

NEW BOOK FROM AWARD-WINNING MEMBER

## PROONENT EXCLUSIVE: CHRIS ROWE BOOK EXCERPT

Choosing a stealth approach to book-writing, Chris Rowe contributed magazine articles to a local publication for many years and then wove them together into first one book and then another. His second book goes by the colorful title of “Bartenders, Preachers and Golf Pros”—we offer you some excerpts of it here.

Longtime head professional at Whispering Pines Golf Club in Trinity, Texas, Rowe played NCAA golf for East Central Oklahoma University then joined Dornick Hills Country Club in Oklahoma as an assistant professional. Three years later he moved on to storied Colonial Country Club in Ft. Worth, Tex., his last stop before taking up residence at Whispering Pines.

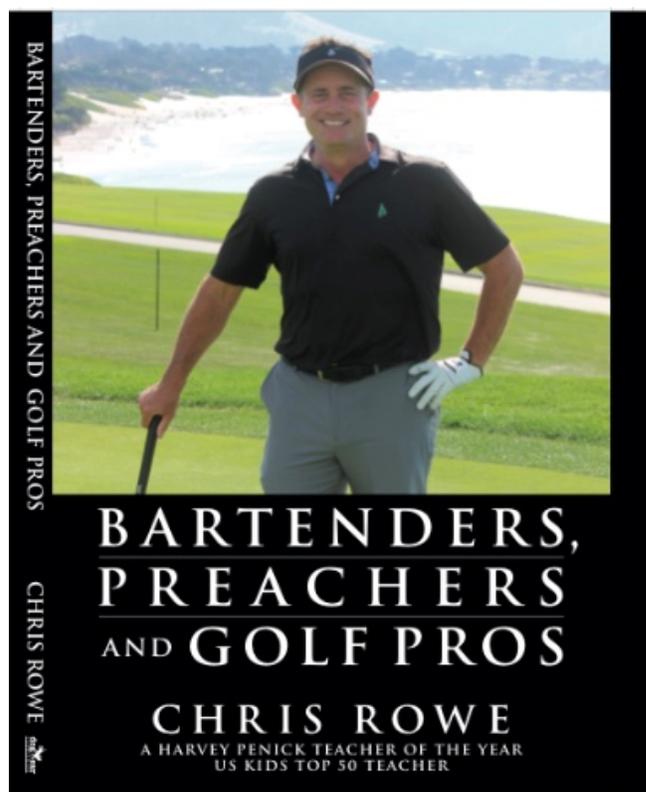
Continually challenging himself toward high achievement as a golf coach, Rowe has garnered recognition for his efforts along the way. Three times he has received South Texas PGA Teacher of the Year award, named for Harvey Penick. He has also been a US Kids Top 50 Teacher in America and on multiple occasions has been nominated to the Golf Digest and GOLF Magazine national rankings of top teachers.

In a presentation last January to Proponent members Chris offered up the following advice to his fellow instructors:

- “Private clubs are like high schools—full of cliques. And each clique has a ringleader. Give each ringleader a free lesson, make them better, and you’ll get business from every group.”
- “If you’re surrounded by small towns, go find the best golf talent each one has, and become the one teacher whose name is known to everyone in that town.”
- “Write a book—it will set you apart. But don’t sit down and do it from scratch—instead find an existing publication that will let you write articles for it, and after a few years put the articles together to make a finished book.”

In writings aimed at amateur golfers rather than his professional peers, Chris has endeavored to produce an insider’s guide to the game that the average player can learn from. Here are some highlights from the new book.

**I tell my students that every golf course is** a book of golf holes made up of 18 chapters. If a college student had a test on a book they were assigned, they would want to know details and highlights of each chapter. All the chapters of the book are important, but usually some are more



important than others. The professor verifies this, by telling the class: “You might want to read this chapter more than once.” The test always has more questions from that chapter than any other one.

Likewise, on the golf course, there are always holes you need to pay more attention to than others. All the holes are important and require you to “read” through them, so to speak. Par fives usually could be a more important chapter because the second shot challenges you to make a decision. Do you go for the green in two? If you lay up, what yardage do you lay up for your third shot? The rest of the holes require decisions as well, so never skip over chapters and assume you will not be tested on them.

