf professionals?**

I would share with them the simple thought that “Life rewards action.” I can say that because my story exemplifies it. I saw a tiny ad for the Golf Digest Golf Schools in the classified pages in the back of Golf Digest and wrote to Golf Digest expressing my interest. At a later date, I called Jim Flick and got a job with Nicklaus-Flick Golf Schools and that exposure led me to Golf Channel, which led me to a membership at the Medalist, which allows me to be on the range with Tiger Woods and watch how he practices. I would encourage anyone seeking career advice: Push yourself to take action.

Another example, I was filming something with Lee Westwood and when we were done I asked him if I could come and watch



**Martin Hall spends nearly 20 hours a week preparing and producing each 30 minute episode of School of Golf.**

him hit balls. He told me he was going to Asia for five weeks but when he returned I should send him a text. So I waited about six weeks and sent him a text and two minutes later he shot me back a text and we set up a date to watch him hit balls. Two things I try and remember, “if you wait it will not come” and “if it’s going to be, it is up to me.”

**What do you think about how we brand ourselves as instructors?**

I think “branding” is doing what you said you were going to do when you said you were going to do it. Basically, branding is consistency. For the young teachers a presence on Youtube and Twitter is important. In general you need a strong foundation.

To refer to another comedian, this time Steve Martin, think about his comment on building that foundation. Steve said: “You need to get so good at what you do that they cannot ignore you.”

**What are your thoughts on growing the game?**

One by one, our responsibility is to help the people who come to us get better, but I am not sure that anyone has a master plan to add a million new golfers. I think we have to inspire, entertain and get them to love the game.

**Talk to me about your creativity and how it helps you create aids and drills that help your students?**

I don’t know, maybe I just see things differently than others. I never found golf to be easy and over the years developed ways for students to enjoy the game we all love. Often, I come up with a solution by asking myself, “Would there be a different way to use this?” Some of the knack of creativity is bending things to a new purpose.

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