

# What I've Learned: Bobby Clampett

## Impact Zone Golf, Naples, Florida

Interview by Paul Ramee, Jr.



It's been said for years that the likes of Tommy Armour, Paul Runyan, Bob Toski, Claude Harmon, John Jacobs—top players turned great teachers—would not be seen in the 21st century. There would be too much money in the bank and too many other distractions for the world-class golfer of this era to find his way into teaching.

Bobby Clampett, however, does stand as a modern-day version of that archetype. A longtime PGA Tour player and Champions Tour competitor whose greatest fame came early, Clampett exhibits that same intense drive to know and teach the swing that made Runyan, Jacobs, Toski and their ilk so successful and influential.

In Clampett's case, the mentorship of Ben Doyle only adds to a fascinating pedigree and to his wunderkind story of youthful golf glory. Doyle was the first devotee of Homer Kelley's principles and first expert in the Golfing Machine techniques that still mean so much to Proponent Group members and coaches everywhere. A Proponent member since 2013, Clampett now balances his CBS Sports broadcasting work with a growing instruction business under the banner of Impact Golf. To discuss his playing career, swing theories and Impact Golf activities, Bobby spent time recently with Paul Ramee with Paul's tape recorder turned on.

Here's what came of their session.

**Bobby, thanks for your time. There's been a lot written about your career, so we'll try and cover some aspects that are less well known.**

**Where should we start?**

We should probably go back to when I was 10 years old and living with my mother in Carmel, Calif. I was somewhat familiar with golf and had a mild interest in playing. One day my mother went to see Ed Haber, the owner and president of Quail Lodge, which was and still is a major Carmel golf resort. She asked him

if he would give me a job, not to be compensated in money but in playing privileges. Ed said OK and introduced me to the head professional, Lee Martin. We hit it off and Lee started coaching me. He proved to be an excellent teacher because within six months I had competed in a junior tournament and a few months after that I shot in the 30s for nine for my first time. I began playing the Northern California Junior Tour regularly and by then I was really in love with the game.

**People are aware that the coach who would influence you most is Ben Doyle. At what point did that relationship start?**

When I turned 13, Lee took a job in Florida and started working with Ben. As you know, Ben was the first accredited instructor of The Golfing Machine. He taught me The Golfing Machine principles and really recalibrated my swing. But the pivotal moment for me happened earlier, at Pebble Beach during the 1972 U.S. Open. I found myself shagging balls for David Graham, Arnold Palmer and Gary Player.

**Why do you call it pivotal?**

I became so inspired by my exposure to those players that I quit Little League and concentrated completely on golf. When I turned 15 I was playing at scratch and that year I won an event they call the "Big I." The next summer I broke the all-time Junior Player of the Year points record for Northern California. The year after that I set a new California Junior Player of the Year points record. I



Clampett has had success playing at, commenting on and teaching golf at the highest levels.

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skipped my junior year of high school and was able to get my diploma at age 17. I left home and enrolled at Brigham Young University, joining a golf team with four seniors on it.

### **You were making a pretty big leap at that point.**

Those seniors were 21 or 22 or older and I was still 17, but I managed to play No. 1 on the team and won the individual title at two tournaments. That was good enough to make first team All-America. The next summer, which was 1978, I played a national schedule. I won the Porter Cup, Western Jr and Am, California Am, World Am, and I qualified for the Masters and the U.S. Open, finishing low amateur in both those events. I was the top-ranked amateur in the U.S. that year. My sophomore and junior seasons I won four and six tournaments, respectively, earned NCAA Player of the Year honors both seasons and finished my career with 12 victories, which is still an NCAA record, Phil Mickelson having tied it. I turned pro after my junior year at BYU and played the PGA Tour on three sponsor's exemptions and a maximum of 10 events. In those 10 events I won enough money to secure a full tour card.

### **Take us into your early years as a touring pro.**

In 1982 I finished third in the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach. I also won the Southern Open. That made me the youngest player ever to reach \$500,000 in earnings. At that point I still felt that I had plenty of room for improvement so in '83 I broke away from Ben Doyle and tried working with several what I call "style-based" teachers. Nothing really clicked with them. However I managed to stay on tour for another 15 years despite never breaking the Top 80 on the money list. Fortunately, CBS came calling at that time.

### **Was it difficult at first, to be that close to the game only now as a broadcaster?**

It was actually fascinating. I was able to study the game from a different perspective.

### **You've spent 25 years with CBS, I am sure we could talk for hours about your time there, anything in particular to share?**

It was very lucky to work with people like Ken Venturi, Pat Summerall, Jim Nantz, Gary McCord, David Feherty and many others and also to call them friends. The guy who held it all together, as we know, was Frank Chirkinian. Frank coached and mentored me and he was the greatest golf broadcasting talent the game will ever know. He really brought golf to TV. He produced and directed at the same time. I was really a fish out of water when I worked on my first telecast from No. 15 at Pebble Beach in 1992. I was also playing in the event, so he made sure I had the first tee time. Frank was so good at giving advice, he had so much going on with multiple screens, multiple commentators, pulling up video, but he always had great feedback for us. He may have come off like a mean gruff, but he was always rooting for you to do well. So, CBS was a very cool place to be.

### **So, you made the switch and had no second thoughts?**

There may have been some lingering desire to play. But, all of a sudden I was looking at the best swings in the game, using the Swing Vision Cameras and I realized that all these swings were different and unusual, but they were all performing. Ed Fiori (he beat Tiger), Jim

Furyk, Lee Trevino, they had great success but obviously teachers were not teaching their style to students. I found myself asking how it was that these guys could play such great golf.

