

# The Art of Teaching

Clubs across the Met Area have a renowned corps of teaching professionals whose talent is equal only to their dedication

BY EVAN ROTHMAN

ILLUSTRATION BY BRAD WALKER

**T**he Met Area is as rich in great teaching professionals as it is in great clubs and courses. No doubt those things are interrelated. And just like the storied layouts and grand clubhouses always remain top of mind to golfers, the area's educators are continually focused on their students' improvement—even if the focus of those students can, well, waver a bit from time to time.

Our teachers are in the trenches of the practice tees sunup to sundown, ever-attentive to ways to raise our skills, lower our scores, and let us enjoy the game even more. Some are familiar faces to Golf Channel fans; some have celebrity clientele; some were, or still are, very good players; some are happy to be famous just within the confines of their club. All have learned a lot helping others dig the secret out of the dirt—and agree that they are themselves always learning.

Maybe that's why they are so successful. According to the 2012 PGA of America Annual Operations Survey, the median golf instruction revenue for Met Section clubs was \$62,500. (This was for the calendar year 2011 and includes lessons, clinics and golf schools at facilities with at least 18 holes.) While that represents a 10.7 percent year-over-year decline—unsurprising given the stuttering economy—it remains more than six times the national average of \$10,000.

Those numbers demonstrate our area teachers' and players' constant commitment to game improvement. That doesn't mean the field stands still. Some experts say the nature of teaching is evolving with similar speed to the technology often fueling that change. Dr. Paul Schempp, who recently spoke to a group of Met PGA professionals at Westchester Country Club, is the president of Performance Matters, Inc. and a University of Georgia research professor. He believes that technological advances have begun to alter the communication between teachers and students—and, in the process, students' notions of that working relationship.

"Between websites, emails and text messages, the connections that teachers and students can establish is far stronger," says Dr. Schempp, who works with several Tour pros and helped *GOLF Magazine* develop the methodology used to select its Top 100 Teachers in America. "There is more of an expectation by students that it

will be a partnership, with more back-and-forth communication, than before."

Dr. Schempp sees hints of other changes. Some also involve technology, with its use not limited to the teaching front but even down to the booking of lessons online, as well as teachers posting more instructional advice across all media platforms. Other budding trends have more to do with the nature and structure of instruction. He believes that more players are recognizing the value of a longer-term commitment to instruction, with more frequent visits to their pro, versus "Band-aid" fixes. Dr. Schempp also sees group lessons becoming more common, especially among women and families, and a burgeoning demand for supervised practices.

"For, say, \$20 a session, I hit balls and practice alongside 10 or 15 other people, and the pro supervises us, providing quick tips and activities," Dr. Schempp says. "It's more of a coaching model than instruction."

*The Met Golfer* recently spoke to a handful of prominent Met Area pros to get their takes on what they do, how they do it, and how it's changing, for starters. Their answers showcase the variety of thought on display. Provoking thought on our end, of course, comes naturally to them all.



Mike Adams uses teaching aids at Hamilton Farm.

**Mke Adams**  
Hamilton Farm Golf Club,  
Gladstone, N.J.



**Years Teaching** 34

**Teaching Philosophy** “The first thing I do with new students is assess them with a series of tests. Once I understand their biomechanics, how their body is going to work in time and space, I put together a game plan. I focus most on the setup, which basically writes the script of how you’re going to swing the golf club.”

**Different Students, Different Teaching?** “Your biomechanics are the same regardless of skill level. All you’re trying to do is to find out how their body works, not anything about their golf swing.”

**Teaching Evolution** “My teaching is always evolving. I learn from students every day. I want to have the answers to all their questions. In *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell says 10,000 hours makes you an expert. I’ve taught more than 110,000 hours. In all that time, I’ve been able to make every mistake in teaching and wind up a better teacher.”

**Technology’s Impact** “Trackman and high-speed video, they’re another set of eyes. They allow us to quantify what our own eyes see. We’re able to show the student, ‘This is what’s really happening in your swing or your putting stroke.’”

