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KIDS PLAY

HOW TO GET KIDS INTO THE GAME OF GOLF

By HUGH PENTON

Golf can conjure up notions of pricey green fees and long days on the course...not a sport that appeals to children looking to try it out for the first time. Yet, according to the National Golf Foundation's most recent report, there are approximately 2.9 million golfers between the ages of six and 17.

There have been a variety of articles citing kids' waning interest in the sport, as well as articles highlighting the benefits of kids playing the game of golf, but a key piece of the discussion is missing: How do we actually encourage kids to become engaged in the game of golf? Here are some suggestions:

USE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT.

One size does not fit all when it comes to golf. Just as shoes need to be the right size for their feet, so does the golf equipment our kids use. Giving children the proper tools they need to play comfortably and effectively provides them with the greatest opportunity for success.

U.S. Kids Golf (uskidsgolf.com) manufactures a wide variety of clubs and equipment to help kids use the right equipment based on their height, ability, swing speed and more. The Ultralight Kidsklubs have lighter heads, flexible shafts and are designed for beginner to intermediate players. These clubs not only bring fun to the game, but also help to improve every swing.

STRUCTURE THE GAME, BUT MAKE IT FUN!

To make golf fun, it's advisable to avoid the course at first. While it may seem counterintuitive, if a child hits the greens whiffing his or her club only to watch the ball roll a mere couple of feet, and all the while hears grumbles from the cart behind for not moving along quickly enough, he or she will leave the course feeling discouraged. It shouldn't come as a surprise if that type of experience makes the child never want to visit the course again.

Simply put, children will not pursue activities they do not find enjoyable.

Hence, beds are rarely made, clothes are rarely folded and dishes are often found everywhere but in the sink. But when an activity can be presented as fun, children will be drawn to it. They will be even more excited to try it out if they can involve other people.

While fun is key, so is a structured environment. According to the National Golf Foundation, six out of 10 kids exposed to golf in a structured program grow up to be active adult golfers, whereas only three out of 10 kids who learn in an unstructured setting become active adult golfers.

My mini Golf (MyminiGolf.us) is a simple putting game that also provides a structured format to learn the sport. This portable, interactive, learning and development game comprised of 13 uniquely shaped pieces, is far less intimidating than an 18-hole course. My mini Golf can be played indoors or out, with all-weather, durable plastic pieces that can be set up to create a unique putting course every time. Kids create their own course, and modify it, and in return, modify their putting target. My mini Golf also creates a perfect environment for individual instruction with the instant reward of improving the score. A game such as My mini Golf will allow the child to play when, where and with whom he or she chooses, to improve putting technique and develop basic skills, all while having fun.



“WHILE FUN IS KEY, SO IS A STRUCTURED ENVIRONMENT. ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL GOLF FOUNDATION, SIX OUT OF 10 KIDS EXPOSED TO GOLF IN A STRUCTURED PROGRAM GROW UP TO BE ACTIVE ADULT GOLFERS.”

INVOLVE THE FAMILY.

I recently read a story of a mother who was brought to tears when she saw her young son with autism connect with the family in a new way through the game of miniature golf. The game allowed one son who was very interested in the sport to connect with his brother with special needs in a new way that both felt stimulated and rewarded.

As studies reveal, active children are happier, more fulfilled children. Studies of corporate leaders show that the number who made honor role in their younger years was a mere 20 percent, but those who played sports was 70-80 percent. This type of involvement in sports takes time and effort by the family to get kids to practice, cheer them on at games and work with them at home when they want extra help.

And while the goal of teaching youth golf is to teach the fundamentals at an early age and improve self-confidence, by remembering to focus on fun first, your child will soon be turning bogies into birdies.

Hugh Penton is an avid golfer, inventor of dozens of patented golf products, and president/CEO of Starting Time, a leading golf product and accessories company.