

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Can Instruction Lead Golf Out of the Wilderness?



By Lorin Anderson, President

The very good news – as reported on page 3 of this newsletter – is that the majority of Proponent Group members are having a very good year. Two-thirds (66 percent) report increased revenues versus the first half of last year with more than two out of five (41 percent) reporting at least a 10 percent increase. Nearly half also reported in-

creasing their rates this year. With so many of our members at top tier facilities this reconfirms that the top of the food chain is doing quite well here in the states, but it seems many in golf are still struggling as the game has seen a 2.5 percent annual decline in play over the past decade in the U.S.

These numbers play into a bigger narrative that Proponent Group is examining closely and will shine a spotlight on going forward. It's becoming more and more clear that perhaps the most dynamic indicator of engagement for a golfer is whether or not he or she takes formal instruction.

Some early data that Proponent Group and Retail Tribe have been gathering in recent months is showing about a 140 percent higher spend by the golfers at a facility who are regular lesson takers (we defined them as taking three or more lessons or clinics in the past year.)

Add in the data from the Pellucid Corporation – a top sports research company – that has found that there could be a significant game improvement “dividend” for the industry. Based on data that took Pellucid years to gather and analyze, the company found that for every stroke shaved off a golfer's handicap during the season, they

played an average of 10 percent more golf the following 12 months.

The net projection in the United States if every golfer lowered their handicap by one shot is that we would see an increase of 50 million rounds played and an additional \$1.7 billion in golf spending with three quarters of that increase in golf fees and the rest on ancillary spending.

Coupled with what Proponent and Retail Tribe are uncovering it's becoming clear that instruction could be a much bigger driver for the industry than anyone realized.

As Pellucid's Jim Koppenhaver points out, this “could be an industry life-saver vs. a nice-to-have for the industry.” He also notes that after two decades of significant equipment improvements that fail to show a corresponding reduction in scores, we can easily grasp that game improvement by equipment alone is unlikely.

Instead, the other two pieces of the game improvement equation – Instruction and Practice – have the potential to move the needle. Especially as we see teaching technology moving forward by leaps and bounds and we see more sharing and continuing education among instructors.

Whether you realize it or not, you may now be teaching in what will be looked back on as a Golden Age of instruction, when an increased understanding of science, human and motor-skill development and digital business opportunities all converged to make teaching and coaching golfers the catalyst that finally moved the industry forward again.

Proponent Group will be working to continue to educate facility leaders and the golfing public to understand that improvement is within reach and that it's a boon to the industry. We promise to deliver much more on this front at the Proponent Group Summit in November.

Proponent Group Partners

