



PGA Sports Academy

Purpose/Mission:

The PGA Sports Academy program is a collaborative framework based on research and best practices from PGA Professionals, PGA Education, allied associations and the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) standards for juniors adopted by the PGA World Alliance. The PGA Sports Academy's focus is to develop core golfers and provide them with pathways to continue to play golf socially or competitively based on each individual's desire.

It is imperative that every parent/participant understands the process of LTAD in the PGA Sports Academy program so that they have a clear understanding of what the PGA Professional is trying to accomplish with each participant. PGA Professionals are strongly encouraged to distribute a copy of The PGA Sports Academy Parent Resource to parents before their child begins the PGA Sports Academy to help outline the curriculum and expectations for the program.

Fun – First And Foremost

Fun – First and Foremost is our junior golf mantra. We must make sure new golfers are engaged and have a fun, interactive experience. To educate and get juniors involved in golf is the goal, but keeping it *fun* is the primary focus. It's crucial that instructors enjoy the experience—juniors will sense your love of the sport and hopefully become smitten for a lifetime.

PGA Sports Academy Curriculum Overview:

The PGA Sports Academy will help youth learn to play golf and have fun in the process. The PGA Sports Academy has three levels: Player, Sport and Champion.

Player Level Objectives

- Develop an understanding of the sport of golf;
- Learn fundamental movement and motor skills and link them together into the golf swing;
- Use ball-striking games such as baseball and hockey to develop hand-eye coordination;
- Establish essential safety and etiquette.

Sport Level Objectives

- Develop fundamental golf movement skills and teach overall sports skills;
- Learn scoring, the rules of golf and the process of playing a round of golf;
- Establish target and alignment fundamentals and begin developing proper short-game skills.

Champion Level Objectives

- Establish a knowledge base in the mental side of the sport;
- Develop full swing, short game and putting skills to higher level;
- Incorporate strength, stability and flexibility to improve performance and health;
- Enhance performance by learning course management skills, STAT tracking, keeping a golf journal and advancing to national competitions.

Each level includes five focus areas that will help juniors learn, develop and practice the skills to become better golfers and enjoy the sport of golf:

- Fitness and Nutrition;
- Golf Skills;
- Sportsmanship, Etiquette and Rules;
- Golf and “Near Golf” Experiences;
- Golf and Skills Challenges.

Each level will develop the necessary physical and golf skills to practice, improve and enjoy the sport. Juniors will be tested before they begin each level to determine their level of experience. At the end of each level, each participant will be tested again and will receive a score based on his or her skill level. The PGA Sports Academy will give each participant a practice program to improve their skills and set goals to help become a better golfer.

Delivery

The PGA Sports Academy is designed to enhance PGA Professionals’ existing junior golf programs as well as provide a turn-key solution for professionals who wish to adopt the program in its entirety. The PGA Sports Academy is designed to be delivered at “green grass” facilities, but it can easily be adapted for in-school and after-school programs to help transition youth to PGA facilities. The curriculum is structured to be multi-dimensional with generous flexibility in terms of teaching methodology from PGA Professionals.

Knowledge of Game

Player Level Overview

Children in the Player level will benefit most by instruction and instructional settings that focus on fun and games while minimizing the more traditional instruction setting. The goal is to allow for play and exploration of golf through self-discovery and experimentation. In fact, this level is often referred to as “The Play and Exploration Years.” As a result, these thoughts should always be considered when designing the content and program schedule. By creating this environment, the instructor will be building the ideal learning environment for the junior golfer at this stage of their development. Following are some suggestions for creating this program; adaptation to suit the particular student and facility are encouraged.

Player Level Instructional Focus

Instruction at this level begins with teaching the junior golfer to achieve a square clubface at impact; traditional pre-swing concepts of grip, posture and alignment are key parts of the process. However, traditional in-swing concerns are given only cursory attention as the goal is to encourage the development of the “building blocks” of golf. This strategy does not limit the incorporation of swing thoughts designed to change specific areas of the in-swing motion such as dynamic balance, coil, arc or other PGA Principals. Players at this level, however, are limited in their ability to create motion and comprehend multiple technique changes. Drills and training aids are excellent means to address changes in swing shape at this level. Positive feedback from instructor to student in the areas of grip, posture and alignment is extremely helpful at this level. Keep it light and fun with jovial banter and give-and-take. A serious “professional-like setting” as you would see with older players is unlikely to achieve results with the very young golfer. It is recommended that the instructor utilize video analysis for his or her teaching and documentation needs rather than to show a Player Level student swing issues.

