

# SPECIAL REPORT

## *“Seven Questions You Should Ask Before Taking Golf Lessons”*

By Bobby Lopez, PGA Professional



You want to get better at golf but you're not sure if lessons will help and you don't know what to look for in a good golf instructor. A good instructor knows all about formal swing theory but also recognizes that every player has unique needs, demanding a unique approach to swing development.

To improve your golf swing you must understand more than the mechanics of a sound golf swing - you must understand the idiosyncrasies of your own swing.

Finding the right teaching professional is not easy, especially with all the show business related to teaching today. Some golf instructors are more concerned with their royalties from swing aids than their teaching skills. There are so many golf schools to choose from in "Golf Digest" and other golf magazines. Some claim to have a special swing key or method that will take you to the promised land of golf. Be careful! There are no short cuts to better golf. One swing key might work for a specific type of golfer or golf swing while the same swing key might be disastrous for another.

A word of caution on destination golf academies. Many are located at a beautiful resort and include an enjoyable golf vacation. Keep in mind that there does NOT exist the opportunity for continual follow-up instruction. I believe it is advantageous to have a local professional that gets to know your swing and personality being that your golf swing will be a constant work in progress.

Did you try golf lessons before and played worse? This is very common result and the rea-

sons are numerous. Your instructor may have tried to address numerous swing faults at one time causing you to become overloaded with too many swing thoughts. Another common mistake golf instructors make is to teach all their students the same swing technique. Even tour players do not attempt to copy their competitors. Would you consider mimicking Jim Furyk's swing? How about Lee Trevino?

Great golfers know their swing! They know their positives and negatives and more importantly they know how to keep the negatives to a minimum or under control. A good golf instructor will help you better understand your golf swing motion, body type and style. Work with what you've got and you'll improve quicker with

### The Seven Questions

*Question #1 How long have you been teaching golf? Who taught you?*

*Question #2 Do you use video analysis? Can I use a simple version at home?*

*Question #3 What is your teaching philosophy?*

*Question #4 What is your playing experience?*

*Question #5 Are you accredited by the PGA?*

*Question #6 Can I try one lesson without obligation?*

*Question #7 Do you have testimonials and long term students?*

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less frustration.

If the question is, “should you take lessons” the answer is a resounding yes! Golf lessons from a qualified professional will help tremendously in getting you to swing properly before bad habits set in.

For constructive lessons, you need a pro who can communicate effectively and can keep it simple. Your instructor MUST be willing to only address swing faults that need attention, not your entire swing unless absolutely necessary.

Swing problems come in pairs. For every swing fault you might be performing a “*compensation.*” A competent instructor will explain the swing faults you are committing and point out the compensations you are performing as an antidote for the faulty swing movement. The proper plan of attack is to “*burn the candle at both ends*” by addressing both the swing fault and the compensation together.

If your instructor claims; “you’re doing this or that”, your question should be, “if I’m doing that, then what else am I doing so that I get a good shot from time to time?” The more you ask, the more you learn about your instructor and your golf swing. Here are the seven basic questions you should ask before considering an investment in golf instruction.

## **Question #1 - How long have you been teaching golf? Who taught you?**

This question should provide some interesting information. Why? Because if an individual has been teaching for a long time then he/she must be somewhat proficient or they would have had to seek other employment by now. If your prospective pro has taught at a very respectable location that would be another plus. If he/she was taught by a very well known teacher than that would also be a positive

and give you some insight for the teaching philosophy question you will ask shortly.

If the prospective instructor answers that they have been teaching for a short time then ask if their boss or head professional can sit in on the lesson or at the very least check you out at each phase of your development personally. You will definitely want to shy away from an unsupervised rookie. A cold rookie teacher could cause you years of aggravation and difficulties in unraveling the damage done to your golf swing motion.

