

## Good Timing

### Doug Roberts and the Jack Nicklaus Academy of Golf



Timing. It can be one of the key elements in perfecting your golf swing. Some say it's the most important factor to achieving success. Others will tell you when you get everything else working properly you eliminate timing as a factor. Sounds a bit like the chicken and the egg to me – and if you look at my swing it's easy to see that I still don't know which comes first. But Doug Roberts is a guy who could probably help me sort it out. Doug is the Director of Instruction at the Jack Nicklaus Academy of Golf at The Ledges in St. George, Utah. After spending just a brief visit with him, I'd say he has this whole timing thing figured out.

The Jack Nicklaus Academy was preparing to open at The Ledges in the fall of 2005. About that time, Doug had decided he was ready to find a more comfortable setting for his family – something a little closer to his roots, and a place he could teach golf year-round. "I hadn't been around

St. George for a long time, so I called my old friend Dave Terry who used to be the City Golf Manager and asked if golf was catching on in the area (you think?) and if he knew of any opportunities that might be a good fit. He put me in touch with The Ledges Director of Golf, Colby Cowan." And suddenly the swing was in motion.

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For Roberts it was a dream opportunity. For the Jack Nicklaus Academy it was a great match.

The Nicklaus Academy at the Ledges is an incredible teaching and training facility with more than two acres sculpted into a championship short game area with multiple greens, distinct bunker challenges and mini-fairways. Step inside the indoor facility and you'll find three climate controlled teaching bays with roll-up doors that allow you to watch the ball in flight as you work on your shot. Each bay is equipped with precision video cameras and analysis software. The facility includes a pressure mat system that tracks balance and body movement and the most advanced biomechanics analyzer on the market, a wireless system called K-Vest. The Academy also features the ball flight launch monitor and custom fitting software of MaxOut Golf. "We have high-speed cameras, plus the pressure mat, plus the launch monitor all in one software application," said Roberts. "In most other teaching facilities you can only use one at a time."



The software acts like a telestrator so instructors can draw and illustrate teaching concepts on the screen on top of the captured video. Non-blur, frame by frame visualization makes it easy for students to see exactly what is taking place at every part of the swing. With a floor monitor, students are able to watch exactly what they are doing, as they do it. "That really quickens the learning process," says Roberts, "it gives them immediate feedback on what it looks like and how it feels. Five minutes of doing that is worth two hours of somebody standing over you trying to explain what you are doing," he said.

"What makes this particular Nicklaus Academy special and comparable to the best in the world is the technology that we've put together combined with our golf fitness program, a great short game area, and a championship golf course – you've got the whole package."

Roberts started playing golf as a seven-year-old at the 9-hole course in Richfield, Utah where he worked with his dad who was the golf manager and superintendent. "Dad was a good player, but he wasn't ever a professional," he said. "From a very young age I would work with him at the golf course, take care of anything that he needed done, then play golf until dark." By the time Doug was twelve he was sure he would be a tour player. "The game came pretty natural at first," he recalls. But it got more "unnatural" as he became more competitive and had to fine tune his method. "A place like this would have been priceless back then," he grinned.

Roberts won the Utah Junior open two years then played on the University of Utah team as he continued to improve on his game. "The ironic part is I almost considered myself 'anti-instruction' growing up," he said. "I was a 'feel' player and for the most part my coaches let me feel my way through." Roberts says he used to laugh at others who were taking

instruction. "All that's going to do is mess them up," he thought, "make them too mechanical." That attitude changed when he was exposed to people who actually made it on tour. "The 'feel' players, who also had an understanding of their mechanics, were the ones who could really succeed," he said. "You can be too mechanical, but when the ball is not doing what it's supposed to, you have to understand the mechanics of what's causing that to be able to get it back on line."

After turning pro he went to Myrtle Beach and then Orlando, where he worked part time at the courses and started playing the mini tours. "I was just good enough to cover expenses," he laughs, "but at that point, I wasn't good enough to make a living at it." A friend gave him the chance to help out at a nearby golf school to earn some extra money. "It was a lot of fun watching the head instructor lead these recreational players and to see the improvement in just a couple of hours. That really opened up my mind to the possibility of teaching."

When it became apparent that he wasn't going to play for a living he got into the PGA of America and started working as an Assistant Pro. He eventually ended up in Scottsdale, Arizona at the Desert Mountain Club. "It was a fortunate decision," he said. "My first week there, they were looking for people to help out with the Nicklaus/Flick Golf School." Hall of Fame instructor Jim Flick was running the schools, and Mike Malaska was a lead instructor. Roberts had the opportunity to work side-by-side with both of them.



Timing.

"I thought I knew quite a bit about the game, but watching Jim Flick do his opening presentation, and the way he communicated the golf swing to these people, I realized I had a lot to learn."

Flick's presentation of the game was gratifying. "It was actually very similar to the way my dad taught me," said Roberts. "Flick is the best communicator I've seen. He talks about playing golf in a manner that makes sense. People really took to it quickly, and they had a lot of fun learning."

Flick's teaching style brought Roberts back to his youth. "It's a game," he said, "it's supposed to be fun! Some people wrap up their identity in their golf score, and they don't enjoy the game," he said. Watching Flick, gave Roberts a new idea. "From that moment I realized the direction I wanted to go. I wanted to be a full time instructor." As timing would have it, one month later the director of the Desert Mountain Schools moved on. Roberts was hired and became entrenched in the Nicklaus/Flick Schools.

Doug spent 13-years teaching side-by-side with some of the world's best including six of the top one-hundred instructors. "Jim Flick, Mike Malaska, Martin Hall, Mark Wood, Stan Thirsk, Laird Small and others - the experiences with these pros, their hands on stories and 'dinner talk' were invaluable," he said. "The great golf instructors, the one's you've heard of, are there for a reason."

One of his most memorable experiences as an instructor was the opportunity to do a European teaching tour. One of the featured courses on the tour was the Old Course at St. Andrews. "Just to be there is incredible," said Roberts. "The course is 600 years old, and you can feel the history and the tradition that goes with it. Golf is woven into the fabric of the community. It really had an impact on me."

Now the cycle has come full swing. The opportunity to work at one of the world's newest facilities "is heaven," he said. "When I told Jim Flick about the academy they were building here and the opportunity I had, even he was jealous. When people come here and see the incredible facilities, the quality of golf we have and the location with all the color – they just love it."

That said, Doug still maintains a very warm and humble approach to it all. "Some of the most fun and rewarding experiences I have are with the recreational players. I tell everyone to approach it as a game - keep it simple, enjoy it - we don't have to be perfect and the closer we get to simplicity, the easier this game will become."

For more information contact Doug Roberts at the Jack Nicklaus Academy of Golf.

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