

KOHLER Golf Academy

Keen student of the game, our correspondent David J. Whyte's search for the finest resort academies takes him to the American state of Wisconsin at the American Club Resort's Kohler Golf Academy.

BY DAVID J. WHYTE

An hour's drive north of Milwaukee and 3 hours from Chicago is one of only 36 hotels in the world to be both awarded Forbes Five-Star and AAA Five-Diamond. Through the years, The American Club has built a strong heritage of excellence, thanks to hosting such prestigious events as the PGA Championship, the US Senior Open and, in 2020, the Ryder Cup.

Set at the heart of the planned community of Kohler, everything is close at hand from a Forbes Five-Star rated Kohler Waters Spa just across the street to a well-furnished mall called The Shops at Woodlake, and no sign of the usual American fast-food outlets and chain stores.

There are two golf complexes attached to The American Club. Blackwolf Run has two courses, The River and Meadow Valley, and the other, further east and overlooking Lake Michigan is Whistling Straits with its more links-like offerings called The Straits and The Irish. Kohler Golf Academy is located at the Blackwolf Run complex with an indoor, off-season facility located at The Shops at Woodlake.

For those expecting a big, sophisticated facility, they may be surprised at how modest the academy is. A small, open-sided gazebo pitched at one end of the driving range at Blackwolf Run with a range of Taylormade and Titleist club fitting equipment and video analysis using the JC Video System is all there is, but the key here is in the software, the people who run the facility and their philosophy of making golf a simpler, better game for amateurs.

With several teaching programs, individual private lessons, multi-player/multi-session golf

schools and a pre-round 'Quick Tips' service, they are aimed at groups of golfers and usually take place over 2 or 3 days with 4-hour sessions per day tailored to suit the group. Single golfers get one-on-one sessions usually lasting 3-hours per day and again these are customized to suit the individual along with the number of days required covering all aspects from short game to full swing.

KOHLER TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

According to head teaching professional Todd Wagner, the main goal of the academy is for the golfer to improve and have fun and they do it in a very simple way. When it comes to making changes to the golf swing, they look at ball-flight. If a student's ball flight is solid, there won't be much change but if they identify areas that require attention, they break it down into simple, understandable elements. The easier it is for the student to grasp concepts, the more likely they will implement it.

The core of their teaching philosophy is body movement. The body provides the motion required to successfully swing a club and make solid contact with the ball. People become too focused on equipment or some particular part of their swing but it is all about correct body movement. They refer to this movement as the 'Athletic Sequence'.

And Wagner explains this: "With any ball game, you tend to shift your weight towards the target, turn towards it and then finally hit or kick or throw the ball," he says.

"We learn this sequence of movements



when we are young and it doesn't change in adulthood, and yet this is where nearly all the problems arise in adult golfers. They're disconnected from their own innate ability to move naturally," he continues.

To put actions to words, he shows us, "Step, turn and throw. Step, turn and hit. Step, turn and kick. You move onto your leading side and hit last. It's that simple and yet it is interesting how people lose this progression or have trouble grasping it. We help our students experience their natural sequence and then train them to repeat it every time they swing a golf club."

This is the philosophy here at the Kohler Golf Academy. It might seem rudimentary in this day and age but it works to help students quickly, more effectively and with more appreciation of what everyone is trying to do out there on the golf course, which really, is to have fun. 🏌️

SIMPLE USE OF VIDEO

The JC Video System is the main diagnostic tool for students and instructors to identify 1) what they are doing 2) what they need to do and 3) how to make the change.

WHAT ARE THEY DOING?

Golfers only take away one or two things from each lesson so a simple video session will clearly identify in the minds of the student and instructor where things are going wrong.

WHAT THEY NEED TO DO?

Once the fault is identified, it is time to see what should be done instead. This could be partly influenced by what the student hopes to take away from a lesson. They might be looking to hit the ball further or perhaps introduce a draw into their ball flight. Changes are made based on that and the information identified on video.

HOW TO MAKE THE CHANGE?

That is where good instruction comes in and forms the largest part of the teaching session. The approach here is diverse, depending on the problems identified as well as the requirements of the student. It is very useful having tour players (within the JC Video System) as a guide to compare their swing with. Simple technology but very effective.

They also communicate by touch, adjusting the player's body position or swing movements to help them feel how it should be done. Nine times out of 10 the student feels awkward but in reality they are not and the video helps them grasp this. What it feels like and what it looks like are nearly always two completely different things.



ORGANIZED GOLF

Here are five of my favourite swing tips. The first two to help you get better organized in your swing and the others to get you organized out on the golf course.