When you play your home course, you should know every detail of every hole. If asked to open your home course book to chapter twelve, you should be able to tell me exactly how you would play that hole. You should be able to tell me every detail about the layout of the hole, the complexity of the green, and the best angle to approach the green. If you are preparing for a tournament on a different course, you should study

every detail and be prepared to get a call from your golf professor asking you how you would play each hole.

So, again, golf courses are books, and holes are chapters. Pay attention in class and study each chapter. Your test is the club championship, member guest, state qualifier, or your Saturday morning game. You should know all the chapters when you arrive at the first tee and make an A-plus on your next eighteen-hole exam.

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During the PGA Merchandise Show, you see everything you could imagine in the golf industry. One of the most unique items this year was from FlightScope. FlightScope is a Doppler radar that tracks your golf ball's spin rate, distance, carry, club path, angle of attack, and many more details. This is incredible technology, and everyone should hit shots with their instructor using this device.

FlightScope added a new technology this year that includes a headband that reads your brain waves after each shot. You place the band on your head, and the screen it's connected with either shows green or red. If the screen shows red, you have tension in your swing. If the screen is green, your tension level is good.

As the headband was placed on my head, the screen turned red immediately. Feeling a bit ridiculous wearing a suit with this headband on and the screen turning red wasn't a surprise. The person who invented this technology was standing next to me, and he asked me to hit a ball. The PGA Merchandise Show actually has a driving range set up where you can hit all the new clubs from each manufacturer. They handed me a nine iron, and the shot soared into the back of the net seventy yards away. Feeling pretty good about the shot, I immediately turned to look at the data. The data showed green at address and then went to red as the golf swing began.

After a few more shots with the exact same results, I decided to try and trick the machine. I've never taken a lie detector test, but this technology works in a similar way. Earlier in the day, Proponent Group had had numerous classes for golf instructors to get continuing education. I absolutely love attending anything that gives me new ideas and makes me a better instructor. One of the classes was a mental class taught by a sports psychologist. The main objective of his class was breathing techniques to relieve tension. "Do you breathe in on your backswing or out?" We've all heard the joke, but there is validity to the question. When you let all the air out of your lungs, you start to relax.

This seemed like the perfect time to try this technique with a headband filled with sensors and a screen that wouldn't turn green. I addressed the ball and took a deep breath just before pulling the club back, and then let all the air out of my lungs. The inventor of this technology looked at me and said,

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"That was good!" The screen had turned green at the moment my lungs were exhaling.

This got me thinking about what the sports psychologist had been talking about. What if you inhale when addressing the ball and exhale at the start of the swing? Every shot hit after my new breathing technique produced a green screen!

When we get under pressure or get nervous on the golf course, we tend to speed up our swings and have tension throughout our body. If you breathe using

this technique, it immediately relaxes your body and eliminates tension. I'm not saying do this on every shot, but try it when you're on the first tee and nervous, or standing over a putt to shoot your lowest score. It worked for me, and it will work for you the next time you're on the links!

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My golf career has introduced me to so many incredible people throughout the past 30-plus years playing and working as a PGA professional. I've hung out with the President of the United States and played golf with hall of fame athletes, along with numerous famous musicians. I've been blessed to work at Colonial and Whispering Pines the past 21 years, and you bump into a lot of great people along the way.

When I worked at Colonial, our shifts usually had the assistant professional opening the golf shop three days a week and closing the other three days. The mornings when I opened, there would always be this particular caddie on the corner of Colonial Parkway, waiting for someone to give him a ride. The caddie's name was Clifford. I never knew his last name but made a habit of giving him a ride to the clubhouse. The public bus would drop him off on University Street, and he would walk halfway to the clubhouse about the time I would arrive at the back gate entrance near the fourth tee.

For years, we would have brief conversations during our two-minute drive. We always had small talk, and I always wished him a good day on the links. One day, I asked Clifford if he had ever shagged golf balls for Ben Hogan. To my surprise, he nodded. When you work at Colonial for a decade, you hear every Hogan story imaginable. I never met Mr. Hogan, and to this day, I wish I'd made my way over to Shady Oaks while he was still alive.

