

What I've Learned: Larry Rinker

The Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grande Lakes, Orlando, FL

Interview by Paul Ramee, Jr.



When you say that a coach's "book is full," you generally mean their time is reserved far in advance with golf lessons and clinics. With Larry Rinker, you could certainly use the phrase that way. You could also use it more generally, to describe a life filled with golf-related pursuits and highly impressive achievements. A real page-turner, in this Proponent member's case.

For starters, the former PGA Tour player holds down two premier director-of-instruction jobs, in the South and West. He is in particular demand as a short-game instructor, with a roster of tournament players as clients. He's a national radio host, a broadcast veteran with SiriusXM, ESPN, Golf Channel and USA Network and he's part of a three-sibling act that includes fellow tour players Laurie (LPGA Tour) and Lee (PGA Tour).

If you want to make a deep dive into Rinker's area of highest expertise, sit down with his "Five Fundamentals of Being a Great Player," an online interactive ebook published in 2012 and revised in 2015. The subtle, precise challenge of high-level golf inside 100 yards is a focus of this publication, although it expands to cover a full gamut of tournament preparation—be it the club's fall member-member or a big-time tour event.

Realizing there was much to cover when he sat down with Larry for a Q-and-A session, Paul Ramee fired his questions briskly. Here's what came of that conversation.

Can you tell us about your upbringing and what it was like to be part of such a well-known golf family?

I got started at six when my older brother, Laine Jr., came home from a junior camp at Martin County Country Club and said, "Hey, there's a kid that's six out there, why don't you come out tomorrow? So I did. Golf became one of the only sports I could play in school after I had a kidney taken out later that year.

That's an unlucky break for an athletic boy, wouldn't you agree?

I had a 50/50 chance to live after my lungs collapsed following the opera-

tion. I was in the hospital for two weeks and when I got home my dad had a set of clubs waiting for me. I can still see it now.

Is it true that your family spent a lot of time together on the golf course?

My dad was a flower farmer who grew chrysanthemums. He started playing golf when he was 24 years old. He quickly fell in love with the game and saw it as a great family activity. He would joke that golf was "an easy way to babysit the kids," but he was serious about how valuable the game was in building family bonds. Golf was what we did as a family.

What about the competitive side, as you and Laurie and Lee became outstanding junior players?

My parents were very involved with our tournaments. They drove us to just about every one, and stayed to watch the competition. Whether it was junior, college or professional events, they always seemed to be there.

How much did you kids interact on your own?

We were always learning from each other. I remember when the "Square to Square" swing method was briefly popular and my brother Laine Jr. decided to model his swing on that concept in college. Looking back it was one of the worst concepts we have seen and I'm glad I didn't try it.



Sirius XM has allowed Rinker to call upon his experience as a player, instructor and broadcaster.

How did you get started with formal instruction?

My first teacher was a man named Mike Skevington, who was a Horton Smith disciple. He was a great teacher and had me walking our junior tournament courses and drawing the greens on a notepad so I could create a yardage book. Under him I improved steadily and broke 70 for the first time in my second tournament.

Were there other instructors who helped you develop?

In 1976, when I was 19, my father took me to see Bob Toski. I was an average college player at the time. Working with Bob, I made big improvements. It was his coaching that would elevate me from where I was to top-30 on the PGA Tour money list in 1985. Bob and my father created a nice bond as well.

When people talk about Toski they always mention his energy level and his powers of motivation, along with all his technical knowledge. Was that your experience?

I was very fortunate to have someone like Bob Toski mentor me. The experience was amazing. Bob played at the highest level and you just couldn't have a better coach. His teaching lineage is very strong. He was a phenomenal mentor and remains a close friend.

Any specific memories stand out?

The most important thing he taught me came in our first lesson. Bob instructed me to "get the left arm through the swing with speed." He told me that if I did that, the golf ball could never go left. He showed me as a right-handed golfer how to eliminate the left side of the golf course and still release the club.

