

# WHAT I'VE LEARNED: RANDY HENRY

## RANDY HENRY'S DYNAMIC GOLF, COEUR D'ALENE, IDAHO

INTERVIEW BY PAUL RAMEE, JR

The resort town of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho has been known throughout golf for two exceptional things—the famed floating green at Coeur d'Alene Resort and the custom golf club factory and headquarters bearing the name Henry-Griffitts. These days, it's also the summertime teaching headquarters for Golf Channel Academy coach Randy Henry, and the center of activities for Randy Henry's Dynamic Golf.

Randy's name has appeared on the Golf Digest list of 50 Best Teachers in America and he's also earned the magazine's nod as No. 1 Teacher in Idaho. Throughout his long career he has coached winners on the PGA, LPGA and Champions Tours as well as some of the world's top collegiate and junior golfers. In the 1980s, Randy founded Henry-Griffitts, the custom-club company that popularized the lie board, designed the first fitting cart and later pioneered interchangeable heads and shafts.

Players like Peter Jacobsen, Scott McCarron, Homero Blancas, John Brodie and Sandra Palmer cite Randy as a major influence on their golf success, and a patient, creative teacher who has become a close friend as well. Devoted golfers like NBA Hall of Famer Bill Russell could cite their

association with Randy as a game-saving experience. As a teacher, clubfitter, club designer and all-round innovator, Randy Henry has left a deep imprint on golf, both the game and the industry—his fellow Proponent Group member Paul Ramee got Randy to delve into some of the details of how it all happened.



### **Randy, how did you get into the golf business?**

I started playing golf just like everybody else, came to love the game and enjoyed competing. In 1974 I was headed back home to Idaho from a golf tournament in Spokane, Wash., when the car I was riding in got hit by a drunk driver traveling the wrong direction. My back was broken in nine places and I was in the hospital for a long time, eventually undergoing a 16-hour surgery that involved multiple steel rods and pulleys and other

Explaining how the static and dynamic lies angles of an iron affect impact conditions and ball flight has been part of Randy Henry's working life since the mid-1980s. He's had the pleasure of spending many of those work days in the scenic surroundings of Idaho's northern lakes region.





The essential, unchanging message of Henry-Griffitts has been that skilled golf instructors should be the ones to handle a golfer's equipment needs—doing the work and earning the proper reward for optimizing both swing motion and ball flight.

things. When I came out of the hospital I found I couldn't play golf the same way as before and had to make changes. I became interested in the equipment part of the golf motion and ball flight, as part of my effort to play golf again.

**You were done competing, obviously.**

Right, so I became a club pro and worked in a few different places in the Northwest. Eventually I moved up to our family's summer house in Hayden Lake, in the Panhandle of Idaho right near Coeur d'Alene. That's where we started Henry-Griffitts.

**You say a club pro, but your emphasis was on teaching, right?**

Yes. And this was happening at a time when the Senior PGA Tour, now the Champions Tour, was adding events and offering bigger purses. I spent a lot of time on that tour, teaching and coaching. I had a big advantage because I could put the correct equipment in the players' hands. I found this made teaching very easy. Henry-Griffitts had a lot of success on the old Senior Tour. Lots of guys were playing HG equipment, and we weren't paying any of them to do it.

**Tell us about those early days of custom-fitting, as you remember them.**

I remember being out on tour with Homero Blancas, at a tournament where Lee Trevino was doing commentary for NBC. Trevino came up to Homero and congratulated him on how good he

had been hitting his driver. They started talking about the club itself and Homero hands it to Lee, who immediately says, "Homero, how long is this thing?" When Homero told him it was 45 inches, Lee shook his head and said "There isn't a person in the world who can hit a 45-inch driver, what are you, crazy?" A year later, there wasn't anyone out there *without* a 45-inch driver.

**How about back home, working with the average golfer?**

We found that off-the-rack clubs were too strong for 90 percent of the people playing them. That led to weak swings—really, it tended to be the main reason why people developed those weak swings. I found that when I weakened the clubs, I got stronger swings. The amateur player would go from hitting weak uppercut fades to hitting draws. The swing motion changed and ball flight changed. We figured out that equipment affects motion.

**Talk to me about the role of the teacher in the fitting process.**

My belief is that the only person who can effectively fit clubs is the teacher. The teacher knows the golfer, knows their body, knows what they're trying to do to hit solid shots.

