

WHAT I'VE LEARNED: ANN MARIE GILDERSLEEVE

DIRECTOR OF INSTRUCTION, AUSTIN COUNTRY CLUB, TX

INTERVIEW BY PAUL RAMEE, JR

When fresh-faced young golf professionals show up for their first job interviews, virtually all say they have embarked on this career out of a deep love for the game—further, they're dead certain nothing will cause their devotion to waver. Hearing such assertions, veterans of this challenging business sometimes wonder in silence if things will indeed work out that way.

Proponent Group member Ann Marie Gildersleeve is the living embodiment of the young golf instructor who threw herself into the job with unbridled passion and never lost her spark. A dual PGA and LPGA member, she is director of instruction at the venerable Austin Country Club. She was honored in 2014 as Teacher of the Year in the Southern Texas PGA, an accolade to go with her four Teacher of the Year selections in that section's Western Chapter. She is a three-time U.S. Kids Top 50 Teacher (2005, 2006, 2007) and in 2008 received the US Kids Master Kids Teacher Award. Known as

an expert clubfitter, she also serves on the Leadership Advisory Staff of Titleist. Formerly a senior instructor at the Harvey Penick Golf Academy, she is the founder and executive director of the Harvey Penick Foundation. Ann Marie is the co-author of the Harvey Penick Teaching Manual for Instructors, and contributing writer for numerous publications within the industry. On pages 4-5 of this newsletter you can read about her PGA Show presentation to fellow Proponent members. Below you'll find a lengthy look at Ann Marie's career and her many discoveries, through Paul Ramee's recent one-on-one talk with her.



Gildersleeve gets to work with many top juniors at her home base at Austin Country Club. The pennants in the hitting bay attest to their continued success at the next level.





Gildersleeve has spent nearly 20 years at Austin Country Club, home of one of her mentors, Harvey Penick of “Little Red Book” fame.

How did you get introduced to the game?

I lost my dad to cancer when I was nine and my grandfather stepped in and spent a lot of time with me and my siblings. He loved the game of golf and would frequently take me with him to the course. I’m sure a lot of his friends thought he was babysitting me, but his love for golf was passed along to me. Plus, he taught me so much about the game.

As a kid I played sports like hockey and softball. I had three brothers who were all athletes and we played any sport that was in season. Playing with the boys taught me to be tough and wipe away the tears.

But you ended up specializing in golf.

I progressed along as a player and eventually knew that I would rather help others enjoy this great game than pursue the playing side. I joined the LPGA first, which provided me great insights, then I became a member of the PGA. Having dual membership in the two associations provides me with great relationships and insights that I don’t think you get when you are a member of just one association.

Sounds like you had good antenna for valuable learning experiences, all along.

I would say that’s true. It certainly applies to my connection with my second mentor, the legendary instructor, Harvey Penick. Harvey’s “Little Red Book” challenged me to develop my eyes. At that time VHS was the only video available and I felt more “zoomed in” when I used video, felt that I could see things better. There was an opportunity to interview for the

Teaching Professional position at Austin Country Club and during my interview Dale Morgan offered me the chance to come out and teach twice a week. I wrestled with accepting a part-time position. Dale, who turned out to be my third mentor, then called me back the next day and offered me a full-time position. I said yes right away and I’ve been at Austin CC for 18 years.

How would you describe the club, and the experience of working there?

We have a pretty extensive waiting list and people don’t drop off it—they’re willing to wait for their chance to join. I attribute the wait list to the success of the club and the environment we’ve been able to create. It is certainly a family club, where everyone is welcome. Dale is only the third head professional the club has employed, going back to 1899, so the stability of the head-pro position and the quality of the people who’ve held it has been key to our success.

You’re known for working with juniors, but would you say you teach the full gamut of players?

I would, for sure. I could be teaching a beginner one lesson and a tour player the next, so that variety really keeps it exciting. I remember working with Tom Kite in 2008. Tom will take a lot of lessons and get different viewpoints, which is great. So, in 2008 we were working together and I told him just to stay on point. I told him, “If you do that, you will win again.” We discussed a timeframe of three months for that goal, to get him where he



Harvey Penick's son Tinsley told Gildersleeve to carry on his father Harvey's legacy, but to also "create her own."

needed to be. As it turns out, on the 90th day he won—the 2008 Boeing Classic.

