

Teaching Teachers

Keeping students in tune while on tour

I haven't missed a day of teaching in more than 20 years of running my golf academy, but things are changing for me. Thanks to my third-place finish at the qualifying tournament last fall, I am now a fully exempt member of the Champions Tour at age 59. I played on the PGA Tour and what was then the Nike Tour in the 1980s and 90s, but I chose to focus on teaching so I could be home with my family. Now that my three kids are grown, I'm excited to get out on tour again, and I feel like my decades of teaching have made me more ready to play my best. I'll still be teaching when I'm not on the road, like at the season-opening Allianz Championship in Boca Raton, Florida, this month. And I'll be leaving my regular students with ways to stay sharp while I'm gone – such as setting up a swing station to keep them from coming over the top.



By Jeff Coston, PGA with Don Jozwiak, Senior Editor



Champions Tour player **Jeff Coston**, a 20-time winner of the Pacific Northwest PGA Player of the Year award and member of the Pacific Northwest PGA Hall of Fame, is a PGA teaching professional at the Jeff Coston Golf Academy at Semiahmoo Golf & Country Club in Blaine, Washington. Coston captured the 2006 Senior PGA Professional National Championship, and tied for fourth at the 2004 PGA Professional National Championship.



Feeling a swing with depth

One of the most common mistakes you see from right-handed players is aiming too far too the right. When a player does that, the only way for them to get the ball going toward the target is to come over the top and release the club early, or to flip their hands and pull it back on line. Instead of telling a player what they're doing wrong, I try to get them to feel the right way to do something. Giving them a way to feel a swing change is the only way to make it permanent, because it shakes up their mind.

So I use a swing station that I set up with alignment rods to get them square to the target, then make a good swing from the inside. This starts with putting a rod in the ground so the end is a little more than a foot above the ground a step behind the ball – that's enough room for them to swing under the rod with any club. Then I put another alignment rod at about a 45-degree angle so the end is just above the golfer's hands at address. If they stay under this rod during the swing, then they'll stay on plane.

Here's what I'm looking for at each stage of their swing:

A

At address, I make sure they're lined up with their feet pointing to the left of the target and their club aimed at the target – which will probably feel like they're lined up to the left – with good posture.

B

At the top of the backswing they're creating depth in their swing from turning their hips and shoulders. From this position, the hands can move to the golf ball in a straight line with power.

C

On the downswing, I want to make sure the hands win the race to and through the golf ball. I tell students their hands are a surfer, the clubhead is a tidal wave and just past the golf ball is the beach. The surfer has to beat the tidal wave to the beach or else he'll drown. This lets the club release, but with the hands leading the process.

D

At impact, the shoulders should be square, and the hands are leading the clubhead into impact. Impact is the most important part of the swing, and teaching it – and practicing it – are the key to playing good golf.

Using my knowledge on the course

Teaching isn't what I do; it's who I am. The day after I earned my Champions Tour card, I spent the entire day on the lesson tee teaching a golf school with Mike Bender at his golf academy. I've been so lucky to learn from and teach with some of the great teachers in the game. Mike Adams is like my father in the game, and I'll be staying with him while I play in my first two Champions Tour events of the season. Between those two, Mike Bennett and Andy Plummer, I've learned a lot from a talented group of golf instructors over the years. They've helped me become a better teacher and player, and I'll be using all their knowledge when I tee it up between the ropes.

Practice improves performance

To this day, the improvement people make when they practice using this swingstation still astounds me. They get better so much faster. That's because people need to have hope. They don't practice because they don't know what to practice. But if they have hope and a method, they'll put in the work. This shows them that they don't have to master 80 things to have a good swing – they can focus on four or five things and hit the ball really well. It's especially good for improving with the driver, which is the weapon that sets up the rest of the hole. ■