From what Toski taught you as a player, are there things that carry over to your own teaching?

The list of things he taught me, that I still think about, is too long to go through here. He taught me the importance of communication, how to hit different shots, and how to control the path and club face with my arms, hands, and wrists.

What was the PGA Tour like in the 1980s?

To get out there in the '80s you did not have to be as good a player as you do now. Once you got through Tour School, you could learn and improve out on tour which for a lot of us was a requirement, to keep our cards. Life on tour was still not so different from the 60's and 70's— we used to drive around from

event to event and some guys would even drive to California from Florida for the West Coast swing. At some tournaments we still had to buy range balls. We were given coupons for 50 percent off our meals, which we ate in the clubhouse grill, mixed in with the members and guests. All of this was still better than the players had before us. We weren't pampered, except the superstars, and I think that created a closer bond among the players.

Did things gradually get less casual, as you continued your tour career?

Things changed pretty suddenly, actually. When the tennis player Monica Seles got stabbed at a tournament in 1993 it triggered some new policies. Then after 9/11 it really changed. Now there are fenced-in areas between the locker room and first tee for players to walk through along with other security measures.

What is your overall feeling on your decade-plus as a tour player?

I am blessed to have had the career I had. Of course I would have liked to have won, but I wouldn't trade one win and a few seasons on Tour for my 525 PGA Tour starts and 283 made cuts. I got to play with everybody.

You led the PGA Tour in eagles one season. What is the back story there?

Quite a shocker. And all the more so when you find out that Corey Pavin finished second! Corey and I were not exactly the two longest hitters out there. What is amazing is that I had 14 eagles for the year, and all but three of them by Hilton Head.

In 1985, you won the JC Penney Mixed Team Championship with your sister Laurie. Can we figure that was a memorable week for the Rinker family?

That was the high point of my career and yes, it was a very special thing for our family. Both of our parents were out there watching, and Laurie had Lee caddying for her. We beat a lot of future Hall of Famers. Back then, players like Curtis Strange, Greg Norman, Nancy Lopez and Betsy King played the Mixed Team. When Laurie and I won, we beat Curtis and Nancy, who both ended up as Player of the Year on the respective tours.

What was the impetus behind your transition from tour player to teacher?

In 2000 I was still playing decently but that would turn out to be the beginning of the end for



Larry Rinker made the cut in more than half of his 525 PGA Tour starts including a win with his sister Laurie in the 1985 JC Penney Mixed Team Classic

me. In 2001 and '02 I had fewer starts and not all that many good rounds, either on the PGA Tour or on what is now the [Web.com](#) Tour. My wife told me I needed to do something else, so by 2003 I had my real estate license and at the same time I was doing some teaching around Orlando. I worked on the team that was developing Ty Tryon, in his move straight from high school to the PGA Tour in 2001. I was working with some other juniors on their short-game skills. It felt good to be developing a niche following as a short-game teacher.

At that time my brother Lee was pursuing head-pro jobs. I took some cues from that and in 2008 I took a seasonal job as an assistant pro in Vero Beach. My salary was \$600 a week but the teaching income turned out to be significant. I remember that in my first 17 days I did \$4,000 in lessons. In 2009 I became a member of AMF, the predecessor organization to Proponent Group. In 2010 I landed a teaching job in Vail at the Red Sky Golf Club. That came to fruition through my involvement with Lorin Anderson at AMF. Getting that job in Colorado really changed the course of my career and so will the new position at The Ritz-Carlton.

How much fun is it to host your own XM / Sirius Satellite Radio Show?

