

Learning goes high tech

Golf academy a new alternative for those wanting career in game

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COURTESY OF NATIONAL UNIVERSITY GOLF ACADEMY

Swing animation in 3D is one of the features of the laboratory at the National University Golf Academy.

For most, the game of golf is tough enough to learn on the course.

But for others, the game can be learned in 3D animation at a state of the art swing lab or simply by signing on the Internet.

Welcome to golf in the 21st Century.

“This has been a lot of fun,” said Dr. Charles “Mac” Powell, who is the dean of the new National University Golf Academy in San Diego.

“We have only been going for a couple of months (since September), but we have attracted students from all over the world,” he added. “There are not a lot of universities who offer golf academies.”

National University, which opened in 1971, features 22,000 students at several campuses in California and Nevada. It offers more than 60 degree programs on the Internet, including an associates degree in professional golf management and a bachelor's in sports psychology.

“We have a lot of students who take our courses online, on-site or a combination of both,” said the 37-year-old Powell, who has been involved with golf since age 16.

“Students can start any time. If they have seasonal employment, they can come spend the winters with us and work in the lab and on the course. If not, they can get their degree online.”

18 months for a degree

An associates degree in professional golf management usually takes 18 months to complete, Powell said.

“We have students who want to be pro players, head pros and general managers,” he said. “They might have been in the golf business a long time but don't have experience in accounting. This degree gives them a nice balance.”

The Academy gives students the ability to upload video critiques of their swings and academic programs that focus on the physical and psychological components of golf, Powell said.

“There are a lot of golf courses and clubs who are hiring outside for a club manager,” Powell said. “Golf pros are focused on teaching and don't always have the complete package of skills. Even at the associates level, the students will get all the skills they need to (be a club manager).”

Powell said the 3D imaging system is “unbelievable.”

“This is the most exciting place to learn and teach golf I have ever seen,” he said. “The students hit golf balls in the lab, and they get to see exactly what they do in flight. Then, you look at body, hips, rotation, speed and plane. The students quickly learn what they need to improve. It has just been amazing.”

Ryan Aragon, who was unemployed in Albuquerque, N.M., gave the National Golf Academy a try after learning about it from his brother, who is a friend of Powell's.

“I think what got me the most interested is the technology they have here,” said Aragon, who was a restaurant manager after graduating from high school. “The technology here is top of the line stuff. The quality of instruction also is very good.”

Aragon is working on a bachelor's degree in sports psychology. He wants to be a teacher for pro golfers.

“This has definitely helped my golf game,” he said. “I hope to be able to do the same for others down the road.”

Career vs. just playing

Matt Swanson, who runs a golf academy at Wildcat Golf Club and operates Swanson Golf Center in the Champions area, said his facilities are geared toward players who want to play the game.

“Our golf academy teaches regular guys who want to learn how to play golf,” Swanson said. “That one is for students looking for a career in the business.”

Sam Houston State University offers a golf management program.

“I would think that a lot of guys would probably look at the online thing (that National University is offering) as an option,” Swanson said. “But Sam Houston has a great golf management program, and we have a pretty unique facility (for those wanting to learn the game).”

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