**How The Business of Teaching Has Changed** “For me, it hasn’t. I teach 10 to 12 hours a

day, seven days a week in the winter in Florida and six days a week at Hamilton Farm. I teach all day, almost every day—over 3,000 hours a year.”

**Golden Rule** “I have two. ‘Thou shalt not make the student worse,’ and ‘Thou shalt allow the student to have fun.’”

**Students’ Job** “Their progress is as much about them as it is me. My job is to analyze and diagnose, and give them a way to get better via homework. Their job is to do that

Former LPGA Tour player Liz Caron works with many junior golfers.



TOP: COURTESY OF MIKE ADAMS; LEFT: RUSSELL KIRK/GOLF LINKS

homework. I want them to have progressed by the time they see me again.”

**Advice for Young Instructors** “Keep your eyes, ears and mind open, and your mouth shut. God gave you two eyes and two ears because He wanted you to look and listen twice as much as He wanted you to speak.”

**Favorite/Least Favorite Parts of the Job** “The favorite thing is creating the relationships of helping people become better golfers. Least favorite? Nothing. I have the best job in the world. I’m so fortunate to teach at two of the country’s greatest clubs.”

**Quick Tip** “Everybody needs to learn the knockdown or punch shot. Use what I call the ‘2-2-2’: Choke down two inches to stiffen the shaft, which lowers the shot’s trajectory and reduces the distance it will travel. Move the ball back two inches in your stance to make contact with the ball first and take loft off the club. Then open your stance by dropping your front foot back two inches to put more weight on your front side and restrict your turn back.”

**Liz Caron**  
Rockrimmon Country Club,  
Stamford, Conn.



**Years Teaching** 2

**Teaching Philosophy** “My main focus is really figuring out swing path and club plane.

That sounds simpler than it is. But I’m certainly not the most technically oriented instructor.”

**Different Students, Different Teaching?** “You have to consider everyone on an individual basis, including their physical limitations. For better players, it’s really important to use video; for beginners, you’re more worried about fundamentals; and for kids, you want it to be fun—hitting balls down a hill or into the water—so that they’ll want to come back to the course. I like to make sure my women students feel comfortable. I tell them how I played on the LPGA Tour and I shanked shots, too. We all make mistakes.”

**Teaching Evolution** “I do a better job now assessing golfers’ goals and building a plan that will help attain them. When I started, I didn’t ask enough questions about what they were looking to accomplish. Now I can help them in the long run and not just try to fix their most obvious flaws.”

**Technology’s Impact** “I use an iPad a lot. You can use technology not only to provide good feedback but also let the student trust in your abilities. Trust is earned in a student-teacher relationship. When I tell you your ‘half-swing’ is still a full swing, I can show that to you.”

**How The Business of Teaching Has Changed** “Obviously, I don’t have the long view that others have. Our club is always looking for new members but lessons are up this year. We’re always busy.”

**Golden Rule** “Take a genuine interest in each and every one of your students. Care about them and their success—that’s what this game is all about.”

**Students’ Job** “Eliminate inhibitions and stop worrying about making mistakes. That’s such a huge asset. And practicing with a purpose and a goal is so important. Your teacher should be giving you games and drills and ideas to help do that.”

**Advice for Young Instructors** “Don’t second-guess yourself. You’ll look back on lessons and realize you sometimes took the wrong approach. If your heart and mind are in the right place and you only want what’s best for the student, you’re still one step ahead of everyone.”

**Favorite/Least Favorite Parts of the Job** “The reason I teach is to see the smile that someone gives you when they hit the ball

just the way they want to. Their happiness makes me fall back in love with the game. There isn’t much I don’t love about teaching—though being pregnant [this year] I could do without being on my feet all day.”

**Quick Tip** “Your swing doesn’t have to be perfect if your tempo stays consistent. Even Tour pros spray shots when their tempo is off. Find a tempo that works for you, whether it’s ‘1-2-3-4’ or a word or phrase, put it in your mind and keep referring to it.”

