

# THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

## JUNIOR GOLF DESERVES MORE ATTENTION



Regardless of age, a person can enjoy a relaxed round of golf in a pleasant, parklike atmosphere. At least, this had been my own experience ...before reaching the point where my kids could play golf with me. Now I realize that golf is also one of the best sports parents can play with their children.

Ever since my son, Todd, was six years old, he has been fascinated with golf. At first, he was thrilled just to ride (and occasionally steer) a golf cart. It wasn't long before he became my unofficial caddy, reading the scorecard for yardage and selecting the

right club. The problem is that he is left-handed in a world of right-handers. You never can find junior clubs for a southpaw in a pro shop.

One recent weekend, we were at the driving range. Todd, who is now 13, was nosing around the pro shop and discovered a set of adult left-handed clubs. He talked the clerk into letting him try the clubs on the driving range. They were also on sale. He knew he had me cornered, and the clubs are now his.

For the past few months, we have been spraying balls all over neighborhood driving ranges. He's hitting well enough to stay interested. Now it's time for a few lessons from a teaching professional. Only when the pro says he's ready, and not before, will we take to the links for the first time.

However, there's no way I'm going to expose him to the pressure new golfers face when they hold up experienced players. He has to be able to use his clubs with reasonable skill before we'll merge into the line at the first tee on a weekend. I don't want him to get discouraged early. I want him as a golf partner for at least the next 30 years.

Today, with the shortage of public golf courses and the strong national campaign against slow play, America's kids are being overlooked. If a family doesn't live in a golf community or belong to a country club, there is little opportunity for the children to get involved in golf. Junior golf has become even more of a privilege for the wealthy than it used to be.

So far the tab for Todd's clubs, bag, driving range, and the lessons is about \$400. That's about four times the cost of his participation in either soccer or baseball. When we start playing that will add another \$20 per round. Now my daughter is hinting that she, too, wants to give golf a try. Multiply everything by two.

Greens fees are climbing steadily, courses are becoming more difficult to master, and you have to reserve tee times days in advance. Then, when you can finally arrange to play golf with your kids, you face some pretty harsh criticism if you can't keep up. It has to bother a child when you have to let group after group play through.

The United States Golf Association has predicted that there will be a growing shortage of golf courses in this country unless one new course is opened every day for the next ten years. I think the USGA should have been more specific about the type of courses needed. Clearly the most pressing need is for public and daily-fee golf courses. Junior golf doesn't stand a chance if all we build are resort courses and private country clubs.

One of the golf industry's goals for the '90s should be the promotion of family golf, with junior golf as the initial step. Family golf has a positive image that fits hand-in-hand with environmental responsiveness. Golf can bring families and entire communities together in a healthy, relaxed environment.

Those who have played golf with their children know the value of the sport. Those who have been playing without their kids are missing a great experience.

*Bruce F. Shank*

# EVENTS

CALENDAR

## AUGUST

**29-30** Penn State Turfgrass Field Days, Joseph Valentine Memorial Turfgrass Research Center, University Park, PA. Contact: Dr. Joseph Duich, Dept. of Agronomy, 16 Tyson Bldg., University Park, PA 16802, (814) 865-9853.

## SEPTEMBER

**4-6** Institute of Groundsmanship Sports Trade Exhibition, East of England Showground, Peterborough, UK. Contact: IOG, 19-23 Church St., Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, UK MK12 5LG; telephone Milton Keynes (0908) 311856.

**17-20** 44th Northwest Turfgrass Conference, Rippling River Resort, Welches, OR. Contact: Northwest Turfgrass Association, P.O. Box 1367, Olympia, WA 98507, (206) 754-0825.

**18** Professional Turfgrass Field Day, Westchester Country Club, Rye, NY. Contact: Metropolitan Golf Course Superintendents Association, P.O. Box 396, Mamaroneck, NY 10543, (203) 329-8257.

**18-19** Virginia Tech Turf Research Field Days, Turfgrass Research Center, Blacksburg, VA. Contact: J. R. Hall III, Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, 424 Smyth Hall, Blacksburg, VA 14061-0403, (703) 231-9736.

**30-31** Florida Turfgrass Association Annual Conference and Show, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, FL. Contact: FTA, Inc., 302 S. Graham Avenue, Orlando, FL 32803-6332, (407) 898-6721.

## OCTOBER

**3-4** 30th Annual Southern California Turfgrass Expo, Orange Country Fairgrounds, Costa Mesa, CA. Contact: SCTC, (714) 951-8547.

**21-24** National Institute on Park and Grounds Management Annual Educational Conference, Reno, NV. Contact: NIPGM, P.O. Box 1936, Appleton, WI 54913, (414) 733-2301.

Send announcements on your events two months in advance to editor, *Golf & SportsTURF*, P.O. Box 8420, Van Nuys, CA 91409. Fax: (818) 781-8517.