

Thursday, September 20, 2007

Golf lessons from legend

Golf academy offers instruction n phases of game

Likely you've seen or heard ads for the Jack Nicklaus Academy of Golf and wondered where and what it is.

Where is the easy part. It's at The Ledges in the Winchester Hills area of St. George.

The Academy itself is housed in a rather non-descript building near the driving range. It, in turn, houses some pretty amazing technology used to help attendees improve their golf game.

Nicklaus Academies is a world-wide organization with facilities at 42 sites, including three in the United States.

Mike Malaska, a former Weber State golfer whose name is familiar to old-timers, is the world-wide instructor of golf for Nicklaus Academies. Doug Roberts is the director of instruction at The Ledges.

On Tuesday I had the opportunity to enjoy a truncated version of the instruction available at the school. My golf game is fairly non-existent but I could see improvement after my session.

"The key is to understand yourself physically so you know what you can and can't do," Malaska said during an introductory session. "Technology helps you have a clearer picture of what you need to focus on.

"The golf swing is not as complicated as people try to make it," Malaska continued.

Still, it's where I struggle and it's likely where you struggle, too.

During a session at the academy, participants will have an opportunity to see what they're doing right and wrong. And, of course, they'll receive instruction on how to do things correctly so their scores go down.

"Jack wants people to enjoy the game of golf," noted Malaska.

The greatest enjoyment, obviously, comes when everything you've learned during your years of play comes together and you shoot a lower score than your friend, business partner or client did.

No doubt you know that a great deal of business is conducted on golf courses around the world. It's valuable, therefore, to be able to play well.

Kim Anderson of Soltis Investments, a St. George firm, noted that his corporation uses golf and golf instruction (at the Nicklaus Academy) with its clients.

"As far as the golf lessons, they've loved the instruction," Anderson said. "We've used The Ledges many times for corporate retreats with our clients."

What do you get when you enroll? As mentioned previously, you get the use of plenty of high-tech equipment to help you improve your game.

Included is The Optimal Motion Instructor, used to show an individual's shaft angle, body alignment and stroke tempo in the putting motion. Instruction in the short game, from 100 yards in, is another element of the lesson. So is information on golf fitness.

Mike Lewis is director of the Nicklaus Academy in Bend, Ore. He was on hand to demonstrate the K-Vest, 3-dimension software which shows correct body alignment at the address of the ball.

Mark Benson is a physical therapist who pointed out that participants in the golf school receive three hours of fitness instruction during a three-day session.

"It's another tool to improve your golf game," Benson said of the increased flexibility which comes from stretching and other simple exercises.

Cost of the instruction is roughly \$500 per person per day, Roberts said.

"For Utah that's a high price," he admitted. "But for Scottsdale (Arizona), it would be middle-of-the-road. We justify that with technology and a 2-for-1 teaching ratio."

Most golf schools, Roberts said, are priced to a 6-to-1 ratio. That often leaves many of the students standing around while one receives instruction.

Seth Glasko, who is Director of Instruction at the Legacy Golf Club in Las Vegas as well as Director of Junior Training and Education for Nicklaus Academies worldwide, said, "any company that uses golf at all in golf relations, should send their clients to the academy."

Most, he noted, have their clients play in corporate tournaments, with widely varying weather conditions and results. He suggested that they could benefit from the instruction from such people as Roberts. Afterwards, he said, they will say, "I get it now."

Since I graduated from college in physical education, I have some idea of what I'm supposed to do on a golf course. Never been able to do it. The instruction I received helped me avoid the worm-burners that are typically part of my game.

"The game is not so much about the distance you hit it," Malaska said during his segment of Tuesday's session. "It's about controlling the flight of the ball."

Thanks to Lewis's instruction with the K-Vest, my control may be better next time I play a round.

Information about the Nicklaus Academy is available on the Web at www.TheLedges.com

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