

Extracurricular Activities

Written by Nichole Brophy

Sunday, 31 August 2008 17:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 05 March 2009 11:22

When the bell rings and school supplies start invading the kitchen table, ease back into the swing of things with a fresh after-school activity.

Whether you've been trying to get your child on the links for a while, or have a junior with a sudden attraction to the game, myriad local avenues are available to explore. Sean Ferris, a PGA professional and the assistant executive director for the Junior Golf Association of Arizona (JGAA), offers useful tips on how and where to get your junior teeing up—and how to keep them interested.

"If any thing in junior golf, geography is probably number one," Ferris says.

"Unless they are old enough to drive, [kids] usually need the help of an adult to get to where they are going. So the first thing I say is, 'Tell me where you live, and let me find an instructor I know of that is very good with junior golf and is close to you.'"

Once location is pinned down, the next step is evaluating your junior's skill level.

"The next thing is to look at what programs they have and what will be the best fit," Ferris says. "If it's a beginner, it's better if [the junior golf program] has a lot of group clinics, because it is always easier for beginners to learn in a group environment rather than [through] individual one-on-one instruction.

Although a 6-to-1 student-to-teacher ratio is ideal, Ferris adds that veteran pros can be just as effective with an eight-to-one or even a ten-to-one ratio.

"Golf can be a hard sport, and if you don't see other people struggling with it just like you are, it can become discouraging."

The final consideration is the increasing expense of one of the priciest sports around.

"Budget is the reality of it," Ferris says. "You can find very expensive programs for juniors and you can find...[nearly] free programs. So there are all types of programs out there. And budget is a factor when you consider all the other sports activities that kids are involved in."

Getting your junior to practice is one thing, but engaging a child's interest is the key to a lifelong love of the game. Ferris says to keep in mind that a golf school's success can be measured by a child's desire for continued improvement.

"Definitely the success and the popularity of the program are directly related to having an LPGA or PGA professional who [is] there and dedicated to junior golf."

Junior Golf Programs – Whether it be your country club's driving range, or one of the city's municipal courses, a place to learn and love the game is never too far away.

The First Tee of Tucson

Located at the Trini Alvarez El Rio Golf Course, the First Tee of Tucson provides juniors many opportunities to tee up throughout the year. Offering play days and standard classes, the organization operates on a merit-based system where golfers earn their way through up through the ranks to Birdie, Eagle and Ace levels. In addition, a new 4,500-sq.-ft. learning center for juniors is being built on property (slated for completion this fall). It will provide junior members a place to study, read, learn and even watch golf-related materials. The volunteer operation is always looking to add to its junior golf and volunteer family. The cost of membership is \$5 per year per child. Equipment is provided. 520.628.1555, www.thefirstteetucson.org.

Southern Arizona Junior Golf Association

For juniors getting serious about the game, joining the SAJGA allows them the opportunity to tee up for friendly competitions regularly with other junior members. While the cost of full membership is \$60 for the first year, a practice-only membership is also available for \$30. Either membership allows juniors to join the lesson offered every Sunday afternoon at Randolph Golf Course. <http://www.sajga.org/>.