I was fortunate to have that opportunity. The network already had Hank Haney, David Leadbetter and Jim McLean lined up to host golf instruction shows. They were looking for a fourth and I was the lucky guy Brian Hamilton with SiriusXM reached out to. It has been fun to call upon my experiences as a 34-year PGA Tour Veteran Member. I was fortunate to work with the best instructors in the game, people like Toski, Peter Kostis, Leadbetter, McLean, Chuck Cook, Mitchell Spearman and Robert Baker. I also played with the best players and we learned from each other. After trying to do television for quite a few years I finally got a real shot at being a broadcaster from XM covering the PGA Tour in 2008 thanks to Chris Castleberry. He took the time to coach me and help me improve, even asking me to take some voice lessons in Orlando in 2009. That said, I feel I now have a lot of insight as a former player, instructor, and broadcaster. I can say that I have learned a lot from the great guests that I have had on the show.

How did you develop your ebook?

I was sending email follow-ups to my students and I realized I was writing a lot of the same things, so I started copying and pasting them into a Word file and soon I had 3-5 pages on putting, short game, and distance wedges. I added golf swing and course management which became the fourth and fifth modules or fundamentals. I added pictures and two appendixes, on mental weapons and goal setting. When a friend looked at what I had he said all you need is a cover page and table of contents and at the last minute I added the 11 video lessons. I had an ebook.

What is wrong in golf instruction now?

I understand the kinematic sequence and the importance of the bigger muscles, but I also believe that the role of arms, hands and wrists is not talked about enough. Bob Toski always said the hands are the most influential part of the body and we are not teaching golfers hand-eye coordination today. I also think putting needs to be more intuitive and instinctive and less "engineered." Less than 10 percent of the people move the putter with their shoulders intuitively and instinctively and everybody has some hand and wrist action, according to 3D. Teachers need to understand each golfer better, and coach the person in front of them in

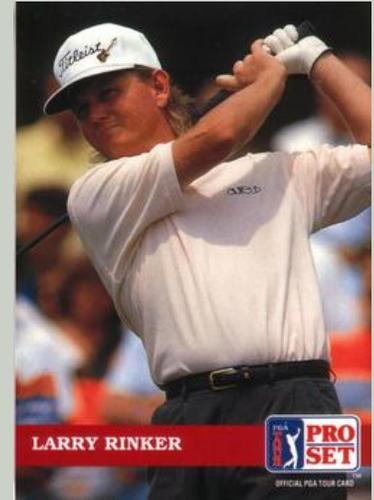
the ways that they can improve. I would also say that, in my view, the people who are teaching golf are not playing enough golf. I believe playing golf allows instructors to continue to learn new ways coach more effectively. It's their opportunity to try out new techniques and understand where people really want to improve their game the most.

Read any good books lately?

I used to read all the time. I was drawn to the game's psychology—authors like Bob Rotella, Dick Coop and Fred Shoemaker.

"I would say that the people who are teaching golf are not playing enough golf. Playing naturally allows instructors to coach more effectively. It's their opportunity to try out new techniques and add validity to their teaching."

-Larry Rinker



Is Larry Rinker in an old-school professional or new-school?

I would say I am a blend of the two. I try to hold onto the old-school values while keeping up with new-school tools and information. I feel that my work ethic and burning passion for the game has me trying to learn all I can and that means I need to learn as much as I can about tools like TrackMan so that I can simplify that information for my students. I follow up every lesson with video reviews and a copy of my ebook. To me follow-up is the great indicator of how much you care and that builds relationships. Highly developed communication skills is an old-school value. I remember how Toski used to chew our butts off if we answered him with the wrong word. Bob knew there was an art to communication and taught me those communication skills. Take the everyday golf-pro word "drill." Bob would tell us it was an "army term." He wanted us to be very precise and specific about the terminology we used.

What are you excited about learning for 2015?

In 2015 I want to learn more about how people move differently and coach into that. I think I need to better understand how to effectively coach players whether they have fast or slow hips. When I played competitively, some coaches tried to get me to turn faster through the ball with my core. It never worked for me. In general I will keep looking for new ways to help people move in the most effective manner possible. That way my students can keep their individual style and improve in the ways that they can. I want to be known as a teacher who works with what you have and helps you to get the club in a better delivery window coming into the ball, which will make your impact alignments better. I also want to help people understand their game so well that that they can fix themselves out on the course.