Full Swing - Player Level Instructional Points

Grip

Since the grip is the student’s only connection with the club, it is important that they appreciate the impact it will have on their overall swing potential. Unfortunately, the age and attention span of this level will more than likely not allow for a true appreciation of the importance of the grip. Keeping that point in mind, the instructor should attempt, through positive feedback, to reinforce a grip that the instructor feels most adequately fits the student’s needs.

The first key point in developing a sound grip is to teach the junior golfer that the palms should face each other with the back of the left and the palm of the right facing the target (for a right-handed golfer, of course).

Three steps can help the student ensure a correct grip:

1. Have the student hold the club at a 45-degree angle with the right hand.
2. Have the student position his/her left hand on the grip as if shaking hands.
3. Have the student slide his/her right hand towards the left, covering the left thumb.

3 pictures to illustrate procedure

Stance and Posture

Correct stance and posture require that the student's feet be positioned shoulder width and the body weight evenly distributed or slightly favoring the right side. The student's arms should be relaxed and hang directly below the shoulders. There should be a straight line running from the hips to the shoulders. The butt end of the club should point between the left hip and zipper. This address should be combined with a ball position that is center of the stance with irons, slightly forward of center for hybrids and fairway woods and even with the left heel for drivers. Correct stance and posture will allow the student the best opportunity to effectively swing the club as well as move his/her body while maintaining stability with the lower body.

Proper stance and posture are achieved in three steps:

1. The student stands tall with the feet positioned shoulder width.
2. The student adds a slight amount of knee flex.
3. The student leans forward from the hips to reach the ball.

3 pictures to illustrate procedure

Alignment

Neutral or square alignment has the clubface aiming directly at the target and the feet, hips and shoulders parallel left of the target line. This combination of target line and body line often is compared to a railroad track with the outer rail the clubface line and the inner rail the body line.

Neutral or square alignment is achieved by the following three steps:

1. The student positions the clubhead behind the ball with the clubface square to the target or an intermediate target.
2. The student positions the feet, hips and shoulders parallel to the target line.
3. The student adjusts their feet as necessary to establish parallel lines.

3 pictures to illustrate procedure

Proper alignment combined with correct grip, stance and posture are important in helping the junior establish a correct swing shape. Though these pre-shot steps take minimal time to achieve, junior golfers very often view them as unimportant and lack the discipline to regularly repeat the steps. Unfortunately, without these steps, consistent development and improvement are difficult.

Short Game - Player Level Instructional Points

PGA Professionals and experienced junior golfers understand quite well the importance of short-game proficiency to producing lower scores. But it can be a tough sell to younger players interested in wailing away with the full swing. Instructors are encouraged to continue the "having fun" theme into their short-game sessions, focusing on the pre-swing issues of set-up and alignment and allowing the student to explore and experiment with the various short-game situational shots. When appropriate, the following information can be highlighted to explain the differences between various short-game shots.

Chipping/Pitching Definitions

Chipping is defined as a shot that covers more distance on the ground than in the air. The shot has maximum roll with minimum air time. Often beginning golfers take quickly to the concept of chipping as the slow speed of the swing and short distance the ball travels make it a relatively safe shot and one easier to execute than other shots.

Pitching is defined as a shot that covers more distance in the air than on the ground. The shot has maximum height with minimum roll. Though pitching is a more difficult shot, it is often the only option when trying to get the ball on the green and close to the hole.

In both cases, the height the ball reaches is determined by the set-up, loft of the clubface and speed of the swing. The distance that the ball travels in the air is the result of the length of the swing.

Chipping

A proper chip shot set-up for the junior can be achieved by the following four steps:

1. The student utilizes the same grip as the full swing, with the hands positioned lower on the grip.
2. The junior narrows his/her stance to a point where the heels are positioned less than shoulder width.
3. The student positions the ball back of center of the stance, with the butt end of the club in front of the ball.
4. The student leans his/her weight slightly to the left (or the foot closer to the target).

