

WHAT I'VE LEARNED: DAVID OGRIN

SAN PEDRO GOLF ACADEMY, SAN ANTONIO, TX

INTERVIEW BY PAUL RAMEE, JR



As prize money on the PGA Tour spiked upward in the 1980s, an old pattern seemed to fade. It appeared that touring pros with long careers would no longer take up teaching when their competitive days were over. They wouldn't follow the footsteps of Paul Runyan, Bob Toski, Johnny Revolta or "Lighthorse Harry" Cooper—rich purses, healthy pensions and other opportunities would see to that.

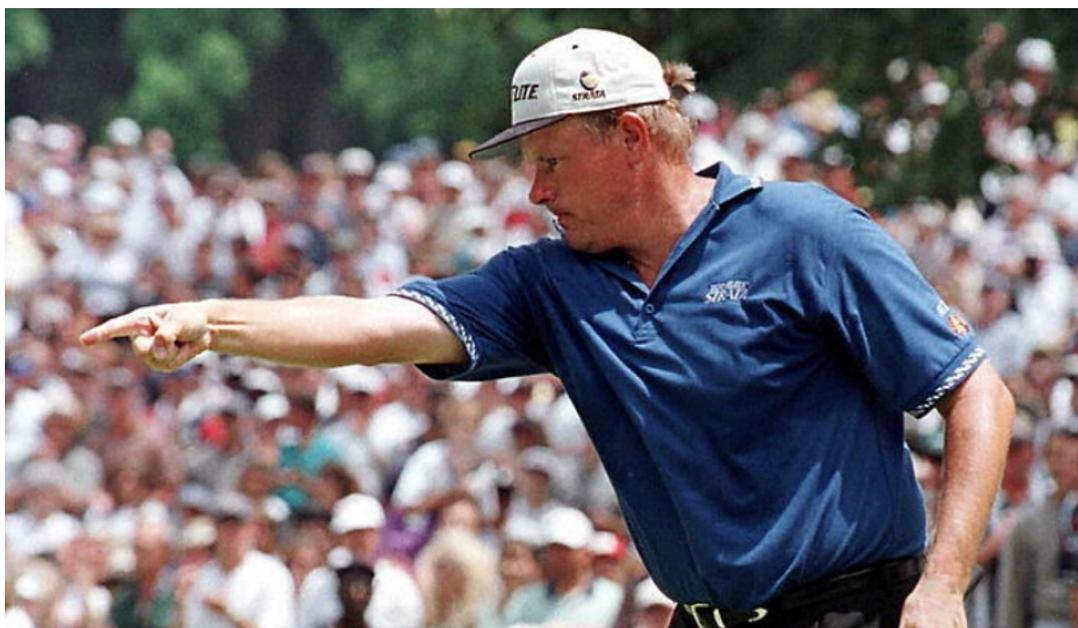
While this turned out mainly true, a select few long-tenured tour pros have indeed gone into instruction. Proponent Group member Bobby Clampett is a good example, as is this month's featured interviewee, David Ogrin. Born in 1957 on New Year's Eve and raised in the Chicago suburb of Waukegan, Illinois, Ogrin is a devotee of golf tradition and a free thinker as well—one of those level-headed dreamers that a Midwestern upbringing in proximity of a world-class city will sometimes produce. A long, enviable marriage, four kids, enduring religious faith and a healthy obsession with the Chicago Cubs have been his constants. Meanwhile, a screen credit in "Tin Cup" and a brief literary career with Golf Digest in his youth bear

witness to Ogrin's slender streak of showmanship.

More or less self-taught as a golfer, he was a mainstay of his high school team and went to Texas A&M University on a full scholarship, graduating in 1980 with a degree in economics. Ogrin turned professional in 1980 and within a couple of years had earned his tour card. He played the PGA Tour from 1983 to 1999, making over 500 starts. His career record shows 32 top-10 finishes including a win at the 1996 LaCantera Texas Open. In 1997, Ogrin set a career-best mark for season earnings (\$593,683), had seven top-10 finishes, finished 36th on the money list and generally played the best golf of his life at age 39.

A Proponent Group member since 2016, he spoke at our Summit on the topic of player development in the era of Topgolf, where at the time he was employed as corporate director of instruction. David's thoughts on playing, teaching and the competitive mindset are presented in this edited transcript of a discussion he and Paul Ramee sat down for last month.

David Ogrin came from a blue-collar upbringing that taught him the value of hard work in building both his playing career and his teaching business.





Ogrin is likely the only person to leverage a PGA Tour win into a job as Director of Instruction at Topgolf.

Except for unusual cases such as Larry Nelson or Calvin Peete, tour players are guys who grew up playing the game. Is that the David Ogrin story?

It definitely is. I started early and I've never stopped. My father was a steelworker and an avid golfer who liked to compete. The year I was born, 1957, he won a prominent tournament in our area called the Chick Evans Amateur. As it turned out, I had the privilege to win that same event as a 20-year-old, in 1977. So, I very much followed in my dad's footsteps. It's an old family story that I would walk behind him to the altar at Sunday mass to receive communion, making practice swings all the way up the aisle.