**David Glenz**

Black Oak Golf Club,  
Long Valley, N.J.



**Years Teaching** 34

**Teaching Philosophy** “It’s pretty simple, [starting with] body structure and the set-up environment. The spine tilts to the club shaft at a 90-degree angle. From there, it’s just the movement of the clubhead, especially the clubface, as it circles the spine.”

**Different Students, Different Teaching?** “The framework remains the same. With beginners, it’s all about the right posture and club movement, emphasizing how the hands relate to the clubface and what the clubface is doing in motion. Intermediate players get more into the coordination of clubhead and body movement. Advanced players get a lot more into specifics of pre-

David Glenz is hands-on at Black Oak, his new club in western New Jersey.



ANDREW LEVINE

**On the Lists**

The Met Area is well represented on golf’s two most authoritative rankings of the country’s finest teachers: *GOLF Magazine’s* Top 100 Teachers in America and *Golf Digest’s* America’s 50 Best Teachers.

- \*Mike Adams, Hamilton Farm Golf Club
- \*Michael Breed, Manhattan Woods Golf Club
- Jason Carbone, Baltusrol Golf Club
- Eden Foster, The Maidstone Club
- David Glenz, Black Oak Golf Club
- \*Michael Hebron, Smithtown Landing Country Club
- Darrell Kestner, Deepdale Golf Club
- Tom Patri, Friar’s Head
- Mitchell Spearman, Doral Arrowwood Resort

\*appears on both lists

cise body movement with some attention to what the club’s doing. There is a progression as players advance.”

**Teaching Evolution** “I’ve stayed with the same thing. I’ve always tried to avoid teaching a method, the same thing to every player.”

**Technology’s Impact** “I use video a lot for feedback, to show players what they’re doing.”

**How The Business of Teaching Has Changed** “When economic times are difficult, many people don’t have as much time to pay atten-

tion to things like golf lessons. I probably should do more promotion, but things being a little quieter make it easier in that I'm now running a golf course as well as teaching."

**Golden Rule** "Personalize instruction to the individual. Different people feel things differently. Some don't feel things at all, but they can picture it. You have to tap into each player's best learning method."

**Students' Job** "It comes down to, 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.' Students need a commitment to learning and have to take some responsibility in the learning environment. With good drills and practice movements, if you can get a club in your hands five to 10 minutes a day, you'll play better on the weekends."

**Advice for Young Instructors** "Expose yourself to the best teachers. Watch them teach, understand different philosophies, and then go develop your own."

**Favorite/Least Favorite Parts of the Job** "The satisfaction of helping someone else improve has always been my motivation for teaching. I don't have any complaints. A student just has to come with the expectation that they're going to have to change, and devote some practice time to making improvements."

**Quick Tip** "In the immortal words of Ben Hogan, when it comes to power, I wish we

had three right hands. The ball is 'hit' forward; you need to develop a sense of the clubhead hitting the ball forward—and the right hand dictates more of what the clubhead does. Practice hitting chip shots where you emphasize getting the right wrist loaded and the right hand striking timed with a little push off the right foot."

## Darrell Kestner

Deepdale Golf Club,  
Manhasset, N.Y.



**Years Teaching** 37

**Teaching Philosophy** "I don't teach a method. I try to be versatile and emphasize simple over complicated. You're trying to get good, solid fundamentals to make a repeatable swing."

**Different Students, Different Teaching?** "People learn in different ways. Some people want to see it, some want to feel it, some want to copy it. You have to be able to get a point across a hundred different ways, because sometimes it's that last one that clicks."

**Teaching Evolution** "I think I've tried to make things simpler over the past 15 to 20 years. The most important thing I do is to communicate that those so-called 'basics' are the most important things in the golf swing. Calling it basics minimizes its importance to some people. The better the fundamentals, the better the player is."

