

Golf in Schools Rock!

Greg Johnson

TGA's national initiative bringing golf into schools is creating a pathway ensuring the games future.

When Tiger Woods won the Masters in 1997, shortly thereafter The First Tee was launched and thus the golf industry hung their hat on an industry non-profit organization to create an influx of new youth golfers over the next 15 years. The only problem, the influx didn't sustain.

According to the National Golf Foundation, junior golf participation increased from 1995 – 2005 going from 2.8 million junior golfers to 3.8 million, however since 2005, participation has dropped 21% back down to 3 million. During the same time frame, overall participation by adult golfers has dropped 18% from 30 million players to 24.7 million. How can that be? TV ratings for golf were at its all-time high, the

greatest player in the game and perhaps most popular athlete on the planet was center stage and the First Tee was introducing the game to 10 million youngsters. The growth just didn't happen.

For decades the game has struggled activating and retaining youth. The main barriers being availability, affordability, transportation and competition among core team sports like soccer, baseball, football, basketball, and now lacrosse and hockey.

With caddie programs disappearing across the country, and kids not having access to private clubs, or the means to get to golf courses, the industry has strug-

gled with developing the next generation of golfers. In addition, as baby boomers begin to age and play less golf or even leave the game, a primary concern is how they can be replaced.

While increasing participation and enticing existing golfers to play more rounds is a priority among the industry, developing new golfers over the next two decades will be a critical component to ensuring the games future.

In 2003, an entrepreneur, Joshua Jacobs, identified a void that golf was not readily available to youth, namely in the schools, where all the other sports were being played and talent and passion was being





developed. Jacobs created a model that today is solving many of these industry issues and especially availability and cost.

The innovative program, TGA Premier Junior Golf, has become the leader in bringing golf directly into schools and putting it on a level playing field with other mainstream sports and on the menu of activities for youth 5-13. The multi-national program, which is scaled throughout the United States through a unique franchise business model, begins by introducing ages 3-15 and their parents 25-45 to the game of golf through an affordable before and after-school enrichment curriculum.

TGA (Teach, Grow, Achieve) has already brought over 465,000 new golfers into the sport and made the game of golf available to more than 1.5 million families across the country.

The New York City and surrounding area has one of the highest concentrations of TGA Chapters in the country with programs in Westchester County, Rockland County, and Orange County, as well as in the counties of Morris, Essex, Bergen, Mercer, and Union in New Jersey. These local programs have brought over 105,000 youth into the game.

Kevin Rooney was just 22-years-old when he became the youngest TGA Premier Junior Golf owner in 2008. He acquired the Bergen County franchise and then added the North Westchester TGA Chapter in 2012. Since then he has developed one of the company's strongest franchises growing the game of golf through school-based programs, and leagues and camps at golf courses.

"Owning a TGA franchise has been very rewarding both personally and professionally," Rooney says. "The business model is proven and has allowed me to expand programs and grow golf quickly and efficiently. Teaching the game of golf after school gives students something to do other than playing video games on the couch. They learn a lifelong sport that builds life skills, improves character and increases the quality of life in the communities they live in."

TGA's innovative model, the only one of its kind in the golf industry, has empowered entrepreneurs like Rooney and PGA golf Professionals to activate and engage thousands of new players into the game at the grass roots level. The success of the model begins with its unique golf in schools programs incorporating educational subjects such as language and history, character and life skills development, as well as health and physical fitness into each class. This fall, TGA will unveil STEM (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics) core academic concepts into its programs, becoming the first youth sports program to do so.

The school based five-level program is executed through a station-based curriculum where kids are active the entire class and not standing around. Station examples are: full swing, short game, putting, rules and etiquette, sportsmanship, physical fitness and STEM. Each student receives a proprietary Student Handbook when they sign up.

A critical component to the TGA model is keeping the kids engaged above and beyond schools as they go through the



five-level program. TGA has developed a player pathway to keep students and their families playing and practicing as they older. TGA partners with over 250 local golf courses nationwide where kids get their first taste of playing at a golf course in a non-intimidating atmosphere.

"Recreational programs are key to transitioning students and families from schools to golf courses. We run camps, clinics and leagues that set up a perfect progression for them to get the combination of instruction and on course experience they need to instill a love and passion for golf," explains Rooney.

This, in turn, drives revenue to area golf courses and golf has the new golfers it covets. If there's anything that can be learned from TGA, based on National Golf Foundation statistics, TOUR Players do not grow golf, grass roots programs, availability and affordability do.

For more information about TGA Premier Junior Golf, visit www.playtga.com.