BY TODD WAGNER, HEAD TEACHING PROFESSIONAL

ORGANIZING YOUR SWING

1. The Athletic Sequence

The main engine in the golf swing is the body and the Athletic Sequence is the natural way of utilizing your body and delivering the energy required to hit a golf ball well. At address, we should feel balanced and athletic. Think about two posts i.e. the right leg and left leg. We rotate around the back post on the back swing then shift that stored energy forward from the right to the left. It's as simple as that. Don't try and overcomplicate it. Practice the routine without a club as illustrated.

2. The Grip

The grip is a key element of the Athletic Sequence. A sound grip will unite the torso to the club. To establish a better feel for how your grip should be and how it connects arms, body and club, take a wet towel



and wring it out. Now apply the same action to your golf grip, starting off with a firm wringing action then relaxing into a neutral pressure. You'll find a surprising improvement in your consciousness of your grip and how your arms connect with the body.

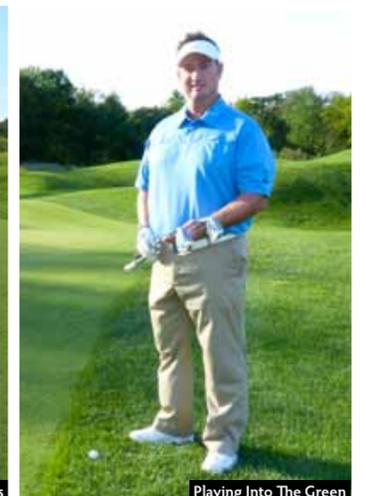
ORGANIZE YOUR GAME

3. Tee Box Management

If there's trouble off the tee box, tee up on the same side of the trouble and angle away from it. From the 'troubled' side you will be hitting towards the center of the fairway or green with your body angled away from the hazard. If there's trouble on both sides, choose the more penal side and tee up on that side of the box. This tee-box discipline gets you thinking more about course management off the tee and helps build mental confidence, which translates into more assured drives.

4. Approach Shots

On Par 5's or long Par 4's if it is too far to reach the green in two shots, hit a shot you feel most comfortable with. If you are tempted to hit a 'career-best' with say, a 3-wood or a hybrid, that's probably not the shot to hit. Approach each shot in golf like a chess game. In this case, hit a mid or long-iron into position, leaving an easy 100-yard pitch for an up-and-down birdie or par verses the risk of an all-or-nothing shot that at best might leave a 50-yard shot into the green.



5. Playing into the Green

When you are playing from around the green and hoping to nuzzle up towards the flag, keep in mind control of direction and distance is much better along the ground than it is in the air. Putt if you can, chip if you have to, and if you have to get it in the air, pitch. From a percentage point of view, putting or chipping with a low-lofted club like a 7-iron will be more likely to get you closer to the pin than using a high-lofted club with its inherent risks. 



AMERICAN CLUB RESORT COURSES

One of the most famous and lavishly appointed resorts in the US, The American Club Resort still preserves the easy-going attitude that is inherent throughout the Midwest.

BEST VISIT DURING...

The summer when Wisconsin is cooler than most parts, there are many who will come from the southern states to visit and enjoy their perfect summer climate. But the best time to visit might be September and early October. The Fall season offers not just cool weather but also some spectacular scenery, especially at the River Course where the trees change colour and fly-fishermen can be seen pulling their salmon in the river.

BLACKWOLF RUN

The original golf facility built in 1998, it now comprises of two courses, The River and Meadow Valley. Both these courses offer target-style golf. The River Course at Blackwolf Run features 14 holes playing along or near the banks of the Sheboygan River, hence its name. This is a demanding Pete Dye design with large, undulating greens but interestingly enough the main challenge is getting onto them.

The back nine of the Meadow Valley Course is probably the prettiest of all four courses and offers the best layout in terms of excitement and challenge. Both the River Course and the Meadow Valley have tall fescue grass that tends to suck in golf balls and lose them.

WHISTLING STRAITS

The Straits is a links-style golf course with breathtaking views across Lake Michigan. Caddies are required and much appreciated especially on this links-style design. Compared to the courses at Blackwolf Run, the fairways are narrower here with difficult lies that puts a test on shot making. There are also many well-positioned bunkers and generally many bunkers. The 17th and 18th presents one of the toughest finishes in America with a par 3 with water on the left and the State of Wisconsin on your right and ending with a very long par 4 with a small green at the end.

The Irish is a combination of target-style golf at Blackwolf with links like its next-door neighbor to make this a hybrid course. When it comes to sand, the Irish course has the most. Combining these factors make playing The Irish an interesting test of golfing skills. 

Contact Information

Visit www.AmericanClub.com for information on The American Club. For information on the Kohler Golf Academy contact Todd Wagner on (+1) 920 565 6075 or via e-mail at KohlerGolfAcademy@kohler.com



MAIN PICTURE: Blackwolf Run, River Course - 18th Hole. INSET FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Whistling Straits - 12th & 18th Hole.