Pitching

A proper pitch shot set-up can be achieved by the following four steps:

1. The student utilizes the same grip as their full swing, with the hands positioned lower on the grip.
2. The junior narrows his/her stance to a point where the heels are positioned less than shoulder width.
3. The student positions the ball in the center of the stance, with the butt end of the club even with the ball.
4. The student balances his/her weight evenly between the right and left sides.

Bunker Play Definitions

Though it does not require any change in the mechanics, a greenside bunker shot situation does require a slight change in the fundamentals. This shot is difficult for most juniors because of the inconsistency of sand and the limited access for practice. The first goal should be to get the ball out of the bunker, onto the putting surface.

Bunker Play

A proper bunker shot set-up can be achieved by the following four steps:

1. The student utilizes the same grip and alignment as the full swing.
2. The junior's stance should be shoulder width with the feet dug into the sand.
3. The ball should be positioned slightly forward of center in the stance, with the butt end of the club pointing to the center of the body.
4. The junior's weight should be balanced equally between the right and left sides.

The Hole is the Goal!

“The Hole is the Goal” is a fun way to introduce beginning juniors to golf. Learning to putt will give juniors an idea of how and why we play the sport of golf. Juniors of any skill level can

perform a putting stroke. “The Hole is the Goal” makes playing and learning golf easy and fun. The goal has a double meaning. It represents where they should aim their shot (like a hockey goal) but also in general as to what the goal of the exercise should be. The only goal that should be set at this level is to have the youngster become enamored with the game through a series of fun and interesting experiences.

There are many putting games that young children can play that will help them learn the goal of the game and how it is played. This exercise can also be fun for PGA Professionals. For example:

- Begin by walking with your young golfers across the putting green, teaching them how to feel the firmness and elevation changes and furthering the process by rolling balls across the green and developing a sense of speed;
- Putting to stationary and moving targets indoors (putting to moving targets helps kids develop visual and timing skills);
- Putting with a partner and having each player aim for each other’s putters;
- Building a miniature indoor putting course out of unbreakable household items;
- And putting on a real golf green with family and friends.

Putting Definition

Putting is a unique shot in golf because it requires the ball to roll. No height is needed; in fact, the better the roll of the ball, the more successful the putter. For the junior golfer, putting is crucial. The junior might think of putting as an equalizer that can make up for errant shots.

Putting Grip

There are two grips: the reverse overlap and the ten-finger grip. The most important feature of the grip is the position of the student’s hands in relation to the shaft. Both hands should have the grip positioned in the palms. Individual preferences can position the thumbs pointing down the top or side of the shaft. The back of the left hand and palm of the right hand should remain square to the target line.

Putting Stance and Posture

Correct stance and posture will have the golfer’s feet positioned shoulder width with the body weight evenly distributed or slightly favoring the left side. The arms should be relaxed and extended naturally below the shoulders. Because of the closeness to the ball and the length of the putter, the student will be forced to curve his/her back slightly. Positioning their body comfortably to the ball is the main objective. The ball position should be slightly forward of center in the stance.

Putting Alignment

Correct alignment has the clubface looking directly at the target. The feet, hips and shoulders can be positioned parallel left or slightly opened or closed to the target line.

Obviously, the fundamentals in putting are not as stringent as those of the full swing. This more relaxed view is due to the fact that the junior’s body is inactive and stable in a proper putting

stroke, leaving the student and instructor open to try different postures and alignments as long as the mechanics of the stroke remain intact.

In keeping with the *Fun – First and Foremost* mindset, teaching precise putting technique is not as important as creating an environment that allows juniors to have fun. The putting stroke is easy to learn and should be taught to young children in the simplest terms. The power for the stroke should come from the shoulders. Rocking the shoulders back and forth or up and down will place the hands in a position to sense and gain feedback to be used for future shots. For example, when the shoulders create power, the hands can then sense the weight of the putter, the length of the stroke and the club head speed at impact. Because the hands have such an important role in putting, how a junior grips the club is very important. Be cognizant of how your students' hands are working to determine if their natural grip allows their hands to work together. Repetition of this process through some sort of game will help in measuring the amount of power it takes to putt a ball a certain distance. Through this technique, children will be able to use and apply knowledge they have gained to judge future putts. This process will help them experience a reasonable amount of success and achievement, which establishes a great mental and emotional precedent that will act as a solid foundation to build future fun experiences.