It certainly helps a future golfer to have their father's encouragement.

I did have that advantage, but I also had a civic-minded mom who ran for a seat on the Waukegan Park District board when I was seven. She got elected, which was a terrific break for me. The city owned a golf course called Bonnie Brook that was overseen by the Park District, and in those years they had no rules restricting family perks for board members. That meant I had virtually unlimited access to the course, all the way until age 15.

And you took full advantage of it?

I went around that track I don't know how many times. I was able to develop my golf skills by playing, as opposed to on the range. It was just a tremendous experience for me personally. On weekends I would caddie at a club called Glen

Flora, also in Waukegan. I looped for my father and some of the other better players, including the club champion. So, my childhood and youth were completely immersed in golf.

Explain to us how you made it from Chicago to a college career at Texas A&M.

I came along in the pre-AJGA era, when college golf recruiting was mainly by word of mouth. My dad happened to be good friends with a guy named Arthur Ellis, who went by the nickname "Ace." His brother was Bob Ellis, the head golf coach at Texas A&M. As I was developing my game through high school, Ace kept his brother up to speed on my progress. On graduation day—April 1, 1976—I received a full scholarship to A&M for golf.

Heading down there, were you fairly confident you could hold your own?

One thing I knew is that I'd managed to make a good impression on my future teammates. I did that by shooting 74-66 during the two rounds I played with them on my recruiting visit, which happened to come in the last week of February. Given the time of year, the upperclassmen were saying, hey, if this guy can come out of the snow and shoot a 66 he's bound to be great. They didn't realize what unusual weather we were having back home that winter, including blue skies and temperatures in the high 60s the entire week before my trip. They figured I hadn't touched a club, and I didn't tell them about the full week of intense practice I'd just put in.



Ogrin's recent instruction appearance on Golf Channel is just his latest national media opportunity, which began with a gig writing for Golf Digest during his rookie year on the PGA Tour.

You graduated in 1980 with an economics degree and turned pro that year. It's interesting how you started your PGA Tour career and simultaneously you seemed to be starting a writing career.

Well, not exactly, but it's true I was given the chance to write a pair of articles for Golf Digest, based on my having played a number of USGA events and along the way getting to know Frank Hannigan. Frank had an early career as a newspaper writer and eventually became executive director of the USGA, with responsibility for their magazine at the time, USGA Golf Journal. Frank suggested I chronicle my year as a rookie on tour, so I said great and he handed the article off to a senior writer at Golf Digest named Jerry Tarde—Jerry would go on to become chief editor of Golf Digest and he's still there, running the magazine. In 1984 I played in my first Masters and wrote a second article called "Diary of a Rookie at the Masters."

Didn't alter your career plans, though.

No, it was very interesting and kind of cool, but my focus was on golf. I ended up playing the tour from 1983 to 2000. I gave the Champions Tour a try in 2008 but after a couple of seasons I hadn't made it to fully exempt status, so my wife and I talked it over and we decided it wouldn't be best for me to go chase it. That's when I got committed to teaching as a next phase.

What was your transition like?

To a certain extent it had already begun. During my mid-40s I was living by an executive course that

sponsored a non-profit for kids, the Central Texas Junior Golf Association. When they shut down the golf course they asked me if I wanted to run the program and I said yes, and took it over. At the same time I had a job teaching at the Bandit Golf Club in New Braunfels, just east of San Antonio. That was my first formal experience in golf instruction. I did that for a couple of years before I started training for my run at the Champions Tour. When that was over I went to a new golf center in New Braunfels called the River City Range. I was there for a year, continuing to work on my skills as a teacher.

So, you were getting opportunities to gain experience.

I did have a lot of good fortune in that regard, including some things outside of teaching. OB Sports Management approached me in 2011 about GM work, so I went to work for them, managing a couple of clubs and giving lessons and clinics to the members. A similar break I got involved a club in Casper, Wyoming, the Three Crowns Golf Club. A good friend, Chris Moore, was GM there. Chris had decided to start a serious teaching program and went looking for candidates. He received 48 resumes and couldn't find the right fit, so he called me to see if I was interested. I went up and met with him and ended up signing on to do three summers of instruction.

But you kept your base in Texas, year-round?

Ogrin's PGA Tour career spanned 17 seasons and more than 500 starts including a victory at the 1996 LaCantera Texas Open.



Correct, and that led to an offer to assist with the Texas Lutheran University golf team. My next career move brought me from Texas Lutheran to Topgolf in San Antonio, as their golf director.

How did that come about?

It's a funny story, how I got that job. The first I heard of it was through a Facebook posting, which said they were looking for a "rock star" to fill the position. I sent a message explaining that I was the literal definition of a rock star, and if they wanted proof they could take a quick trip around the corner to La Cantera Golf Club. Right in front of the clubhouse is a plaque, mounted on a rock, recognizing my Texas Open victory there.

