

DAVE KENDALL

KENDALL ACADEMY OF GOLF, ANN ARBOR, MI

INTERVIEW BY DAVID GOULD

As the golf profession becomes increasingly specialized, we are less likely to see a career as diversely successful as Dave Kendall's. To borrow a term from the sport that was Kendall's first love, he is a true "five-tool player" within the PGA context—standout tournament pro, top teacher, skilled head golf professional, dedicated PGA officer and a successful business entrepreneur.

In the spring of 2015 those accomplishments earned Kendall entry into the Michigan Golf Hall of Fame. The Jackson, Mich., native had a bit of extra pleasure on induction day, given that the Hall's new home as of this year is Ferris State University in Big Rapids. Not only is Kendall a proud Ferris State alumnus, he's also one of first two Ferris State PGM students to attain PGA Class A1 status.

He assumed the head-professional position at Cadillac Country Club in 1981. From there Kendall moved south to Ypsilanti where he founded the Kendall Academy at the famed Miles of Golf super-range and par-3 course. Kendall has been ranked as high as No. 2 on the Golf Digest list of Top Teachers in Michigan. He was twice named Michigan PGA Teacher of the Year and likewise has two section Golf Professional of the Year awards. He was

inducted into the Michigan PGA Section Hall of Fame in 2013.

Service to his section as an officer is also part of the Kendall legacy. He has held every leadership office in the Michigan PGA including section president. His playing record is stellar—it includes two Michigan Senior Open championship victories, a state Senior PGA title, Senior Match Play victory and the PGA State Pro-Am. Despite all that hardware on his own mantle, he speaks in this interview mostly about a career teaching and coaching others.



You were a versatile athlete in youth sports—just not all that into golf, right?

As a kid I played every sport except golf. I liked football, baseball, basketball and hockey. I was probably best at baseball. I was fast, on the small side, played shortstop and hit leadoff. However I had a bad experience with the baseball coach and quit my high school team. The golf coach wanted me to come out and play for him. I really wasn't good enough but he encouraged me. It wasn't until junior year that I was able to break 80.

Who had the strongest influence on you as a young golfer?

It was my high school golf coach, Ray Mohre. Ray didn't actually teach me very much about the golf swing, but there are things he said that are with me to this day. I remember we were playing our crosstown rivals in a high school match and I missed a crucial putt on the last hole. The ball hung on the lip and wouldn't drop and I was seething mad. I picked up the ball and threw it as far as I could. A while later coach took me aside. He was a big guy and in moments like this he spoke quietly. He told me I had embarrassed myself by that outburst. And not just myself—I had also embarrassed my family, my team, our school and our town. "People will have to apologize for you, David," he said. "And they don't want to have to do that. They want to be proud of you." Ouch. Those words sank in deep.



Kendall's long-time successes with his students have made him a regular on the Golf Digest Best in State list in Michigan.



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What’s the single biggest misconception in golf instruction?

It would be the idea that the golfer with the best swing wins. It’s simply not true. The game of golf is so much more than swing-versus-swing. Every 18-hole match there’s ever been, the best player that day wins the match. At the PGA Tour level, you could compare golf swings to race cars. If I were a top NASCAR driver, some other top NASCAR driver couldn’t win with my car and I couldn’t win with his car. If I think the other guy’s car has some little refinement my car doesn’t have, I still have to believe I can win the race. And if I’ve got that belief, I absolutely can win. It’s the same with golf swings.

Complete the following statement: A great golf coach is ...

He’s a sounding board. He’s an advocate for his student, a confidence builder. As time goes by, a good coach develops a style and stays true to it. People have said about me that as a coach I could have been tougher. But as an athlete I didn’t respond well to the tough approach. I just wanted the tools to figure it out. So now I try to provide those tools to the people I work with.

Describe the typical one-hour lesson with a first-time student.

I pay close attention to what’s happening in the first 10 minutes with a new student. I’m studying them to see if they believe they’ve made a good choice in coming to me. I’m not looking for them to think that I’m some genius, that I know everything. What I hope they’re

realizing is that I’m extremely glad they’ve come to me. When they leave that first session I want them to be thinking that golf seems a little simpler than it did before.

