ARE YOU READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL?

By Andy Hilts, *Director*

Years ago the NGF launched an ad campaign titled, "Fall—Golf's Best Season!" Images of autumn sunlight and golfers enjoying the crisp air made these ads convincing. And indeed they had to be. Prime conditions or no prime conditions, autumn golf is a tricky sell, due to extra competition for leisure time. Back-to-school, kids' sports, football on TV—it all chips away at time folks would otherwise spend on golf, including golf instruction.

So how do you extend your coaching season later into the fall before the snow flies? Here are some proven strategies and tactics.

Control the Schedule: Book more lessons farther out. I can be a broken record on this point, simply because it's a proven winner. The single best way to keep your students active into the fall is to keep them in your lesson book. You as their coach must control the schedule. You need to dictate when you'll need to see them and how often. When you control the schedule, they will continue to take lessons, even though they may not be playing golf as much.

Put a Fresh Focus on Playing Lessons: Getting on-course with a student is obviously the best way to see just how you can help improve their game. Observe them in action and you'll be most able to illustrate all aspects of their game that need attention. Track their stats during the session to help reveal that their short game actually is *not* "pretty good." Take video of their swing to help explain why they hit the shots they do. On-course sessions are an assessment tool you can build into an action plan that keeps them engaged all year.

Point Out the Importance of Off-Season Skill Acquisition: The best time to make major changes to movement patterns in a swing is the off-season. Don't let students get frustrated during their playing season by working intensively on their full swing. Spend the summer months working on wedge play, putting, course management, mental approach and other scoring skills. Again, we as coaches need to dictate the schedule that's best for their improvement.

Create a Year-Round Game Plan at the Start of the Season: If you aren't sitting down with your players to lay out goals and build an action plan I would urge you to start doing so immediately. Talking about their goals while on the lesson tee isn't enough. Use a white board or a sheet you have developed and cut the year into quarters. Share how each quarter of the year will be focused on different aspects of their game. Having specific stages written down makes any goal more tangible, and having tangible goals will lead a student to take ownership of their improvement.

Find a Place to Teach Indoors: If you don't have a teaching building and can't build one, get creative. Take a corner of the golf shop, if you can. Set up a net and a mat in the basement of the clubhouse or in the cart barn. It doesn't need to be pretty. You basically need 10-foot ceilings and a 20-by-20 floor space—and you can probably get away with an even smaller footprint than that. If you don't have a teaching building and there are no options for an indoor space, get creative with your programming. Host a class on mental performance, host a rules clinic, set up an indoor putting course, bring in a fitness instructor or teach a class on pre-shot routine.

In short, do whatever you can to illustrate that golf improvement is more than just a summertime activity. Try something new this fall and start working to extend your season. Seeing the activity you are generating will hopefully spur others to continue with lessons year-round and thereby keep the revenue streams flowing for the club as well as for you, the instructor. PG

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