## Young and Hungry

Who are the next generation of teachers set to become instruction stars beyond the Met area? We asked some in-the-know local pros and golfers for their nominations. Here is a by-no-means definitive list of potential future household names:

- Jason Birnbaum, Alpine Country Club
- Jason Carbone, Baltusrol Golf Club
- Scott Chisolm, Plainfield Country Club
- Debbie Doniger, GlenArbor Golf Club
- Kevin Hinton, Piping Rock Club
- Nick Maselli, Old Oaks Country Club
- Dave Polchinski, Bayonne Golf Club
- Tim Puetz, Huntington Country Club

**Technology's Impact** "It's like anything in life: The more good information you have, the better you can be. V1, SAM, weight plates, all that information can be critical. Still, how you get that information across is the artistic part of teaching. I guess I try to use technology just enough."

**Golden Rule** "It's to get across the point that getting a better swing doesn't necessarily make you a better player. To have more fun, you need to shoot lower scores. That comes down to spending more time improving your short game—chipping, pitching, putting, bunker shots. Make the bottom line better."

**Students' Job** "Ask questions. Communication has to be a two-way street, not just from teacher to student but also student to teacher. Make sure that you walk away from a lesson with three things: A knowledge of what you're doing, what you need to be doing, to how to get that done."

**Advice for Young Instructors** "It's essential to learn to communicate the same thing lots of different ways. And remember that your best advertising is word of mouth. Many young instructors want to get more lessons and promote themselves. I tell them, 'Keep giving good lessons and over time the business comes to you.'"

**Favorite/Least Favorite Parts of the Job** "I enjoy teaching the short game the most—getting players to hit shots up there for gimmes, making putts. That's very rewarding."

**Quick Tip** "My tag line with putting is: 'Respect the pace.' Everything is speed control. Practice with a real focus on the rhythm and tempo of the stroke."

## Technology

by Jason Birnbaum

*Alpine Country Club teaching professional Jason Birnbaum uses technology in all his lessons, whether it's with his tour professionals (Alexandre Rocha among them) or his members. Here he discusses how technology has impacted his teaching.*

Technology has really just changed everything. When I first started teaching I was using my naked eye and I was trying to learn things about the golf swing. Then I started using a regular video camera and a lot of stuff that I thought I was seeing with my naked eye wasn't really happening. And now with a device like TrackMan, I feel the same way about cameras that I did with the naked eye.

A machine like this is showing me things I couldn't see with the best slow-

motion camera in the industry. It measures clubface position and angle of impact, among other things. I don't want to get too technical here, but one number that TrackMan gives you is called angle detect, which is the amount of downward motion that the club has when it hits the ball, and this is critical to understanding swing path.

One thing I'll say about how it's impacting how I teach is that it takes a lot of the guesswork out of the analysis of a person's swing because the data is unbelievably accurate. It used to be that I'd watch a student hit five to 10 shots before I'd see a consistent ball flight, or really was confident enough to start to break it down to tell them what they had to work on. But now with just one swing, you basically get the DNA of this person's swing, so it's expedited the

learning process for them. Obviously, people have been giving great lessons for a long time without this technology, but it really comes down to what's most effective and efficient.

Technology has also made teaching a competitive landscape. The internet has changed things completely, and there are so many different ways to help students now. There are smartphone apps—I use this one Uber Sense that has a voiceover feature, so someone can e-mail me their swing and it gets downloaded to my phone and then I can play the swing in slow motion while talking about what looks good and what looks bad, analyze it and then send it back to them. Plus with things like social media, you have direct access to students that you didn't have before.



Darrell Kestner (inset) gave Nick Watney a putting tip that helped him win The Barclays.



GETTY IMAGES; INSET, THE PGA OF AMERICA; OPPOSITE PAGE, ANDREW LEVINE

## Teaching a Tour Pro by Bobby Heins

Old Oaks head professional Bobby Heins is not only an accomplished player (two-time Met Open and two-time MGA Senior Open champion) but is also the longtime coach of PGA Tour player Johnson Wagner. Heins, who has been teaching for 32 years, shares his thoughts on his relationship with Wagner, who has three career PGA Tour wins.