In a case like Tom Kite's, where he is taking in all that information, what happens if he decides it won't work? How does he "unravel" where he is?

He does it himself. Tom has amazing confidence and the ability to "self-fix" and sort through what he thinks is working. That's a skill golfers need to learn. Even my juniors are given that chance, or you could say, that responsibility. I let them start the conversation and direct what we're going to do—unless they're lost and need me to get them grounded again.

How active are you on Social Media?

My social media extends to the person in front of me. I will text my players to stay in touch, but I focus on the person in front of me, and that relationship.

Austin Country Club recently hosted a WGC event. That must have been memorable.

It was eye-opening. The tour, the players and the local fans got to see what Austin CC was all about—what an amazing place it is. As a staff, we gave up the learning center for the week to the caddies. But, we were on the range and got to really zoom in on the tour players' swings and interact with them.

Following a legend in Harvey Penick must have been a daunting task—how did you accomplish it?

Coming from the Harvey Penick Golf Academy and moving to Austin Country Club, I was excited and felt prepared to carry on Harvey's legacy right there at his home club. I never lost sight of his insights and how he shared those insights with his students. His son Tinsley told me to carry on his legacy, but also told me: "Create your own."

Any favorite passages from Harvey's books?

There are so many, but my favorite is "Take Dead Aim." No matter what you do, it applies. "Take Dead Aim" means so much more than just hitting a ball to your target. He left the books behind to help others, it is great to be the one that meshes the old—meaning, his writing—with the new, and by that I mean all our technology for coaching.

I read the books daily. They provide me emotional support. With my younger students, it's nice to see his books come alive through our work together. It is my goal to keep his books alive, and you'll see a customized logo made up of a silhouette of Harvey and the words "Take Dead Aim" on every piece of golf apparel I own.

As you are "meshing" the old and the new, what are your thoughts on technology?

I often ask, "What Would Harvey Do?" I believe he would embrace it as a tool and use it when necessary. He would definitely assess whether it would help the player. His use of video was a matter

Gildersleeve focuses on building long-term relationships with her students and doing whatever it takes to create an environment that allows the student to succeed in reaching their goals.



of watching his players on TV and then picking up the phone and calling them.

If I were to take a lesson from you, how would it be structured?

Typically, we would spend some time in the beginning getting to know each other. I don't have a pre-lesson questionnaire—that's not a tool I've ever really used. I want to know what I can do to help them, by getting to know them. I'll write on a white board as we talk, then they take a photo with their phone that they can take with them. I encourage them to interview me and see if they want to create a relationship. Then I am there to help them with the action plan and create an environment to succeed. I love teaching kids. I am just a big kid at heart. Kids can barely sit still and I was that way, myself.

Tell me about your students.

They are great, they teach me every day, I am so lucky to have had 100 players go on to play at NCAA schools. I'm fortunate to be able to say my students have gone on to play the PGA Tour, Champions Tour, Adams Tour, and become collegiate players—men and women both, in NCAA Division 1, 2 and 3. Players I've coached have qualified and competed in all the USGA competitions. I genuinely care for my players as people, they know they can show me their tears

as well as share in the happiness and rewards when they play well. I love having them around me. Everyone calls me the "pied piper" because I am rarely in a one-on-one environment with students. My players watch me teach other players. Lessons with me are open and inviting, and I enjoy the chaos.

Other than the Penick books, which do you consider valuable?

I typically gravitate to older books. I probably have 250 or more books in my library. But the best books are the people in front of me on the lesson tee.

How do you deal with players who are lacking in self-belief?

I am not really a sports psychologist but I do try to get them to believe that their identity is not golf. Sometimes you have to take a look at the parent-child relationship. The parents can really take the wind out of the kid's sails. You know they love their kids and you have to get the helicopter out of them.

I tend to ask the kid, "How much involvement do you want here from your parents?" A meeting with the coach, the player and the parents can be beneficial, to help the player navigate along with his or her "team." The player will learn to manage their team rather than be managed by it. That's a great lesson that will help them throughout their life. **PG**