



Getting It Right from The Start

Tips on Helping Your Children Get into the Game

By Andy Podolak, Head Golf Professional at Fire Ridge GC, Grafton, WI

Over the past decade, the junior golf industry has become big business. Numerous junior-only clinics, leagues, kid-friendly equipment companies have formed, not to mention the countless number of junior tours and college recruiting/resume services that have exploded onto the golf scene. Undoubtedly, there are countless opportunities out there for juniors playing both recreationally and competitively. With so much out there to choose from, it can be confusing for parents as they start to plan the roadmap for their junior golfer's development. Here are a few suggestions from my experience in the industry.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

My first bit of advice is simple; no matter what age your child is when he or she gets started, make sure that having fun is number one. Whatever your aspirations may be for your child with golf, you need to

remember (and remind your child) that it's just a game. In my mind, golf is the greatest game known to man, and perhaps you feel the same, but if your child does not see things that way, that's fine. I'm sure you'll agree as long as they grow up as a well-rounded individual that is all that matters.

BEFORE THEY PICK UP A CLUB

I highly recommend that you start your child out by teaching them some of the most important principles of the game. These initial teachings do not even require a club or a ball. The most wonderful thing about the game of golf lies in these principals. What are these principals? I'm speaking about the etiquette and rules of the game. Golf is historically an honorable game, where a participant is more or less self-policing themselves. This cannot be found in many (if any) other games. The aspects of etiquette within the game mirror that of the way people should act in everyday life, with respect and concern for others.

FINDING INSTRUCTION

Now that your child has been primed on the core values of the game, it's time to look for an instructor. I would simply start your search by looking into your local golf courses for clinics, camps and private instruction. Talk to one of the golf professionals on staff and they will know everything about the clinics, camps, or private lessons because they will be the ones in charge of all the teaching.

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From Enrichment to Equipment, TGA Launches New Junior Golf Club Line

TGA Premier Junior Golf, one of the nation's leading introductory and recreational golf programs, has expanded on its junior golf expertise with the launching of its own line of custom fit golf clubs for boys and girls.

"Since 2003 TGA has become a leading expert on introductory and recreational junior golf instruction," said TGA's founder and CEO, Joshua Jacobs. "By experiencing firsthand how juniors learn, swing and react to equipment, we have developed junior clubs that kids will find esthetically pleasing and well performing, which will further expand our expertise and credibility among our golf consumers."

With the launch of its equipment line, TGA positions itself as the first company in the golf industry fully dedicated to growing the game through programming initiatives and providing its own properly fitted golf equipment along the way.

TGA Premier Junior Golf boxed sets will be available January 2016, and be offered in seven color-coded sizes based on height with right and left handed options for both boys and girls making it convenient and affordable for parents to fit their junior golfer. Yellow for boys/girls under 3', Orange for 3'-3'8", Red and Pink for 3'8"-4'4", Blue and Lavender 4'4"-5' and Black for 5'-5'6". Sets will range from \$89.99 - \$149.99 depending on size and include 3-6 clubs, a stand bag, and head-covers. A percentage of each purchase will be donated to the TGA Sports Foundation. For more information about TGA Premier Junior Golf, visit www.playtga.com or follow @TGAJuniorGolf on Twitter.



FINDING THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

When it comes to looking for the right equipment, you have a lot to choose from. Most of the major golf club companies make junior sets. I would suggest, however, to initially look at a junior specific golf equipment manufacturers such as US Kids Golf and the newly-formed TGA Premier Junior Golf. Studies have shown that a large number of juniors develop their swings using faulty equipment that leads to lifelong swing flaws. Historically, kids learned the game with adult clubs that were cut down to junior size, but were still way too heavy and unbalanced which made learning the game difficult for even the most athletic kids. That's why equipment from youth-specific companies makes the most sense for junior golfers especially ages 3-12.

WHAT TO WEAR

Now that your child has a grasp on the essence and rules of the game, has a quality instructor, and proper-fitting equipment, they need to "dress the part." As with most of the major golf equipment companies, most of the major golf clothing manufacturers have junior apparel lines. I do a great deal of business with adidas Golf and they have a specific line of shirts, hats, outerwear, shoes and accessories for




the girl or boy golfer of any age. Their apparel is second to none in quality and the clothing is tailored specifically with children in mind.

BE REALISTIC

If your junior golfer turns out to become a good golfer you need to remember to be realistic in your potential expectations for them. The quantity of quality junior golfers today is great, and in reality there are only a handful of college scholarships available for the vast number of juniors out there. If your son or daughter can make the cut on the course, make sure what they do off the course is as equally impressive. Make sure that they are true student-athletes and that their grades are up to par plus they are active in extracurricular activities away from the course.

As you can see there are endless opportunities out there for your son or daughter within the wonderful game of golf. What I gave you is just a small sampling of the resources available if your child shows an interest in the game. If you have any questions about how to get a junior introduced into the game of golf please feel free to contact me at Fire Ridge Golf Club in Grafton, WI at 414-339-1086 or send an email to apodolak@fireridgegc.com.

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Andy Podolak is the Head PGA Golf Professional at Fire Ridge Golf Club in Grafton, Wisconsin. Andy is currently in his 9th year and before his days at Fire Ridge he played professionally on NGA/Hooters, Various Mini Tours and many Nationwide/ PGA Tour qualifiers. Andy's lesson rates start at \$45 per half hour or \$75 per hour session. Various lesson packages are also available and he can be reached at Fire Ridge GC by calling 262-375-2252 or via email

at apodolak@fireridgegc.com. Also visit Andy's facebook page at Podolak Golf Instruction.

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