

OUR NATION'S FUTURE IN GOLF...OUR JUNIOR PLAYERS!

Where have all our athletes gone?

By: Mindi Boysen, TPI CGFI

Are you thinking about enrolling your child into a Junior Golf Program this summer? Then here are a few questions you should ask 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 problem with many Junior Golf Schools of the past and even today is that they focus solely on the golf swing. This is considered very one dimensional when most of the hours are spent “raking” and “beating” balls repetitively....sometimes leading to horseplay or boredom and most always exhaustion and irritation for both the kids AND the instructor. Unfortunately, some schools turn out to be little more than expensive babysitting 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, even leading 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). FMS 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 fundamental movement skills and jumps straight to sport-specific skills, he 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 ask what that school can offer your child as a complete athlete.

In a sport development study in 2002, Cote & Hay divided a child's athletic progression into three categories:



Sampling Years (Learning To Play): This early experience with organized sport usually occurs in the 6-12 age group. These are the years of exposure to a wide range of activities. The main focus is fun and enjoyment while learning skills through "deliberate play" that is NOT necessarily guided by adults. As a child finds "favorite" activities on his own, he may start "dropping out" of certain sports or moving onto the

second phase with that sport.

Specializing Years (Training To Play): This second phase typically happens during the 13th-15th years of age. The range

of sports reduces to one-three sports and focus turns less from fun and enjoyment to a more competitive spirit. This is where the lessons of winning and losing play a huge part. Training & playing is deliberate and guided to further sports skills.

Investment Years (Train To Compete & Excel): The third phase is where a certain sport is chosen for intensive training and competition at the regional/state/national levels and can start as early as the age of 16. It is important to keep in mind during this phase that deliberate practice is a must and sense of balance physically, mentally, and emotionally is key.

If you invest in your child's athletic development as a whole during the Sampling Years (6-12) and the Specializing Years (13-15), your "investment" may well pay off in the Investment Years (16+).



As a parent, you are a very powerful influence on not only your child's athletic development, but your child's athletic attitude as well. Be patient and become informed by asking questions of coaches and schools. Your child will look to you for guidance and support often. By understanding the progressive stages of development, you can help ensure that your child's experience with sports is a positive one.

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"Fit For Golf! Fit For Life!" has published a golf fitness program on DVD's as well as a book, *Synergistic Golf*, that outlines each day of the year with golf performance enhancing tips. You can catch demonstrations of golf specific exercises on [Golf America](http://www.golfamerica.com) TV nationwide. Mindi is the official fitness partner of the Arizona Women's Golf Association and is available for private or group sports conditioning training as well as seminars and nutritional consultations. For more information...<http://www.fitforgolfusa.com>