

The Biggest



Issue Golf Faces: PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

PGA PRESIDENT TED BISHOP



“WE’VE GOT TO GET SOME PEOPLE THINKING AGAIN ABOUT NINE HOLES THAT TAKE TWO HOURS TO PLAY,” SAID TED BISHOP, THE PRESIDENT OF THE PGA OF AMERICA AND THE OWNER OF A 45-HOLE PUBLIC GOLF FACILITY SOUTH OF INDIANAPOLIS. “IT’S A GOOD WAY TO TARGET LAPSED GOLFERS AND NEW GOLFERS. THE 18-HOLE ROUND HAS ITS PLACE, BUT LET’S SEE HOW MANY PEOPLE WE CAN ATTRACT TO THE GAME WITH AN OFFER OF A QUICK NINE HOLES.”

Those are Bishop’s words in a recent interview with Bill Pennington of the New York Times Service.

Bishop offers a \$19 nine-hole round seven days a week, with or without a golf cart, after 4 p.m.

“It’s brought a real spike in the number of rounds played,” Bishop said. “And it’s been a lot of people I haven’t seen before.”

Bishop freely speaks his mind about the state of golf in his PGA blog and in other interviews, and with his own course plays his part in growing the game of golf. The PGA president, in this Q and A with BoardRoom magazine, touches on many topics.

BOARDROOM: There are numerous issues facing the golf community and various organizations, including The PGA of America and its 27,000 professionals. What are you hoping to achieve in addressing these issues by the end of your time as PGA President, in November 2014?

BISHOP: The biggest issue that the golf industry faces in the United States is player development. The PGA of America identified three groups who form the pool of players that we need to expand:

- Core golfers are still the most important commodity, because these players are at our facilities now, and we need to get them to play more.
- Lapsed golfers are those who once played the game but no longer do. We need to find new ways to recapture their passion for golf.

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- New players need to be introduced to the game. The good news is that there are new and creative means by which golf can attract groups such as women, minorities and juniors.

PGA Professionals are going to be looked at as the catalyst for player development. We, as an association, need to continue to emphasize to our PGA members how critical their role is in growing the game. We are doing that through Golf 2.0, the industry's strategic plan to grow the game, and its educational programs, which are geared towards helping PGA Professionals become more effective player development specialists. The industry has provided great resources, such as Get Golf Ready, Tee It Forward, PGA Sports Academy and PGA Junior League Golf. Our members need to embrace these programs and make things happen at their facilities.

BR: How have your experiences in golf prepared you for serving as PGA President?

BISHOP: I started working and playing on a par-3 golf course in my hometown of Logansport, Ind. I spent my first 17 years after college running a low-end municipal golf course in Linton, Ind., before I built a higher-end, semi-private daily-fee facility near Indianapolis.

It has been my good fortune to experience golf at all levels. In my opinion, outlets such as that par-3 course and a reasonably priced public course, are where players enter the game.

In my first two decades of working in golf, I made my living owning the carts, golf shop and food concessions. I was lucky to have developed an entrepreneurial approach to running my business. The way my job was structured forced me to learn how to promote and market my facility, so I could provide for my family.

That is a lost art today in the golf business. Too many of our professionals are salaried employees and they never get exposed to having the ownership mentality.

But, as I said, we are addressing important facets of developing business acumen with our PGA members through education delivered at the section level. I think as president, I can relate to the challenges that all PGA professionals face. It's a tough business and I have experienced my fair share of adversity.

BR: If you were a PGA professional working at a private club, you loved everything about the work, and were paid a salary you had asked for, what kind of offer from another private club would you consider? Why?

BISHOP: Sometimes money is not everything. I would be looking for a facility that would give me some freedom and latitude when it came to developing programs that



would enhance the club's business. I always thought that the toughest spot in golf was for the professional who was subject to carrying out business decisions mandated by their club or board, when that golf professional knew there was probably a better way to do business.

BR: There are programs such as Get Golf Ready and PGA Junior League Golf, which have been popular at private clubs. What is the role that private clubs play in growing the game?

BISHOP: I know many successful private club professionals who have embraced these programs.

My daughter, Ambry, works at the oldest club in America- Saint Andrews Golf Club in Westchester County, NY. I have told her repeatedly that anything she can do to promote interest in golf with non-playing family members is critical.

When families look at monthly dues commitments, they have to search for value in the experience. The more people in the family who get some benefit out of the club membership, the better chance for retaining that membership. Get Golf Ready and PGA Junior League Golf are two great examples of initiatives that will involve everyone in the family in golf!

BR: By extension, what is the role of the PGA professional in executing any of these programs, and what is the golf professional accountable for?

BISHOP: The golf professional is the person who has to execute these programs. It is the responsibility of the golf professional to develop relationships, and these programs do that. Golf always has been and always will be a people business at every level. Golf professionals, by nature, love being around people and the vast majority of the good ones, realize that relationships equal customers.

BR: If golf doesn't grow at a club, why?

BISHOP: There can be many reasons for this. I think, in this country during this decade, that some private clubs are just destined to fail. Local demographics and lifestyles are dictating that people do other things with their leisure time than play golf.

The traditional country club, in many mid-size Midwestern commu-

nities, is really struggling. Memberships are aging and clubs are not attracting members who are under 40 years of age. The activities that kids are involved in today take up a lot of time, and younger parents just don't seem to find the country club lifestyle something they want to invest in.

The golf professional seems to ultimately pay the price for the lack of growth. Many good professionals have lost their jobs as club membership rosters have shrunk. It's unfortunate, particularly for professionals who are over 50 years of age, and who have devoted the best years of their life to a club.

It's difficult to find a comparable job from a compensation standpoint. But, many businesses have faced the same challenges in the last 20 years. Truthfully, golf will probably never return to where it was in the 1980s and early '90s.

BR: What do the professionals do to further player development?

BISHOP: Golf professionals need to take the time to analyze their clientele and be proactive in suggesting how these four player development tools – Get Golf Ready, Tee It Forward, PGA Junior League Golf and PGA Sports Academy – can specifically benefit their members or customers. Suggest programs to your members, and be flexible in when you offer them, so it will be conducive to the customer's schedules.

BR: Is teaching still a major focus?

BISHOP: Teaching will always be the major focus. Proper

instruction should not only improve the student's skills, but enhance their enjoyment of the game.

Creative golf professionals will find ways to increase fun for their students. Encourage beginning women to tee up the ball everywhere until they get to the green, when they can chip and putt.

Throw the ball out of bunkers and avoid the sand shot until they get proficient with that technique. Seriously, what's the harm? Show people how to have fun with golf, and then let them become "golfers."

BR: What things as a golf professional do you not like to do?

BISHOP: I have been a golf professional for 37 years. There is no job that I haven't done. And not one is necessarily more important than another. When you have done it as long as I have, you realize that it's all part of the job, whether its teaching, playing, washing golf cars, cleaning restrooms, scoring and running events, etc. It's what we do.

BR: How has the role of the PGA professional at private clubs evolved over the years? Has it been for the betterment of the club member's experience?

BISHOP: I do think that club members around the country realize that their golf professionals are highly educated and very qualified to serve in many different roles today. That is a good thing for everyone at the club. **BR**

