

Where Have All Our Athletes Gone?

BY MINDI BRITTNER

Are you thinking about enrolling your child into a junior golf program? Then here are a few questions you should ask the instruction team before choosing your school and writing the check:

1. Do your instructors have any athletic knowledge besides golf?
2. Will you be focusing on other fundamental movement skills while my child is here?
3. How will I know what stage of development my child is in when your clinics are over?
4. Will my child have fun and be doing things to make him/her feel good?
5. How many balls will my child hit repetitively?

The issue with many junior golf schools of the past and even today is that they focus solely on the golf swing. This one dimensional approach,

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where most of the hours are spent “raking” and “beating” balls repetitively, sometimes leads to horseplay or boredom and most always causes exhaustion and irritation for both the kids AND the instructor. Unfortunately, some schools turn out to be little more than expensive babysitting facilities, and the instructors may not have any experience with teaching and relating to children.

Recently there has been much research on early childhood and athletic development. The Titleist Performance Institute’s (TPI) philosophy of junior golf is very simple: Junior golf schools need to develop fundamental movement skills, establish functional movement patterns, develop sport-specific skills, teach golf-specific skills and, most importantly, create a **love for the game**.

A famous coach once said, “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” A child’s physical literacy should not and cannot be left up to chance. When a child has not been taught the proper skills, adult recreational activities later in life may be less than stellar, non-gratifying and even lead to injury.

That is where the Long Term Athletic Development (LTAD) model comes in. The LTAD approach focuses on having kids perform age-appropriate skill acquisition drills to maximize their athletic potential. It progressively gets more complicated and more specialized as

the athlete develops and reaches the next level. For each stage, there is a corresponding phase of athletic training.

So what does all this mean to you as a parent? If your desire is to have your child play golf and become great at it, then expose your child to other activities as well. Junior golfers under the age of 11 should focus on mastering the fundamental movement skills (FMS). These are general patterns of movement such as running, hopping, skipping, leaping, bounding, agility, balance, coordination, speed, throwing, kicking and catching. If a child doesn’t fully develop his/her fundamental movement skills and instead jumps straight to sport-specific skills, he/she will miss out on the foundation of *many* sports.

So, when you are shopping for junior golf schools, most definitely pay attention to the skills acquisition for the sport of golf (putting, chipping, full swing, course management, rules). They are very important and the reason it is called a “golf school.” But don’t hesitate to also ask what that school can offer your child in other sporting and movement activities. Becoming a good golfer begins with becoming a complete athlete.

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