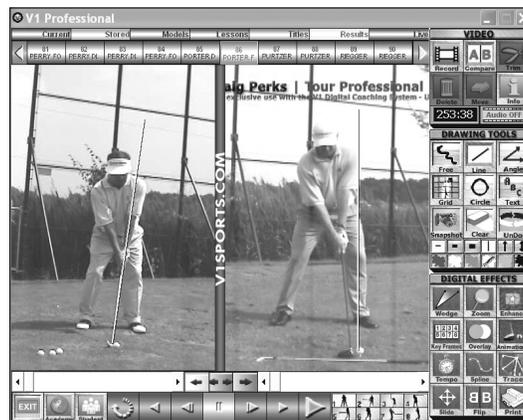
If your prospective professional seems to have experience and has worked at a respectable facility then the best question to ask is; “*who taught you and maybe how did they teach you?*” If he/she answers that they had “*hands on*” training from Mr. X and an enormous amount of lessons given in front of Mr. X, (under his/her personal supervision) then you have a green light thus far.

## **Question #2 - Do you use video analysis? Can I use a simple version at home?**

If the answer is no to video analysis then start looking for another pro. You need to have the best technology available to be competitive. The video analysis will save you weeks maybe even years of frustration. You will have a much better understanding of what you are doing wrong when you can actually see yourself on video analysis!

The video analysis allows you to take your lesson home so you never forget what you learned. You will be very surprised at things you will see in your video when you get home that you did not notice in the heat of the moment during the lesson. You will see yourself trying to reach a new swing position that felt uncomfortable at first but looks great on video.

The visual support will give you the impetus to continue forward with your swing changes. Your



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improvements will look good before they feel good. Once the swing changes feel right you'll begin to see some significant improvement on the golf course.

Make sure your teaching professional is not blocking your view during the filming. This will tip you off that your pro is a rookie. Make sure he/she stands aside and faces the camera while explaining potential swing improvements. Good clean audio is very important as well.

One very important feature to look for is if the instructor has the ability to record the corrections as well as the golf swing. A split screen comparison is a key feature. It will help you to see a comparison of the proper movement to contrast to yours. The same feature will help you enjoy a before and after video of yourself once you dominate the improvements.

Make sure your instructors software program has some sort of marking system for highlighting corrections right on your tape. You might have seen the telestrators used on televised football games. The markings can be very helpful as evidence and a visual key.

The V1 video capture software offers a simplified home version so that students can work on their lesson on their home computer. Costs can range from \$20 to \$50.

A short word to the ladies...if you feel uncomfortable about being video taped make it known to your instructor that the tape is to remain confidential. The video analysis is so powerful that you will delay your learning process by NOT using it.

## **Question #3 - What is your teaching philosophy?**

If your prospective teaching professional begins his/her lesson by offering an in-depth dissertation of technical mumbo-jumbo...it's time to find another pro! The pro is probably hung up on how much they know and could possibly overload you with too many swing thoughts which could cause you to play

worse. Vince Allen, (*PGA Pro and former caddy to Walter Hagen*) used to say, “*the dumber they are the better they play.*” Boy was he right!

You would be surprised to find out how many great touring pros have no idea what they are doing when they swing a golf club. They play by feel. Most successful feel players have played with the same swing characteristics since they were kids.

Make sure your pro will only work on one swing thought at a time. Until the new motion is set in stone don't attempt to add another change.

Remember golf professionals that offer too many changes too quickly contribute to the concern of many golfers about golf instruction.

## **Question #4 - What is your playing experience?**

Some golfers will tell you that to be a great coach you don't have to be a great player. This may be true but it certainly helps to at least be a good player.