Clifford began to tell me about Mr. Hogan going to the right side of the 10th hole at Colonial and hitting balls across the 10th and 18th fairways while Clifford stood in the 17th fairway. These three holes run parallel at Colonial, and back then, golf courses didn't have the elaborate driving ranges we have today. I asked him the obvious question: "How good was Mr. Hogan?"

"Everything people said about Mr. Hogan was true!" he replied. "You move a step here and a step there, and the

balls would land right next to the shag bag." Clifford then told me the line I'll never forget! In his Southern drawl, he said, "Chris, there were numerous times the golf balls would bounce right in the shag bag." What I would have done to see Mr. Hogan hit some of those shots.

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If you were asked to walk 10 feet across a two-by-four board that was five feet above the ground, would you be able to do it? I'm guessing most of you would be able to. Now, what if the board was raised to fifteen feet above the ground? Most of you might say this would be harder or scarier, but the truth is the board is still the same width and length. The only difference is the height that the board has been raised. But it's still the same 10-foot-long two-by-four. Many times when we are hitting a golf shot, we make the moment bigger than it actually is. Is a birdie putt easier than a triple-bogey putt? No. They are exactly the same because each putt counts the same. We often put more pressure on ourselves when we are playing a famous hole or have a putt to win a bet. Every shot counts one stroke, regardless of the moment.

A few months ago, I was playing the 8th hole at Pebble Beach. My tee shot landed on the right side of the fairway and was in perfect position. Those of you who have played Pebble Beach and stood on top of the cliff know how spectacular the moment can be. As I looked down at the green with a 360-degree panorama view of the most beautiful place on Earth, it was hard to imagine the shot not being a big moment. Jack Nicklaus says the second shot on the 8th hole at Pebble Beach is the best second shot in golf, and as I stood there with a seven iron in my hand, Jack's statement entered my mind. I started to think about how beautiful the ocean and cliffs were—and how cool it would be to tell the guys I birdied the 8th hole at Pebble Beach. I really wanted to hit the shot perfect!

With all the distractions, I collected my thoughts and went through my routine. As I stood over the ball, I told myself, This shot is just another golf shot. My mind cleared, and my focus was on making a good swing. The ball took off toward the green and gently faded toward the flag. Holding my pose and knowing the shot had been struck perfectly, I watched the ball land softly on the green ten feet from the hole. Unfortunately, the putt didn't go in, but the greatest second shot in golf was hit perfectly.

The point of this story is to understand that no shot is more important than any other shot. It's important to go

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through your routine and make a swing like you make on the driving range. The next time you are playing a famous golf course or have the opportunity to do something special on your home course, remember to not let the moment get too big. Every shot counts exactly the same, and no moment is bigger than another.

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My guitar collection is very dear to my heart. It's so much fun to pull a guitar out of the case and plug it into a powerful amp. One of the things I've never understood is the longer a guitar is not played, the more out of tune it becomes. All guitars have to be tuned at some point, whether they are played or not played. It has never made sense to me if the guitar was perfectly in tune when it was returned to its case, why it would be out of tune a month later. Shouldn't the guitar be in the same tune when it is plugged into a Marshall amp as it was when it was put in the case? Humidity and different temperature changes seem to affect the strings and the wood. That is my conclusion and what the research has shown, but it still doesn't make sense.

Golf swings get out of tune just like guitar strings. When you put away your game for a month and come back, you will most likely be out of tune. It doesn't matter how well you were striking the ball before your game took some time off; seldom do you come back as the same golfer the first time back. Many PGA Tour players take time off after a win and return a few weeks later, but never seem to get their winning form back. This year, Dustin Johnston was winning everything early in the year and hasn't come close to winning over the past few months after returning. Everyone needs a break, especially PGA Tour players, who are on the road and away from their families for weeks, but there are no guarantees they will have the same winning form.

The weekend golfer doesn't get to play or practice every day like professionals, and their games will certainly go out of tune faster, but it's still all relative. PGA guys finishing in the top ten every week and then taking time off and returning missing cuts is the same as the weekend golfer who normally shoots in the low eighties and comes back after a few busy months in the office and shoots in the nineties the first time back.

We all go in and out of tune with our golf games just like guitar strings. The next time you take some time off, start back with a tune-up from your golf professional. With a little work on the range, you can get your swing back in tune in no time! **PG**