

# Junior Golf: All fun and Games... with a purpose!

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Summertime. Swimming pools. Hoola-hoops. Foam noodles. Colorful flags. Huge neon colored 25 gallon buckets. Lollipops. What does it all add up to? A fun-filled summer golf program of course!

Simple instruction, skills challenges and fun games are all part of my junior program at Crystal Lake. Colorful noodles outline a make-shift fairway on the practice range. Hoola-hoops with flags stuck in the middle as well as the famous kiddie pool serve as great targets for pitching practice. Lollipops are used to surround holes on the putting green for chipping contests and lag putting drills. Not surprising, adults love pitching into the pool as much as the kids!

I'm often asked by parents "How do I get my child interested in golf? How can I help them improve their skills?" Regardless of whether you are looking to train the next Tiger Woods or just want to expose your child to a game they can enjoy for a lifetime, my answer is pretty much the same. Parents, coaches and instructors must create a fun learning environment to keep kids interested in golf.



To understand how to best encourage your child to pursue and fall in love with the game, find out why they want to play. For me, it all started because I didn't want to be left behind when my parents went to play golf every Saturday. I fell in love with practicing and playing by myself, with my parents or with the boys. Practice always involved playing fun games and some sort of competition. It fueled my passion.

When I asked two of my favorite young students why they play, their answers were similar. After some thought, 8 year old Megan Welch told me, "Golf is fun and challenging and I like to see if I can do better than I did last time. Oh, and I wanted to spend time with my dad." She just won her third MN PGA junior tournament this summer.

Alex Uloth, 13 just won his first MN PGA junior tournament shooting 73 and had this to add, "My uncle was a golf course superintendent and he and my dad would play and I wanted

to join them." I've watched Alex over the last 4 years spend hours at the golf course each day practicing and playing sometimes up to 36 holes in a day.

One of my favorite quotes by famed golf instructor, Harvey Penick, "You don't teach kids, you guide their learning." When the learning environment is simple and fun, your child will get hooked on golf. You must find out what makes golf fun for your child and then always remember that he or she is a child and not an adult. Your "goals" and "expectations" will be very different. Don't be discouraged if your child doesn't like golf for all the "right" reasons yet. Learn to be content with the fact that they enjoy coming to the golf course with you and keep making it fun for them!

When I first starting working with juniors I wanted to "fix" and "correct" every error. Now, I realize kids need to have a balance of teachable moments and fun. I remember the highlight of golf for me was getting a coke and hot dog on the 6th hole and then looking for tadpoles in the lake on the 7th hole.

Be sensitive to attention spans and strength issues. With younger children (under 8), they need to control the length of the lesson/practice time. When they are more interested in butterflies or worms, the teachable time is over.

Regarding other sports, there is much research supporting the idea of exposing kids to several sports to enhance their motor skills for golf at young age. Hockey, tennis, baseball, volleyball and downhill skiing are all great compliments to key elements of a great golf swing. Rotary motion, eye hand coordination, proper weight shift and separation of the upper and lower body are all key movements that need to be developed for powerful golf swings.

There are so many games you play or simply make up. The point is to have fun while working on some very valuable golf skills. Fill your practice time with lots of games and it won't even seem like practice!



## Some great games to play around and on the putting green:

**CHIP AND PUTT:** Each player takes turns picking a hole to chip or pitch to you. Par is "3". One chip/pitch and then 2 putts for your par. You can't play the same hole twice.

**9 HOLES ON THE PUTTING GREEN:** Each player again takes turns choosing a hole. The Par is "2" for each hole. You can't putt to the same hole twice. Vary the lengths and difficulty.

**LOLLIPOP LADDER DRILL:** Stick a lollipop or quarter at intervals of 3,6,9 and 12 feet from the hole. Putt from each place. If you make one you get the lollipop or quarter.

**AROUND THE WORLD GOLF-STYLE:** Put a tee in the ground at 3,6,9,12,15,18, 21 and 30 feet. You must sink the 3 footer to advance to the next putt. If you miss you lose your turn. If you make it, you advance to the 6 footer. If you miss, you can take a "chance". If you make it, continue moving back. If you miss, you lose your turn and go back to the 3 footer. The first one to sink it from 30 feet wins.

**CIRCLE DRILL:** Make a 6 foot circle around a hole with tees, string or lollipops. Have your child roll the ball into the circle. To work on learning where to aim for breaking putts chose a hole that would have a lot break.

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