

What I've Learned: Andrew Rice

Berkeley Hall, Bluffton, SC

Interview by Paul Ramee, Jr.



Just as the world-class learning center at Berkeley Hall was opening its doors in 2001, Andrew Rice was joining the club as its director of instruction. For residents of this golf community near Hilton Head, S.C., it was a promising combination of teaching professional and practice complex. A native South African, Rice had played many a match against Retief Goosen and Ernie Els in the junior ranks. Following a stellar NCAA career he took a stab at the touring-pro life, moved

into teaching, worked in the Leadbetter organization and grew in his commitment to being a top instructor.

Andrew's approach has always been a combination of discipline and creative thinking. Diligent enough to make himself a TrackMan Partner as well as a SwingCatalyst Ambassador, he is also the type who will take a step back and ask "why" about any aspect of the craft. Rice ended up writing a book after conducting what he calls his "self-education project" in the fundamentals of impact. That effort yielded information that he felt was otherwise unavailable—thus the book.

It is titled "It's All About Impact – The Winners of Over 100 Majors Prove It!" and it studies the swings of 25 top golfers of the steel-shaft era. On the dust jacket is an endorsement from Nick Price that praises Rice's "dedication and passion to play, teach, and constantly discover the intricacies of our great game." Andrew's two sons are American boys fixated on baseball, which has led their father happily into a youth baseball coaching stint. Some of his fellow Proponent Group members heard Rice present at Live Lessons Day during the recent PGA Show week. For everyone else in the group, his thoughts on a broad range of subjects are gathered here from a recent one-on-one with Paul Ramee.

Andrew, can you talk about your career path and how it led you to where you are today?

I came to America from South Africa in 1987. I had been recruited to play college golf at the University of Central Florida. So, my first four years in the U.S. were spent in Orlando at UCF. We had a top-20 program at the time and I was fortunate to have been selected as a second-team All-American as well as a two-time Academic All-American.

After graduation I played the mini-

tours and went to PGA Tour qualifying school, without much success. I then had an opening to work for David Leadbetter and I took that opportunity. I was on staff of the David Leadbetter Academy for six years, from 1995 until 2001. At that point I moved on to Berkeley Hall, a golf community with two Tom Fazio 18-hole courses. It's located in Bluffton, S.C., not far from Hilton Head. I've been at Berkeley Hall now for almost 15 years.

That's considered one of the great practice facilities.

It certainly deserves that distinction. We worked hard to develop programs and a learning environment to match. We had a lot of success, and then along came 2008 and the economic downfall. In the aftermath of that, I took a look around and told myself it was time to either "step up or step out." In 2009 I wrote a book called "It's All About Impact." The next year in 2010 the TrackMan technology really took off and it help validate the concepts and teachings that are in the book. I've been able to stay on a nice run since then.

What was your most important takeaway from your years at the Leadbetter Academy?

When I went to work for David, I figured this guy is a top-10 teacher in the world. You could make a case that he was No. 1 worldwide. Therefore, he is going to know everything, right? That's what I assumed, but it turned out not to be the case. It was clear that David really kept an open mind. He kept on learning because he didn't think he knew it all. He taught me to think outside the box.

So, you were conscious that achieving success as a golf instructor brings the responsibility to avoid getting too comfortable, right?

That's correct. Which was good, because once we got established at Berkeley Hall—I'd pinpoint the 2005-07 period—revenue came very easy to us. Then the economy cratered, and things on the revenue front were more challenging. I saw the need to bring new energy and ideas to our program.

Writing a book can be a big undertaking. How did you get started on yours?

I wrote the book because I had not seen a lot of work done on impact, and I was personally curious about it. I decided to learn whatever I could about it. Eventually I got to the situation of having a lot of material and not knowing how to present it. I had all these pieces, how could I bring them together? Fortunately, my wife is a great organizer and we put in a lot of late nights.



Rice at work with a Berkeley Hall member.

Putting something on paper—that’s how you find out if your ideas really hold water.

It truly is the test. Sitting down to write I found that I could indeed justify my position on the subject of impact and swing mechanics. It really is one of the best things I have done and it supports what I had thought and what I am teaching and it has opened up so many new students. Now with a website, Twitter and Facebook it continues to grow.

What is a typical day at the office like for Andrew Rice?

I still teach one-hour lessons and I typically teach six or seven of them a day. I spend about one hour each day on social media. That effort will tend to generate one new student a week. Most days start with the four of us in the car—my wife and I and our two boys, getting them over to school in the morning.

Have you ever looked into having someone handle your social media communications for you?

I have, and pretty quickly I dropped the idea. That approach seems very commercial to me. I like to have personal control over what is going out.

Talk to me about your mentors.

Well, obviously David Leadbetter really blazed the trail for me. David’s style is to push his people not to not take things at face value, to challenge the conventional wisdom.

What are the major differences you see between golf and instruction in South Africa and America?

Junior training in South Africa is more broad-based, I would say. South African kids tend to get out and play and compete. In America the instruction is more on the technical side and lacks an equivalent on-course component.

TrackMan produces a lot of information, how do you pick and choose what to share with the student?

The benefit is that there is as much information as I want and it then becomes my responsibility to share what’s important. I like to use the analogy that when I go to my accountant, there are lots of numbers floating around, but it is his job in five minutes or less to relay to me the important information. He has to filter what’s there so I have what I need to understand the situation.

So, you are responsible for filtering—is that it?

TrackMan also keeps the golf instructor accountable. If we have a goal to move the club path from -7 to +2, it’s up to me to prescribe the drills and coach the player through the change. So I am getting constant feedback as to whether what I am doing is working. In the end, the student must take ownership of the drills. That’s another end result that I will be working to make happen.

As data points multiply, can the question of what to prescribe become thorny?

I use the Rubik’s Cube analogy. You’re making various moves until you succeed in getting one side of the cube to be all one color. Now it’s time to work on other side. But in doing so you find that have to break up that first side, the one you thought was all set. That’s when you realize how intertwined the entire process is. I compare that to a golf coach using TrackMan. The data is all interrelated and it takes time to learn how the numbers relate to each other.

What do you find that is new and exciting for 2014?

I think the golf industry has a great vibe for 2014 and beyond. There are so many young golf instructors now who are passionate, well-informed and keen to learn more. I see that and I have the sense that we are in great hands going forward.

Are you viewing this period as sort of a golden era, for people coming into the golf coaching field?

It’s a dynamic period, that’s for sure. Opportunities to learn are everywhere. When I was younger I walked around thinking, “I really have this down.” I felt there was not much more for me to learn. Over time I’ve realized it is just the opposite. You can study and study and you no matter what you won’t be able to learn absolutely everything.

What’s the solution?

For me it’s all about creating a stable of knowledgeable friends. If you do that you can continue to try and learn though attending seminars and clinics and talking within your network. You’ll be able to share ideas with people who have a similar passion. At some point you have to choose where you want your streams of



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information to come from. I see younger people who have way too many streams. They are all over the place and they have to realize that you cannot be everything to everyone.

Any other advice you may have for these young instructors?

I see them as being very sound with respect to the swing motion, which is a good thing. They still need to study the communications skills of the great instructors. That comes with time if you give it the attention it needs.

How about over the long term—how would you counsel the younger professional?

I would offer this advice: Pick one or two aspects of golf performance that appeal to you and really specialize in those categories. Become an expert on them. I would also suggest that you seek out knowledge and challenge what is widely believed. Listen to the best, take what you like and try to present it in a new way. A bit of guidance I give myself is this: “Try not to be normal.” If you can specialize, challenge information and “not be normal” you will be able to differentiate yourself from others.