

WHAT I'VE LEARNED: RICH PRANGE

JIM FLICK GOLF PERFORMANCE CENTER, SCOTTSDALE, AZ

INTERVIEW BY PAUL RAMEE, JR

As director of instruction at Desert Mountain Club in Scottsdale, AZ., Proponent Group member Richard Prange oversees a small golf kingdom of game-improvement activity. The well-traveled Indiana native grew up as one of five golf-obsessed boys, all but one of whom would go on to become a golf professional. At Desert Mountain, a six-course (soon to be seven) mecca that's home to the Jim Flick Golf Performance Center, Prange is responsible for doing whatever a D of I possibly can to help members enjoy and enhance their golf experience.

The latest training concepts and by all means the latest technology is employed to make that happen. Skill levels of the students and clinic-goers run the gamut, and just about every digital device and platform you could name is available to get the job done. Paul Ramee recently interviewed Rich about his life and career, and files this report.

Richard, thanks for taking time to do this interview. I'll begin by asking how you got into

Prange comes from a large golfing family. Three of his brothers and he are PGA Class A Professionals.



golf and eventually made your way to your current position?

I can set the stage by telling you I have four brothers, and four of the five of us are Class A PGA professionals. We grew up just east of Indianapolis.

My brother Bob is two-time Teacher of the Year, once in the Indiana Section and once in the Vermont Section. Another brother was Illinois PGA Player of the Year, another played on the South African Tour and the Canadian Tour, so we've been around.

I've also got a niece who was a two-time First Team All-American at the University of North Carolina and won The Big Break 5, as well.

So yes, golf is in our entire family.





While very proficient with all the latest technologies, Prange still understands “the value of a simple pool noodle” in getting his point across to a student.

That’s a lot of different journeys within golf, for the Pranges. How would you describe your personal path?

I’ve led the classic nomadic life of a golf pro. I went to junior college in Fort Myers, Fla., then transferred to Ball State and then in 1981 I moved to Southern California and worked at a club called Big Canyon. The members were kind enough to sponsor me and I set out to play competitively for a while. I spent a lot of years looking at my ball flight and continually asking why the ball curved left.

In 1982 I ran into Jim Hardy working at a public facility in Palm Springs. I worked with Jim for a while then he referred me to Shelby Futch and the Jacobs Golf Schools in Scottsdale. I signed on with their instruction staff in 1983. By 1986 I had opened the Jacobs Golf School at the Palm Springs Marriott. I continued on from there, to Marco Island in 1991 and then back west to Tucson National in 1995. In between I got married and spent time in Northern Michigan working for the Boyne Company.

In 2006, I met Mike Scully, who recruited me as his director of instruction at Medinah Country Club. He and I were at Medinah until 2012, when Mike resigned and went to Desert Mountain. Six months later I joined him there and I’ve been at Desert Mountain now for five years.

With all that moving around, you probably came across some really cool individuals. Who were some of the mentors that helped your career?

Well first would be John Jacobs, the Brit, who was a Ryder Cup captain for Great Britain & Ireland in 1979 and again in ’81. He taught me about ball flight principles. He was the best I’d ever seen at diagnosing, explaining and then correcting the golf swing. He was always willing to stop and ask what you were doing and he was the greatest at explaining. I still quote him daily, often multiple times in a day.

Next would be Jim Hardy. To me Jim’s work seemed to be geared toward making the golf instructor better. He was so good at explaining why we shouldn’t mix principles. Both of these guys, John and Jim, were great sharers of information.

Do you believe we have gotten away from sharing information face to face? Is it too easy to go on YouTube and see a tip from a great instructor?

I think the art of communication has changed. The greatest opportunity to improve your communication is to instruct at a golf school. With 75 people in a school, you have many different ways that people process information. In your first group you could be working with a Type A engineer who is a 2-handicap, a guy who can’t get enough of your time. Then you make your way down to group No. 2 and you ask Mrs. Jones why she is here and she will tell you it is because her husband in group one dragged her here. But, with today’s millennials—and I joke with them all the time about it—the older generation of teachers has to be receptive to how



During peak season Prange will typically be in his office by 6:45 a.m. and often teaches until 6 p.m.

they communicate, which is different. We need to be open to the new way of communication.