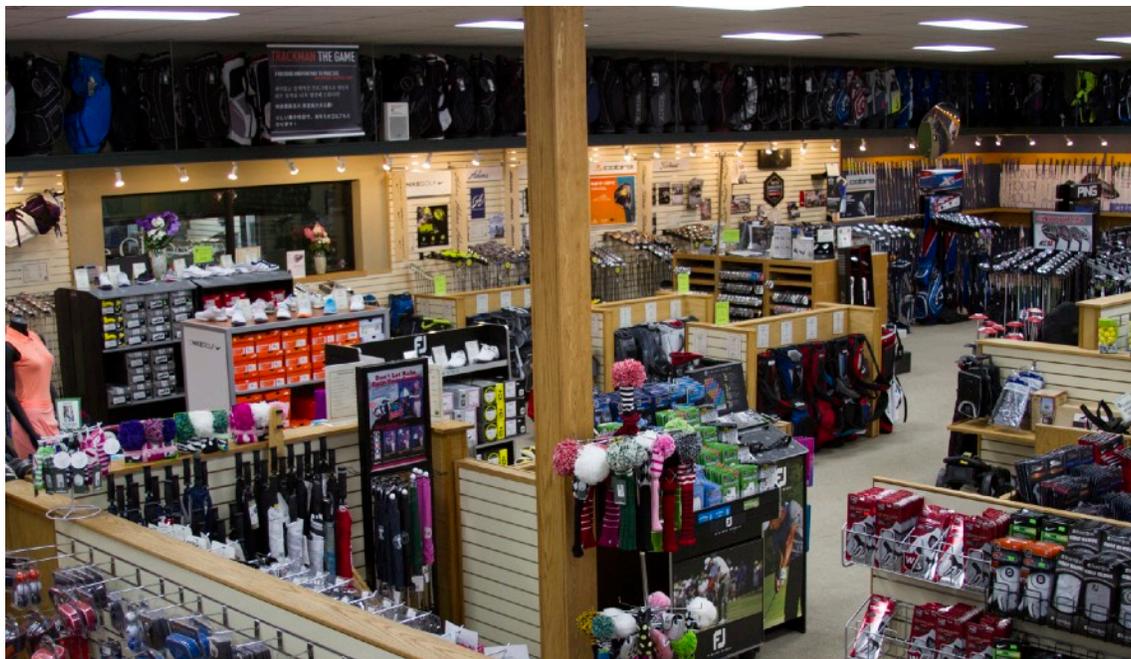
If the average golfer had one hour per week to practice, how would you suggest they spend that time?

I would have them spend a big chunk of their practice time making swings that are less than full swings. I would have them hitting lots of different shots with their wedge and 9-iron. I’d want to see them working on tumbling, running shots with their lofted irons. I’d want them to hit shots working the face both ways, left and right. They should be hitting high and low shots, shots that release and shots that bite. When they’re hitting a longer club with a more full swing, they should move through the ball with the face held open and move through impact with the clubface turned down. This style of practice would do a lot to improve their impact position with any club in the bag.

What is your approach when you work with golfers in a group?

I enjoy teaching groups and I do quite a bit of it—a lot of team teaching, as well. The other coaches at Kendall Academy are important resources for our students—I’ve got confidence in all of them, so it’s great when they offer their thoughts. Some people wouldn’t agree with that approach. They wonder, won’t the golfer be confused if what they’re told by Teacher A doesn’t match what they’re told by Teacher B? If both teachers

Miles of Golf has been Kendall's home for decades. It is one of the premier retail, driving range and short-course complexes in the United States.



are skilled and competent, I just don't see that as a problem. Hearing different viewpoints is part of your experience in everyday life. You hear two opinions and you think about them and you sort it out. When I need expert advice on a business matter, I'm able to tolerate hearing more than one opinion. At a certain point I go with what seems to work best in my personal case. Golf is no different.

What mindset, for the lesson-taking student, is most effective? What should be in their heads?

I want the golfer to get to the point where they think that anything they do, they could do it with or without their coach. If they make a lot of progress with me coaching them, I want them to think they would have become that good no matter who the teacher was.

How has technology changed you as a golf coach?

