Launching Your
PGA Junior League
Golf Program

Best practices include finding team moms, promoting a preseason league, recruiting ambassadors

By Monte Koch, PGA

In my 20-plus years working in the golf business, I have seen many junior golf camps, academies and development programs. Nearly all of them have been what our industry would classify as “good” and some have even been great. However, in retrospect, when I look back at the programs I was a part of, I find myself wondering just how many of those precociously Kensington (ages 7-12) are now paying green fees or dues as adult golfers? In evaluating our current junior participation rates, it would seem the ROI hasn’t been what we had hoped.

In light of that, I am thrilled about the prospects for PGA Junior League Golf (PGA JLG). Whether your facility is daily fee, municipal or private, PGA JLG is truly a turnkey opportunity for PGA Professionals. The following are some best practices for launching your PGA JLG program:

Find the team mom(s) who can be your tipping point

A professional recently told me a story about a junior program he was about to cancel. Hoping for 16-24 kids, he had only a handful sign up. Three days out, he made a call to one of the moms who’d already signed her two kids up. When he said he needed to cancel altogether, this mom asked him to wait. She believed she could find some other kids to register. After 48 hours, this “tipping point” mom’s network produced 17 new registrants.

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More than ever, there are moms with powerful word of mouth and social media networks ready and willing to sell an idea they believe in. They just need to be asked. Better yet, some of these moms are willing to help out further, including with team travel, snacks and the like. Think of the soccer moms who do this already; we need more golf moms and PGA JLG is the way to engage them.

Start early, promote a preseason/introductory league

Instead of waiting until mid-April to start marketing your programs, start now or by March 1. After a successful first year in 2013 with PGA JLG, Dan Harrington, PGA head professional at Meadow Park Golf Course in Tacoma, Wash., is planning to have a Preseason JLG League in 2014. Here’s the skinny:

• Starting on Saturday, March 29, he has planned a Season Kickoff/Sign-Up Session event to create a buzz for families, kids and staff (he will begin promoting it on ACTIVE.com, on-site and online as soon as mid-February)

• A Preseason League fee of $100 per junior will include four coaching sessions on consecutive Saturdays in April, and one or two team scrimmages on their course on a typically slow Sunday afternoon.

• On Saturday, April 26, Harrington plans to host a Tacoma League Scrimmage Jamboree and Party, complete with Golfzilla, for his teams and others in the league. Similar to Pop Warner Football, the plan is to have teams play mini-matches against several other teams so kids and parents can get a flavor of the league and format. Harrington expects that kids who have not participated in the Preseason League will register for the regular league on this date.

Recruit ambassadors who want to give back to the game

Jack Walters was a retired businessman who played three or four times per week at my public facility in Napa, Calif. He routinely helped me to broaden my junior efforts to include events and camps, and even took training with outside sources and with me so he could provide complimentary instruction, golf clubs and balls to any kid who was in need. If I would have had a program like PGA JLG available at the time, Jack would have made a fabulous team manager/captain. With his passion to give back to the game he loved so much, I have no doubt he would have been able to recruit 20-plus juniors, other supporters, local businesses and more. Maybe you have someone such as Jack at your facility who’s waiting for you to ask them to help?

In closing, PGA Junior League Golf is an ideal solution for PGA Professionals looking to grow current revenues, create new revenue sources and build their personal brand in 2014. And here’s the best part, quoted directly from Harrington: “I was surprised a little by how much Junior League Golf did for our facility, but I was surprised a lot by how little time it took for me. In retrospect, I wish I had gone after more than one team at our facility.”

You can bet Harrington will be growing his PGA JLG business in 2014, and I am hoping you will, too.

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