At a Proponent Group Summit in Dallas a few years ago you talked about your job at Topgolf and made it sound like interesting work.

It really was, and I had no intention of leaving, but a director of instruction position opened up with the Alamo City Golf Trail that looked promising. I ended up applying for it and getting the job, and that's where I am today.

You've mentioned how good breaks have tended to come your way. Would you say in looking back that you created your own luck, or is it more a case that good fortune came along and you made the most of it?

I guess I don't view that as an either-or question. I won on the PGA Tour with the highest winning score ever shot in a Texas Open at La Cantera. I

got my tour card even while shooting 81 in my first round of Q School—that just doesn't happen anymore. With things I've done in the golf industry, it's fair to say I knew some people, I got some breaks and then I took advantage. And going all the way back to when I was a kid, I wasn't the only one who was allowed to play the Park District course all they wanted—others could, but I was the one who actually did it.

You talked about growing up before there was an AJGA. How do you view the current state of things, with junior golf so highly organized?

The AJGA has done a wonderful job elevating junior golf to the highest level. So what I like is that it gives everyone a chance to look at the talent pool and see who's good. What I don't like is that the first question any D1 program asks about a prospect is how many AJGA points they have. The South Texas PGA does a great job putting on tournaments and junior golfers have no excuse to not try and play in these. There are so many opportunities to play junior golf tournaments now and it's great. You can never play too much golf. My biggest observation for junior golfers is that they just don't play enough golf. Not necessarily even tournaments, just golf in general.

You were quite independent in terms of getting out there and playing, but I assume you had some coaching. Who did you work with?

It was all my dad, up until I was age 11 or 12. At that point I took a lesson with Don Kennedy at

Deerpath Golf Course in Lake Forest. Don was a respected golf professional and his approach with me was all about fundamentals. He worked on my stance, posture and grip and he told me to go play a ton of golf. I followed his advice, then at some point I made a decision to model my swing after Lee Trevino, with the idea that it would give me Trevino-like ball striking. What it gave me was a bad case of the shanks, which led me back to Don for a cure. He worked me back to a proper grip, stance and posture.

Another example of golf instruction riding to the rescue.

You said it. Some time later I took a series of lessons from Lee Milligan, who was Andy North's teacher. Later, in between leaving Texas A&M and going out on tour, my game fell into a slump, so at that point I went to Ray Geschke, the head pro at Lake Geneva, and he helped get me straightened out. I worked with Hank Haney for two years in 1984 and '85 and then by 1993 I found the coach whom I consider my golf mentor, Jim Suttie. But also around that time I got some coaching on the mental aspect of the game from Chuck Hogan, and that really changed everything. Chuck was a guy who talked about golf in such a different way. He changed the way I thought, which in turn changed the way I played. The result was a real strong streak of play for me in the mid-90s, which only ended when I injured my left knee.

Was there any sort of mentoring for you after you got off the tour, to help you get your teaching practice up and running?

I pretty much learned something from everyone along the way. These great teachers all got to experiment on me before they became who they are today, so I learned a lot during that time and got to see how they grew. Even now, I still go to conferences and hear people speak and I learn new things all the time.

What do you miss and not miss about the Tour?

I miss the guys—players like Rick Fehr, Tom Lehman, Loren Roberts, Duffy Waldorf. I miss the camaraderie of knowing that you're doing something pretty special. You get to play golf for a living where people who are waiting to watch Tiger are watching you. I don't miss being out there and playing poorly, not making cuts, the grind of the

travel and getting on planes all the time. I don't miss the Champions Tour at all.

What does the wise golfer do when the tournament is on the line?

A big lesson I've learned is that you do the things you have control over and don't obsess over the things you don't have control over. You don't always have control over the golf swing, but you can control your breathing, your process, and a lot of mental aspects.

Having played and won at the highest level, what do you bring to your students that someone who hasn't played on tour can't bring?

We as teachers all have access to each other, so there's not much I can bring that you or someone who didn't play on tour cannot. I can bring descriptions and thoughts about my own experiences out there, which indeed is how I start many a statement that I make with my students. It gives a little bit of a different perspective. For example, talking about the mental toughness needed to hit the island green at TPC Sawgrass in a huge tournament like the Players Championship. Amateurs are curious about any similarities between what the game is like for them and what it's like on tour.

What was your greatest strength, in professional competition?

Passion for the game of golf. Not everyone has that, up there in the top echelon. I could always bring the passion.

So what's next down the road for you? What's coming up this year?

There are three major brand names that I'm using currently, to help me do my job better. Those are Golf Channel Academy, PGA Junior Camps, and Operation 36. The brilliance of Operation 36 is due to Ryan Dailey and Matt Reagan, and they deserve every penny they earn because it really is brilliant on so many levels. On the smaller stage, we have a two-day training of our own called Hands-On Golf Fest. The theme of my instruction in this program is how I translate speed and strength training to golf training. It's my independent attempt to bring something significant to the amateur golfer around the fitness aspect of the sport. **PG**