**Who benefits the most from custom-fitting, the tour pro or the amateur?**

The 50-year old up to 70-year-old who is given a club with weaker specifications and immediately



Randy's insights on how golf swing and golf equipment go together were on display at a recent Proponent Group panel discussion on clubfitting.

becomes stronger in their motion. They see their ball flight improve immediately. You can change the ball flight of a tour player with custom fitting, but the amateur is going to see great results quickly, in both how they move and what the ball does.

**You've talked a lot in the past about "compensating moves" by the golfer whose set of clubs isn't right for him or her.**

I've also said pretty often that golf is like a boxer getting hit in the head. He learns to duck after a while. So if a guy keeps hitting it out to the right, he will start to swing left or aim left, but that pattern changes if you can put a club in his hands that makes the ball go in the direction it "should" be going, based on setup and path and so forth. Basically, if that golfer swings left, the ball really should be going left. When it doesn't go left, the skilled instructor can teach in such a way as to address that issue, but it makes your teaching so much harder. When we do a fitting, we get 90 percent of our students to hit a draw immediately with their natural swing.

**Some teaching professionals are cool toward clubfitting because it's a one-off process. You teach people every week or every other week, over a long period, but you only fit them once. What's your thought on that?**

You're talking about a relationship, between the golfer and the pro who is working with them. Sometimes the fitting aspect can take two or three or maybe four sessions, because you find you have to teach while you are fitting. I will make a tennis comparison and say that if you're working with a guy who is hitting lob shots off his back foot, you have to teach him to hit a forehand. Separating the two processes—teaching and fitting—is condemning them to what they have. Big manufacturers don't mind when those two things are separated, because it leads to people looking at new equipment every year. When the teacher is involved that golfer will get better because you can control the situation.

**Reflecting on the progress of Henry-Griffitts through the 1980s and '90s, you really were on the cutting edge, despite being a small company.**

That's true, but now we can't fight with the larger companies. For example, we thought about patenting the lie board, but knew that the larger companies would likely fight our patent and with deeper pockets, win, so we didn't. We wrote articles in magazines highlighting our prior use, so it showed that we were the first in a lot of respects.

**Didn't you have some very early ground-force measuring gear?**

We developed one of the first weight displacement devices. It showed us that people who moved the

In speaking to groups of golf professionals, Randy will often talk about the talented athlete who is a poor golfer—this paradox was a key inspiration for his storied career as a fitter and teacher. Years ago, Olympic decathlon champion Rafer Johnson came to him hitting nothing but grounders and topped shots: A change of club specs and a lesson or two brought out Johnson's natural talent for ball-striking.



same way tended to have the same ball flight, and tended to also use the same type of equipment.

#### **What about your early work with simulators?**

I worked with Bill Bales at aboutGolf. We were working with high-speed video cameras, which at that time cost over a million dollars to get your hands on. So now we had technology to tell us what the ball was doing, what the club was doing and, with the high-speed cameras, what the body was doing. We were able to identify different types of swings and we identified 12 different types. We also found that a lot of teaching pros who were having success working with tour players had swing types that matched the swing of the players they were teaching, which was interesting and seemed to make sense.

#### **Who were some of your early collaborators on this type of teaching that integrated clubfitting?**

When we first got started, Jimmy Ballard was the man. He called us and wanted to come up and see what we were doing. He told us, "This makes sense to me." The early adopters of HG were instructors who were confident in their teaching, but were not getting the results they felt they should be getting. The golf club was the missing puzzle piece, which they came to realize. Tag Merritt was one of my favorites, an innovator who

was one of the first to use video. Some of my best friends were players on tour who were naturally curious. Homero Blancas, Peter Jacobson, John Brodie, players like that. As their teacher, I wanted them to know their swing better than I did. My job was to teach them well enough that they didn't need me anymore.

#### **How does your teaching change when you move from outdoor to indoor?**

Obviously, the use of modern-day simulators makes it a lot easier. There will always be some question as to their accuracy, but for the most part the information is able to allow the person to react to the shot. They can see the good shots and you can reward them for it.

#### **In a lot of ways your career has been about overcoming entrenched ideas and beliefs—would you agree?**

I would. For example, Henry-Griffitts was the first club company to come out with an offset driver. Bruce Devlin was the first guy on tour to use one. Bruce played offset irons and he saw the driver and said it made sense. I couldn't get a 30-handicapper to play an offset driver, but I could get a veteran tour player to do it, because tour players end up being very practical—they just want to play better. **PG**