How about when you teach the millennials?

You have to speak in open-ended questions and have them tell you what's going on. Questions like "what did you feel?" are always a good way in. Then you teach them using their terms and create a personalized checklist for them. Eventually, by using their own language, they can fix their own ball flight. Video and launch monitors are great, but when the player can recognize the ball flight, understand their tendency that created that ball flight, take a few practice swings to change the tendency, then they own their swing.

Technology, a pro or con?

It has given the instructor more ways to assess a student or explain to a student the cause-and-effect of their swing. As coaches, the more tools we have to assess our students—whether it be through TPI, Swing Catalyst, video or a launch monitor—the more confident we can be with their corrections. The one negative is that swings get contrived, as students try and "get into positions rather than flow through positions," to use a phrase I find myself repeating often.

We have access to hundreds of thousands of dollars of Doppler technology here at Desert Mountain, and while we incorporate all of it at

various times to overcome specific issues, it's still pretty amazing what a 99-cent pool noodle can do. In addition to swing strategy within the performance center, we partner with fitness instructors at our wellness center who will create workouts to integrate and reinforce what our students learn in our sessions.

You must have some great stories from some of your family golf outings—any that you can share with us?

Well, as we've matured our matches have become much more civil, but I do remember inviting the brothers to Medinah and having my brother David choose to wear his Boo Weekly camo shirt for the occasion. It was so we couldn't see him searching for his ball when he "hooked it into the (expletive) woods."

We typically only get together once a year so bragging rights last a while. Last year I shot my age, 55, on an executive course to hold the title. Through the years the family part has been great. We get together and play and it's competitive, same as it was when we were all playing the game professionally.

And now you are moving onto another generation of golfers.

At Medinah, we have averaged 170 kids a summer. Watching the progress from year to year is really

Desert Mountain has a full complement of teaching tools and facilities to help Prange take the best possible care of his 2,000 members.



special. To speak to your question on a personal note, my son would rather be skiing, but the instruction he received at a young age—he's now 26—has stuck with him, even though his idea of golf is a few cold brews and just enjoying the day.

What is a typical day for you?

I arrive at 6:45 in the morning and return emails and get my admin work done. Then I head out to teach, though not like I did at Medinah, from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m. Now having said that, I did just glance at today's sheet here at Desert Mountain, and although it is 34 degrees, we have 26 golf lessons booked, four clubfitting sessions and a green-reading clinic at 2 p.m. In season, we might see over 30 lessons and a clinic every day.

What about the rest of your teaching team, they sound like they stay pretty busy as well?

They do. With roughly 2,000 members, of which approximately 500 are here year-round, instruction at Desert Mountain is a 12-month job. We only teach our membership and member-referred guests. We have five full-time instructors including myself, utilizing our instructional bays, outside instruction area and a great short-game complex.

What does a first lesson look like?

All instructors provide a questionnaire to assess skill level, physical issues, goals and so forth. As

the first lesson concludes the communication to establish frequency, drills and practice habits must be addressed. The instruction itself must create a true diagnosis and explanation of a player's tendencies or what you might call their "consistent inconsistencies," another phrase I find helpful.

What happens when the member heads back north after the winter season? How do you communicate with their northern instructor?

It's all about communication. It's impressive how avid and loyal our players at Desert Mountain are. If they use one of us here, they will continue to communicate with us throughout the year. But again, with a couple thousand members, I have made numerous phone calls to instructors and head professionals to discuss what we are working on and why we are working on that particular thing. So, we trade notes as the golfers are coming and going, and that helps.

With such a busy facility, how much on-course training happens?

That really isn't an issue. With so many golf courses, we can typically find a place. And after 2:30 p.m. playing lessons aren't an issue at all—we can just pick a course and schedule a time. That is also when we do our on-course clinics and our rules clinics. **PG**