Player Level Drills and Drills with Aids

Drills and training aids can be immensely helpful in the development of a student's overall swing shape. They allow the instructor to shape specific components of the junior's swing while eliminating the need for specific technical swing thought discussions. One of the keys to self-diagnosis in golf is for the student to have an understanding of the ball flight and how it relates to one's individual swing. Though it would be unrealistic to expect a Player Level junior to grasp the various ingredients and complexities of a swing at this stage, it would certainly be helpful in the future to the developing Sport and Champion Level golfers. In some cases, these drills and drills with aids will be familiar. A benefit to the instructor is that these examples will not only help to improve the overall motion of the swing but also help the junior to develop the feel of the swing. The following drills and drills with aids are but a small sample of the many that can be utilized. These examples have been chosen due to their influence on the student's clubface, which is the primary focus of the Player Level. (To simplify matters, the drills are written for the right-handed golfer.)

This three-step process is effective when practicing a drill or drill with aid:

1. The student makes a practice swing to an imaginary ball focusing on what the drill is guiding him or her to do;
2. The student hits the ball, focusing on what the drill is guiding him or her to do;
3. The student hits a ball without the drill, attempting to create the same feel of the swing as in Steps 1 and 2.

These steps should be repeated until the swing and shot outcome in Step 3 are as proficient as in Step 2. At this point, Step 2 can be omitted, leaving only Steps 1 and 3 to practice. Finally, prior

to assigning the student a drill, the instructor should take the time to personally practice and test the drill. This process will not only give the instructor an understanding of the drill's purpose, its strengths and weaknesses, but this process will also make the instructor familiar with any safety issues involved.

Drills to Influence Face

Toe-In Drill / Heel-In Drill

The "Toe-In Drill" begins with the student addressing an imaginary ball with correct posture and an eight-iron. After swinging the club to waist height in the backswing, the student swings back to an imaginary ball where the toe of the club is ahead of the heel. This exaggerated closed clubface position helps the student develop the feel of the amount of arm rotation necessary through impact to square the clubface at impact. After rehearsing the motion, the student attempts to hit the ball recreating the same feel through impact. To complete the sequence, the student then attempts to create the same impact position while making a full backswing and follow-through. After creating the desired ball flight, the student attempts the fuller motion swings with longer clubs while maintaining the shorter motion swings with the eight-iron.

The "Heel-In Drill" begins with the student addressing an imaginary ball with correct posture and an eight-iron. After swinging the club to waist height in the backswing, the student swings back to an imaginary ball where the heel of the club is ahead of the toe. This exaggerated open clubface position helps the student develop the feel of the amount of arm rotation necessary through impact to square the clubface at impact. After rehearsing the motion, the student attempts to hit the ball, recreating the same feel through impact. To complete the sequence, the student then attempts to create the same impact position while making a full backswing and follow through. After creating the desired ball flight, the student attempts the fuller motion swings with longer clubs while maintaining the shorter motion swings with the eight-iron.

Two Piece Backswing Drill

The "Two Piece Backswing Drill" begins with a teed ball and a six-iron. After addressing the ball with correct posture, the student swings the club back to waist height in the backswing and pauses. At this point, the student notes the position of the club. The toe of the club should be pointing up or slightly favoring the ball side of the shaft, and the shaft should be parallel to the student's toe line. If this is not the case, the student makes the corrective adjustment and then continues to swing back to a full backswing and hit the ball. Initially, the motion will be somewhat awkward for the student due to the pausing of the swing, but he or she will soon be able to replace this awkwardness with a more fluid motion. The objective of this drill is to help the student create a visual awareness and feel of the correct starting direction of the backswing as well as greater control of the clubface throughout the motion.

Hold The Finish Drill

The "Hold the Finish Drill" begins with a higher lofted club such as a seven- or eight-iron. After addressing the ball with correct posture, the student makes a three-quarter length backswing and hits the ball, stopping the club at waist height in the follow through. At this point, the shaft should be parallel to the target line, the arms fully extended and the toe of the club pointing up. If the student typically has an open clubface at impact, this paused position at waist height in the

follow through should be adjusted so that the toe of the club is favoring the left side of the shaft. If the golfer struggles with a closed clubface at impact, the toe of the club at this post impact position should favor the ball side of the shaft. Once the student is comfortable with the motion, length and speed can gradually be added to the backswing with a continued focus on the student hitting that post-impact position described. This drill will help the student develop a greater awareness of the clubface at impact and post-impact position as well as a better feel of his or her arm motion through impact.