For instance, Don Shula was not a great football player but he did play for the Cleveland Browns. In my estimation anyone that can “*make the team*” in the NFL has to

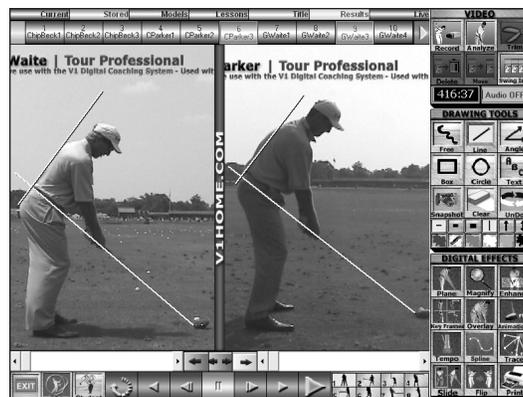
be pretty good. Especially when you consider all the great collegiate players that do not make it to the NFL.

Make sure your pro has at least played on a college golf team or maybe some mini-tours. There is nothing like real life “*under the gun*” experience to draw from. Teaching pros that have played for a living know that you can't get too complicated out on the golf course under pressure.

Playing professionals are more likely to help you build a swing you can compete with under pressure. Don't try to swing pretty, swing effectively.

## **Question #5 - Are you accredited by the PGA?**

An accreditation or at least an apprenticeship in the PGA demonstrates that the instructor is very



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serious about their profession. The PGA club pro apprenticeship takes a minimum of three years to complete and some take five years. That shows a serious commitment on the part of the individual.

## **Question #6 - Can I try one lesson without obligation?**

You should be able to take one lesson to see how things go. Never sell yourself short and take less than the best for your golf swing.

I would NOT commit to a long term lesson obligation unless I was very comfortable and convinced during the first trial lesson that the teacher student relationship was going to be a successful one.

I've witnessed some golf lesson companies that offer long term lesson plans for \$1,500 to \$2,500 where students walk away from a lot of money when they find that the lessons are not working out. Usually they are too embarrassed to ask for a refund.

## **Question #7 - Do you have testimonials and long term students?**

All good teachers will have tons of testimonials and success stories. Good testimonials and referrals are a must! I would ask how long some of his/her students have been with them? Students that stick with a teacher are usually getting results.

I include a picture of the student with the testimonial in the student's own hand writing. Don't settle for a short line like, *“I cut ten strokes off my game”* from George in Seattle.

## **Summary**

Oh yes we haven't talked price! I hoped you would NOT take price into consideration when choosing your teaching professional. Why? Because if you hire a plumber at \$50 an hour and he takes four hours to complete the job you would have done better off with a \$100 a hour plumber that completed the work in only 30 minutes!

This is your golfing life. Whether you're playing golf for fun or you want to beat your boss to

oblivion, get the best instruction you can get. It will cost you less in the long run. However with today's technology you can get the best on a budget price.

Typical costs for lessons from a qualified PGA professional with high tech video analysis could range from \$100 to \$125 per hour. I do a video analysis over the internet for only \$19.

The over the net lesson allows you to maintain your lesson confidential. Your friends won't see you heading out to the range with the pro.

Plus you can get FREE the V1 home version video capture software. This will allow you to practice effectively and allow you to draw lines and circles over your video just like I do.

Visit V1 Interactive Software at  
<http://www.v1golfacademy.com/default.asp>

Bobby Lopez is a PGA professional with 38 years of experience in the golf business.

- Host of the Bobby Lopez Golf Hour on ESPN Sports Radio
- Host of Blab TV Richmond television Show “Golf Your Way”
- Toured for the USO as a trick shot show in support of our troops overseas
- PGA professional of choice in local interviews with Big Al Coleman on 950 AM ESPN radio and with WRVA Jimmy Barrett
- Master of Ceremonies and Entertainment for General Richard Myers Chief of Staff Pentagon as well as annual USO event coupled with NFL Howie Long
- Head Professional at various well known Country Clubs such as Crooked Creek C.C. in Miami, owned by Ted Hendricks of the NFL Oakland Raiders
- Director of Golf at Nueva Andalucia C.C. in Marbella Spain site of the World Cup
- Instructor of choice by the president of V1 Video capture software in training other teaching professionals
- Owner of Bobby Lopez Golf Academy for over 15 years