### **Your answer?**

It was impact.

### **Meaning....?**

Regardless of the style of swing, impact was the same.

### **A pretty inspiring insight, would you say?**

Definitely. It motivated me to send in my application for the 2000 U.S. Open, again at Pebble. My golf activity was probably 18 holes a month at that point in time, although I was swinging a club indoors constantly. Somehow I managed to qualify and there I was on Thurs- day of Open week, in the field. I remember I held the lead after 10 holes, then Tiger pulled ahead. In the end he nipped me by 27 strokes. Still, the experience inspired me all the more, this time toward teaching and coaching.

### **What did you do next?**

I got serious about teaching golf and before long another parent and I went to our kids' school and put together a golf program for the middle school, junior varsity and varsity teams. What we found was that by teaching these kids about impact they all improved quickly and the kids loved the approach. I realized after watching them gravitate to "Impact Based Instruction" that I had a message to lend to golf and I had to focus on how to help people create better impact.



**“We know that golf takes too long, is too expensive and too hard. Those leaving already know the first two reasons, but teaching is inadequate. The average teaching professional does not know how to assess. They will change a player's swing style, but in most cases that doesn't work.” - Bobby Clampett**

### **The obvious next move is to put all the ideas down on paper, which as we know you went and did.**

True. I wrote the book, "The Impact Zone" to organize and present what I'd learned. I was unsure of where this was headed, but I received numerous calls and emails requesting lessons and even a certification program. The First Tee called and adopted our method and found it was the most effective way to teach their kids. We came up with DVDs and training programs and today we have over 80,000 clients and 50 or so certified teaching professionals. My earnings on the Champions Tour, which I started playing in 2010, have added up to about \$1.5 million and that money has helped fund the growth of my instruction business. I've curtailed my competing to focus on teaching. That was a necessity, if the company was going to reach its potential.

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### **Explain your certification program for Impact Zone teachers.**

We just re-tooled it and added advanced modules. The training is online and the fee is \$595. There are 41 modules, a 90-page workbook and two exams. You need to score a 90 on the exams and then apply for certification. We are developing advanced certification levels 2 and 3. Along with that we are developing academies.

### **Is impact-based instruction the future of golf?**

I believe it is. We've all seen the numbers on player performance among amateurs. Golf is struggling, and I've been told some 70 percent of players who take lessons currently either get worse or don't improve. We know that golf takes too long, is too expensive and too hard. Those leaving already know the first two reasons, but teaching is inadequate. The average teaching professional does not know how to assess. They will change a player's swing style, but in most cases that doesn't work and they don't have another solution.

### **You're saying that the attempt to help people is often counterproductive?**

I have students who have been to numerous golf schools and I am their last hope. They are feeling burned, they're very frustrated and they arrive with a lot of baggage. This is the state of many people playing the game who have received "style-based instruction." When they leave our schools, they are empowered, they can somewhat become their own coach. So, I'm convinced that impact-based instruction will become the new standard in golf. It will take some time, years, but even now it is quickly gaining in popularity.

### **How does impact-based teaching relate to The Golfing Machine?**

The essence of The Golfing Machine was always the laws of impact. We are just translating the essence of The Golfing Machine to a simple language that is teachable. Think about Homer Kelley's first Component, the flat left wrist, and his Dynamic No. 4, which is Clubhead Lag. These are impact-based and are really the secret to golf. By teaching impact-based technique we are alleviating a lot of confusion. The profession has thousands of different thoughts and in fact many a teacher's success is based on reputation. As a result many students leave perplexed.



**Clampett's Impact Zone Instruction brand is adding new academy locations.**

### **How does impact-based instruction apply to the short game?**

Short shots require impact, no different than the long game. Of course, there are differences. In the full swing we are creating backswing, while in putting we are creating topspin, so certain fundamentals change

### **Looking back, any regrets on your playing career?**

You can never undo the past. If I had not gone through what I went through as a player, I never would have written "The Impact Zone." If I had more top finishes on Tour, I never would have gone to CBS, never written my book and would never be where I am today. So, that adds up to no regrets. That said, I've learned a lot, and my advice to up-and-coming tournament golfers is stick to your style and don't become a swing junkie.

### **After many years walking the fairways, whose impact impresses you?**

That question reminds me of a composite photograph taken at Firestone Country Club this year of the winner Shane Lowry, Dustin Johnson and Jim Furyk at the top of their backswing. At the time they were the top three on the leaderboard. It struck me that they had three entirely different backswings. A question went through my head: "What does

that tell you?" I'm betting that most instructors would want to fix their backswings. But I believe that is starting to change.

I was hitting balls one day and in the stall next to me an instructor was teaching a woman and she was fit to be tied. She had just played her worst round ever. The instructor was doing his best, but she just kept hitting bad shot after bad shot. The instructor kept working on her posture and she kept hitting bad shots, the two of them were very frustrated, she didn't get any better and the lesson ended. The moral of that story to me was that this was happening way too often and if I could help I needed to do something.

### **Sounds like you've taken responsibility to put the golf instruction world on your back.**

I know Impact Based instruction works, I feel like it is my duty, my calling. In life if you don't do what you are good at and want to do you will never be happy. It is my responsibility to give back to the game I love and someone has to do something.