Drill with an Aid to Influence Face

Hit the Impact Bag

The “Hit the Impact Bag Drill” begins with the golfer addressing an impact bag with a traditional grip and posture and a mid-iron. From this position, the student swings the club back to waist height and then back to impact with the bag. At this point, the student should have an opposite clubface position to his/her traditional ball flight. If, for example, the student struggles with hitting slices, the impact position at this point should have the clubface closed. Initial swings are made with a seven-iron and should be relatively short and slow while the student develops the feel of the compensative motion. Once the student is able to reproduce the desired clubface position while impacting the bag, a ball should be positioned between the clubface and the bag with the student attempting to reproduce the desired clubface position at impact. Once the feel of compression is established and the student is able to achieve the desired clubface position at impact against the bag, the student attempts to hit a teed ball recreating the motion. Initially, it is suggested that the drill be attempted with a six-iron with longer clubs introduced once the student is able to control the clubface position at impact. This drill will help the student not only influence clubface position at impact but also help him or her develop an individual feel of proper impact.

Curve the Ball Drill

The “Curve the Ball Drill” begins with the golfer positioning a shaft on the ground to represent the target line and an additional shaft positioned vertically into the ground approximately nine feet in front of the golfer. Depending on the curve tendency of the golfer, this shaft could be positioned slightly to the inside of the target line for students who tend to slice the ball or to the outside of the target line for students who struggle with a hook. Starting with slow swings, the student hits the teed ball with an six-iron attempting to start the ball down the target line and curve the ball around the vertical shaft to the left to overcome a slice or to the right to compensate for the hook. If the ball does not curve enough, the student attempts to exaggerate the closed or open clubface being produced at impact until the ball curves the appropriate amount. Initial swings should be shorter and slower than normal and increase in length and speed as the student is able to shape the shot the desired amount. As confidence and control are gained, the student introduces longer clubs and attempts the drill with the ball off the ground. This drill will help the student develop the feel of how they can influence their clubface position at impact.

Swingyde Drill

The “Swingyde Drill” begins with the golfer positioning the Swingyde training aid on the club and addressing a teed ball with a seven-iron. Utilizing a slightly slower backswing pace than normal, the student attempts to position the Swingyde so that it rests against his or her left

- Fitness and nutrition (hydration, exercise and food intake).

College Preparation

Playing golf in college is a great way to go to school and to continue being active. For junior golfers without the ability or desire to land a spot on a college team, the college years provide a transition from junior golf to a lifetime of club golf and amateur competitive golf.

Playing Collegiate Golf

If your child is serious about playing collegiate golf, educate them on the demands of a collegiate student-athlete. They must be fully aware and ready to accept what they might experience in college. The following tips will help you prepare your junior:

- Have your child play in as many competitive events as possible. Travel to state and national tournaments to get them out of their comfort zone and playing in different conditions.
- Create a resume of all playing and academic accomplishments. College coaches like to see that you can succeed on and off the golf course.
- Utilize social media to your advantage. Most collegiate teams have social media accounts and websites. Browsing the sites will give you and your child an idea of the atmosphere in that program.
- Know and understand the NCAA rules. There are important dates with collegiate recruiting, which can help or hurt your child's ability to get recruited.
- Reach out to past and present collegiate players and coaches. They will be able to give you and your child a more personal helping hand in the recruiting process.
- Have your child start a fitness routine. In college, they will have to balance fitness, golf and school work.

Other Golf Options

Golf is a game of a lifetime. There are many opportunities to enjoy golf while in college. Students can play casually with their friends or even in competitive tournaments on the side. They can even have a career in golf by attending a PGA Golf Management University or studying as an apprentice on their own. To find out more about these programs, please visit PGAJobFinder.com

Helpful Links

www.juniorlinks.com
www.nationaljuniorgolfscoreboard.com
www.future-links.org
www.positivecoach.org
www.thefirsttee.org
www.uskidsgolf.com/
www.snaggolf.com/
www.golfchamp.com
www.linxtracker.com
www.USkidsgolf.com
www.NCAA.org