

Youth Movement

Extending your clubfitting efforts to juniors can pay dividends now and into the future

By Don Jozwiak, Senior Editor

Saturday morning is cartoon time for a lot of kids. For youngsters in Sarasota, Fla., however, Saturday mornings are a time to turn off the TV and hit some golf balls at the weekly free junior clinic offered at Evie's Family Golf Center. For that hour, PGA Professional Mary Schiavetta (*pictured at right*) sees lots of kids excited about playing golf – and plenty of them are playing the wrong clubs for them.

"Probably the No. 1 thing I see out there are kids playing with clubs that are too long or too heavy for them," says Schiavetta, the 2007 North Florida PGA Section Junior Golf Leader and the PGA head professional at the 60-station Evie's Family Golf Center range. "The parents take an old set of clubs and get them cut down to what they think is the right size. That's well-intentioned, but those clubs are still going to be too heavy and too stiff for most juniors to make a good swing."

The problems with junior golfers playing ill-fitting clubs are the same that adults face: In the short term, it's difficult to make a repeatable swing and good contact; in the long term, golfers get frustrated and stop playing the game.

That's where clubfitting comes in. Even with students who are as young as three years old, Schiavetta works to make sure clubs are the appropriate length and weight. Instead of the high-tech, launch monitor-driven fittings many adults go through, a junior fitting can be much more low-tech.

"I'll have a junior make a swing and ask them to hold their position at the top of the swing," Schiavetta says. "If they can't hold that position, the club's too heavy for them. If they spin around like a helicopter on the downswing, that means the club is too long for them."

Ill-fitting clubs lead to bad swing habits that can be difficult to fix later. Schiavetta helps parents find clubs that are specifically designed for juniors – such as U.S. Kids Clubs – that have lightweight shafts and smaller grips. Value is also an important factor, as children will outgrow sets of clubs as they age. "You get kids who shoot up two inches in a month, and all of a sudden their clubs don't fit," Schiavetta says. "It's tough, and it's an expense issue for the parents. You need to explain why it is important to get the right fit."

Schiavetta cautions her fellow PGA Professionals to also explain to juniors how new equipment can temporarily throw



off their swings. She gives the example of what happened to one of her regular students, Cyrus, when he moved up to a bigger set of clubs.

"Cyrus is one of my regulars; he's here every week," Schiavetta says. "One week he shows up all excited because he got new clubs that were a little longer. And he really struggled. You could see it all over his face, and he was pretty upset. I explained that he would get used to the new clubs, and encouraged him to keep trying. Within two weeks he was strong enough to handle the new clubs, and he was hitting it better than ever."

The combination of encouragement and well-fit equipment benefits juniors and the facilities where they play. Schiavetta says juniors who have the proper clubs stick with the game, and that leads to increased business from the rest of the family.

"When a child shows a real interest in an activity, parents will help them stick with it," she says. "We have a lot of families that show up for our clinics. While the juniors are in the clinic, mom and dad are off hitting a bucket or two. That leads to more revenue, and maybe lessons or equipment sales to the adults. But what's more important is that family discovering that golf is a really fun thing that they call all enjoy together." ■

clubfitter's cart

Henry-Griffitts Sizzle Wedges Offer Custom Grind

With its new Custom Grind Sizzle line of wedges, Henry-Griffitts is offering an unprecedented level of customization. The premium wedges are available in a variety of custom grinds. The most impressive is the Hobson Grind, which is created based on the wear on the clubs and lie board markings during the fitting session – making it completely unique to that customer.

The Sizzle Wedges have milled faces and are cast from SS431 stainless steel, known as virgin stainless steel because it contains no scrap metal, and will be available in 51, 56 and 60 degrees this May through Henry-Griffitts Certified Teachers.