Johnson and I have been working together for his entire professional career, since he won the 2002 Met Open at Winged Foot (below, left). And at first it was more of an advisor—he was young, we had a couple of things we worked on, and I gave him ideas about playing professionally and taught him more about the mental side of the game. But the level of the competition on tour is so much higher now, I always tell him, there's 50 new guys coming out every year and their job is to replace you just like it was your job when you got out there. So you've got to keep fine tuning, and that's basically what we focus on.

Johnson's raw talent was always there, so the question becomes with a little bit

here and a little bit there, through observation, what can we do to get better this year?

I even sent him to Darrell [Kestner] for a putting lesson, since he was a little bit down on his putting. So I suggested he go see someone who pays attention to putting more than I do. Darrell gave him a couple of ideas on his putting, which helped him. With his swing, we work a lot with his wedges, 50 to 100 yards, and we work on ways to drive the ball a little straighter. Sometimes it's a matter of hitting a few more cut shots here and there, instead of trying to hit the draw all the time.

I see Johnson about six times a year. We'll do a lot of our work over the winter in Florida—last year we played as partners in a pro-pro at Mayacoo Lakes, then he came back two more times. I think we're going to do something like that before the new seasons starts and get everything together and organized so the knows what he's doing before he gets out there. And I'll see him in Florida at the Honda, then I usually go with him to his house in Charlotte and stay for a

day or two in April, then I usually see him at Hartford and during The Barclays.

Whether you're working with a tour pro or an average member, in both instances you're trying to teach people how to play golf, but the technique gets more nuanced. With players like Johnson, I'm trying to teach him to recognize things on a very high level—where's the lay-up shot that will leave him the best yardage, what's the stock shot in a situation versus trying to get too cute. With your average golfer you're trying to get them to recognize the kinds of situations that usually get them in trouble.

For instance, if you don't hit a particular shot well or you can't reach a particular green, then don't try it until you progress to the point where you can do it.

At the end of the day, you have people who want to learn how to swing and hit pretty shots and you have people who want to learn how to play and shoot good scores. And sometimes that is the biggest misconception in golf: people want pretty swings, and players want lower scores, and you kind of always have that battle. ■



FAR LEFT, LARRY LAMBERCH; LEFT, GETTY IMAGES

# Be Here.



## HARBOUR RIDGE YACHT & COUNTRY CLUB

### Be Our Guest.

Harbour Ridge Yacht & Country Club on the Treasure Coast of Florida is the winter home to members from many prestigious northern clubs such as Westchester Country Club, Winged Foot, Baltusrol, Wykagyl and Ridgewood. Come see what the excitement is about and play our two championship golf courses. The River Ridge course by legendary Pete and P.B. Dye offers players a wonderful series of panoramic vistas and one of the highest slope ratings in all of Florida. The Golden Marsh course by Joe Lee is "still on his list of the Top 10."

AS PART OF OUR BE OUR GUEST PROGRAM\*, YOU WILL ENJOY:

- Two nights in a fully equipped condominium or home.
- A complimentary tennis lesson and unlimited tennis for two during your stay.
- Two rounds of golf for two - the River Ridge course, designed by Pete and PB Dye and the Golden Marsh Course, designed by Joe Lee, offering championship golf for all playing levels.
- Unlimited use of our state-of-the-art Fitness Center.
- Two lunches for two in our Grille Room where you will enjoy excellent cuisine and breathtaking views.
- A casually elegant dinner for two that includes a glass of wine or cocktail to complement your dining experience.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact Lindsey LaCroix at (772) 873-6013 or send an e-mail to [membership@hrycc.org](mailto:membership@hrycc.org).



ASK ABOUT OUR BOAT SLIP PURCHASE & MEMBERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES!  
Homes and Condominiums with Golf Course and Waterfront views are available for sale or rent.

12600 Harbour Ridge Blvd. | Palm City, FL 34990 | 772.336.3000 | [www.HarbourRidge.com](http://www.HarbourRidge.com)

MetGolf.NDJ



\*For a nominal fee