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PGA Professional Christopher Smith urges his peers to do more to help students actually play better golf

From PGA Magazine December 2005

Christopher Smith, the 2004 Pacific Northwest PGA Teacher of the Year, is the PGA director of instruction at Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club in North Plains, Ore. Smith also was the 2003 Oregon Chapter PGA Teacher of the Year, and was selected in 2003 and 2005 by *Golf Digest* as one of Oregon's top instructors.

He says he's been wondering lately if PGA Professionals have truly been helping their students play better golf.

Says Smith: "Most golfers come to you with a common goal: to shoot lower scores. Many express that they just want to enjoy it more – yet often added enjoyment stems from improved performance. Although an individual's progress is highly dependent on time commitment and talent, if he or she is not shooting lower numbers, why not? Are you teaching students to play golf or just how to swing the club? Swinging the club in a reasonably efficient manner is but a small part of playing better golf.

"To help your students shoot lower scores, play with them. An initial evaluation must be done on-course, in order to make an accurate assessment of what his or her strengths and weaknesses truly are. Often a player's perception of his or her game differs greatly from reality. Once identified, the weaknesses can be addressed and treated, and then progress can begin.

"The knowledge and insight students can glean from simply watching/observing you is priceless in the learning process. Plus, your credibility is strengthened with the ability to demonstrate and execute. For accomplished players, watch for responses, reactions and attitudes. How does the student respond to adversity? Bad shots are inevitable, but responding in a positive manner is paramount.

"Next, have them practice like they play. Do you have students who simply can't 'take it' to the course? It might be because they're not simulating golf on the practice tee, but rather working on

their swing. After all, when was the last time you hit 20 consecutive 7-irons off of an artificial surface, from a perfect lie, on the course?

“Integrate some concepts to help your students more sincerely replicate a round of golf: Change their club, target and lie, if possible, after every shot; go through the entire pre-shot routine for every ball; play imaginary holes by visualizing a course and ‘playing’ it; practice different ball flights – draws/fades/high/low/easy/hard) to simulate what occurs on-course. As with many sports, playing might seem ‘easy’ if the training/practice is severe enough.”