

# Member Q&A: “What I’ve Learned...”

## Dana Rader, Dana Rader Golf School

Interview by AMF member Paul Ramee



Dana Rader

**AMF Member Dana Rader is the owner of the Dana Rader Golf School in Charlotte, NC and is the LPGA’s T&CP National President.**

**This article continues our series featuring a variety of insights from top golf professionals and teachers who are part of the AMF community.**

**Tell us something about your professional journey, in particular, how you ended up owning your own academy.**

As a young girl I went to a summer sports camp for the neighborhood kids, and I really enjoyed it and that is where my dream probably started. Later, after college I went to LPGA Tour school in 1982 and was not successful. So I started my career as a teacher and I believed there was a void. It seemed there were not enough people taking teaching seriously. It was a way for them to subsidize their income, but not enough people were serious enough about teaching the game of golf.

In 1987 I was fortunate to go and work at Pine Needles for Peggy Kirk Bell. We would have 140 people in those schools and I started to get some good feedback from the students. Peggy eventually told me: “You do not belong in the golf shop, you belong on the lesson tee”.

One day a Pine Needles member happened to tell me: “You should own your own golf school.” With encouragement from other golf pros, I started my own two- and three-day schools.

I went out on my own with \$2,000 in the bank, more guts than sense and started the Dana Rader Golf Schools. I found out there were not a lot of models for Independent Contractors who were running golf schools. But, the experience made me a smarter business-woman, it taught me very quickly to save money in the summer for the slower winter months.

**Why did you decide to run for President of the LPGA?**

I ran about 12 years ago and at that time it was not the right time for me to run, I lost to the late De De Owens. This time around I ran for the right reasons. I want to make a positive impact and I believe I have the business and leadership skills to lead the organization. I am starting the second year of a three-year term and I have absolutely loved serving as President. We have a great Executive Director and Executive Committee and they

have helped me continue to grow and develop both personally and professionally.

**What is your take on the state of the game in women’s participation? Is interest still strong or have the changing demands from the workplace and families had a negative impact on participation?**

I have heard a lot about the growth of the women’s game and I am just not sure that the numbers are accurate. Over the years it has grown, but lately I believe it has leveled off.

However, my feeling is that this year we’re primed for growth. I am starting to see the enrollment in our beginner programs increase and the women in the game are staying in the game at increasing levels.

I think people are re-prioritizing their lives and we need to adapt to the constraints on their time by building courses that are shorter and more fun to play, which will ultimately take less time to play and will require less real estate.

**Only about five percent of golf professionals are women. What is your vision for women golf professionals to maximize their impact on the industry even though they represent a small minority of all professionals?**

I think the industry has done poor job with its marketing strategy to young women and we are discussing who the LPGA is in the minds of young people.

We are starting to go into the high schools and colleges and are explaining to the young women who will not make it on tour that we have jobs for them. We need to grow the game in our country among young women and it starts in the school systems and junior golf programs.

We have to then educate our young instructors that when we ask them to teach junior golf or a clinic for women beginners, that is not a low-level assignment. Rather, it’s a real opportunity to make an impact and get our young people into the game.

**– Dana Rader** **You are one of the top teachers in the game today. Can you talk about the people who had the biggest influence on your development?**

I would have to say the biggest influence on my career was my first teacher and pro at the club I grew up at. His name was Joe Cheves, he was a phenomenal man. He was in the Guinness Book of World Records for shooting his age the most times.

He was the true professional. The way he conducted himself and the passion and love he had for the game was contagious. He spent countless hours with juniors and I can easily say that I

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played over 100 rounds with him in my lifetime. He was a mentor, role model and friend all in one.

My time at Pine Needles also provided me with a lot of influences. Peggy Kirk Bell was very good to me. Annette Thompson taught me it was fine to take risks and helped me with my business plan.

**What advice do you give to young instructors about developing their teaching and coaching skills?**

I would tell young instructors to not get wrapped up in trying to teach good players. They will benefit the most from teaching new golfers. They will learn the progression of developing the golf swing, they will learn to teach in a variety of ways and they will learn how to adapt their teaching method. The beginner will teach you how to teach the game of golf. You really have to lose the mindset that you are too good to teach beginners.

As a new instructor it is important to keep your mind on developing yourself as well. You should have another competent instructor observe you teach, you should try and teach with others and observe other teaching.

**Your business model has included a lot of golf schools and corporate outings in the past. Is that side of the business still viable or are you shifting away from those types of programs?**

My business model is always under refinement. Each year I sit the team down and we brainstorm about the upcoming year and its opportunities. With respect to the recent downturn in the economy, in 2008 I had some people retire from my company and I elected to not fill those positions. In 2009 and 2010 business was fair.

This year I hired a Sales and Marketing Director. Also, we are opening up a new indoor facility and we believe it is important to focus on getting the message out about who we are and what we are doing.

**What are some of the keys to training younger pros to become good teachers. What do you focus on in the training of your academy teaching staff?**

We teach within a framework, we start by teaching our young instructors how we believe people should put their hands on the club and set-up, we teach a lot of short game. As a new teacher, you come to us and serve a two-year apprenticeship. You may do everything from running errands for the company to setting up the video equipment. When we believe it is time for you to teach we partner with you, we send out an email blast introducing you, we teach with you. We are very hands-on with our new instructors. We will have you teach in front of the other instructors and then you will receive feedback, both verbally from the group and a written report of your performance.

**How has your experience been with the LPGA's new commissioner, Michael Whan?**

Michael has been terrific, he has boundless energy and he really "walks the talk." He is available all the time, I receive emails from him at 6:00 am and 11:30 pm. He really is focused on making the LPGA the best it can be.

**The LPGA Tour is obviously a global tour but the T&CP side of the LPGA is mostly North America-based. Is there an opportunity for the T&CP to grow its membership overseas as the LPGA Tour has?**

We are currently exploring taking the Teaching and Club Professional side of the LPGA into new international markets. American teachers and professionals are very well respected in the countries where golf is really growing now and that is an opportunity.



**Dana Rader, LPGA T&CP President, is ranked by Golf Digest among the 50 Greatest Teachers in America.**

**What is the key to filling the pipeline with new golfers?**

We need to realize the game's growth comes through our teaching and how we reward the assistant pros who are responsible for keeping the youngsters and beginners in the game. All teachers need to have the fire and passion to inspire and keep the junior golfers in the pipeline. We need to work harder and better as teachers to share more information and really unite with each other to grow the game for all of our benefit.

We have to be very careful how much we discount golf and our teaching fees. Pricing is very important in the current economy. Our students' perceived value of our instruction product is a key component as to whether or not students are going to keep coming back for more lessons and paying our rates. Are we providing the kind of value that we expect from others?