It has given me better tools to do the job. I'm certainly glad that I had to teach for a long time without all the technology. When I was a PGM intern in the mid-1970s at Walt Disney World Resort, instructors there had an 8-frame Polaroid graph-check camera. In 1997 I first used video. There are places where they present technology as though it's the actual product, but it takes humans to do this work correctly.

If you could spend an hour on the lesson tee with any coach in golf today, who it would be and why?

Butch Harmon. From what I know of him he's very comfortable in his own skin and he takes a really

practical approach to teaching and coaching. He seems to make people relax, which is so important. And he helps people achieve their goals.

What's your dream golf foursome?

I would start with Dave Hill, who being a Michigan guy on the PGA Tour was a hero to me. I would add his brother, Mike, as well. I got to know them some but I never did play golf with them. Also in the foursome would be my dad. He was a high-80s golfer who introduced me to the sport. I wanted to be like him. He was a lefty who played a hook so I became a righty who hit a fade. My father flew 65 missions over Europe as a World War II bomber pilot. My parents were married for 70 years and raised six children.

Your favorite golf course or courses and why?

It comes down to two, both in Michigan, Forest Dunes and Crystal Downs. I lean toward Crystal Downs, the great design by Alister MacKenzie. I've played about 50 rounds of golf there. To think that par-70 and 6,600 yards provides so much challenge and so much character is pretty wonderful. All different styles of player could be successful there, which is uncommon.

What's the best success story you've had as a coach?

I once had a girl come to me in her junior year of high school wondering if I could help her get good enough to play on the high school team. I asked her, "Are you pretty close, but you just need to raise your game a



Kendall was inducted into the Michigan PGA Hall of Fame in 2013 after twice being named section Teacher of the Year and twice being named section Professional of the Year. In 2015, he was inducted into the Michigan Golf Hall of Fame.

notch or two?" She said no, she hadn't ever played much golf. Her name was Aubrey, and in her senior year she played No. 5 on the girl's golf team. After graduation she went off to college in Boston and if she comes back to town she'll stop in and say hi. My sense of her is that, partly from our work together, partly from her basic nature, she'll always have the confidence that she can learn anything. That's a big difference-maker in life.

What is it you like most about coaching? What brings you the most satisfaction?

I love the way golfers can't wait to come find me and tell me about their successes. They want to share their success and make me a part of it. In the end they do more for me than I do for them. I also like seeing the light bulb come on when a golfer does something they've never been able to do. A lot of guys in my generation—and I was one of them—wandered around for years trying to get certain fundamentals of the swing and the game explained to them, without any luck. I try to be that guy the younger version of me was always looking for. There's a big difference between having something explained to you in one hour versus one hour plus the 20 years it took to find the teacher who could explain it.

What is your best round ever and what is it you remember most about that day?

I shot 61 at Cadillac Country Club one day—my perfect day of golf. It was August 13, 1987. It was so unusual. Everything worked perfectly. We tend never to show up on the first tee expecting everything to work perfectly, so it's very memorable when it actually happens.

Playing the game and teaching the game—talk about the relationship between the two.

I agree with other instructors who say you should push yourself to play well. Our academy has a nine-person teaching staff and the majority have strong playing records. Do you have to be a great player to be a great teacher? No, but it helps. I've had top players say to me: "If I didn't think you knew what it feels like to stand on the tee needing par on No. 18 to win a high-level tournament, I wouldn't have come to you."

Based on those remarks, it seems that high-level competition as a player has influenced your teaching career pretty strongly.

The thing with me is, I didn't bloom as a player until I was in my 50s, which is highly unusual. I am not the guy who turned to teaching after a full run at a career as a player. The idea that I would end up in a group with Tom Kite and John Cook playing in the Senior PGA Championship can still seem far-fetched. I remember when I told Cook this was my first appearance in a national championship he had to really stop and think about that. "This must be so cool for you," he said, very sincerely. I said it was and right then I decided I would savor every shot on every hole, no matter what.

How did it go?

My score for the two first two days was 84-77, in the rain. Not good enough to make the cut. I did manage to score lower than quite a few veteran tour players in round two. An odd number made that cut so they asked me to go out on Saturday as a playing marker in the first group, which I did, and shot a 69. That felt good. **PG**