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FEATURE

# Everyone's Game

By Steve Hunt





GOLF JUST MIGHT BE the world's greatest sport. It's an activity that can be played individually or as part of a group and virtually everyone can play. It doesn't matter what the player's age or skill level is, anyone can hit the links for nine or 18 holes.

Of course, like everything else, money can be a determining factor as to what kind of golf experience a particular player

may have. The more money a player spends, the better his or her equipment may be and the better courses they can afford to play. But that doesn't mean that a player using the most top-of-the-line clubs on the market today has a more enjoyable time on the course than the player who is hitting with a set of clubs found at a garage sale. It is just a matter of personal preference.



*Encourage a good lie*  
photo by Chris Fritchie

Frisco also has several great practice facilities. In October, the Hank Haney Golf Ranch, originally located just north of Custer Road and Main Street, closed and moved to Westridge Golf Club in Stonebridge Ranch, but local linksters can go hit a bucket of balls, work on their putting or short games at driving ranges located at Plantation and the Trails of Frisco. Call ahead to be certain the Trails is open to the public on your chosen practice day.

### A FAMILY AFFAIR

Many who play have been golfers for much of their lives. Maybe they had a family member, likely a parent, introduce them to the game at a young age and were quickly hooked. Such is the case for Chris McMillian, who was introduced to the game by his father, Bubba, a former Frisco resident.

The McMillians are not unlike many other fathers and sons whose time on the golf course for good, old-fashioned family bonding.

The younger McMillian remembers dear old dad getting him a set of clubs or “sticks” as they are often called, taking him to a local course and showing him the ropes. That was 22 years ago and he has been playing at least several times per week since.

Chris and Bubba also make it a point to play at least one round together each month. It gives father and son a great chance to catch up with what is going on in each other’s lives and to relieve some stress. The student beats the teacher more often than not, but the two still have a great time. Bubba admits that he

### COURSE OF ACTION

Golf is definitely alive and well here in Frisco. We are blessed to have three great courses. Plantation Golf Club is the only public course in town and has been open since 1988. The management there takes pride in being a course that offers something for everyone by providing golf that is fast, fun and affordable. Even though this course is fully public, they sell memberships, much like their private counterparts, and local players have responded to the opportunity.

The Trails of Frisco is a local semi-private course, meaning it is open to the public a majority of the time but at other times, it is open only to their members. Trails General Manager Stephen Lee says they intend to take the course fully private in the coming year depending on the reaction from the local market. Only

open for seven years, Trails of Frisco is the “new kid on the block” in the Frisco golf scene, but the course has already received its share of critical acclaim for great design and facilities.

But, speaking of reputation, none is bigger than Frisco’s only private club, Stonebriar Country Club, which is considered a social hub of the community. Stonebriar continues to be regarded as one of the top private clubs in the state. Its membership likes things of high quality and isn’t afraid to pay more to get them. It is a very exclusive club that is used by individuals, businesses and families alike. Despite its great reputation and popularity, there is not currently a waiting list to purchase a golf membership like there is at many other high-profile country clubs in the metroplex.

plays golf because it is relaxing and also because it's a great way to enjoy the outdoors and get some exercise in the process.

The McMillians are not unlike many other fathers and sons who use time on the golf course for some good, old-fashioned family bonding. What could be better than teeing it up with dad at the local course? Well, one thing could be better, beating him, of course.

It's a similar story for local resident Brad Stribling, who also plays golf with his son. For now, he can still beat him but admits that the 16-year-old is quickly closing the gap, which causes him considerable consternation.

Mr. Stribling got his son interested in the game when Brad was about eight years old and the two have not stopped playing. He likes the fact that golf teaches many character traits other sports lack—things like etiquette, patience and determination. That final quality is especially important considering that at times, golf can be the most frustrating game on the planet but nailing that one perfect shot once in a while provides

enough hope to keep us all coming back.

### TEACHING THE GAME

While many players who take up the game at a young age learn from a parent, others go the more formal route and attend a golf school or academy. Plantation Golf Club has a great Junior Golf Academy, which is open to any player between the ages of six and 17. The curriculum focuses on seven different areas vital to developing a good golf game. Players get the entire lesson in the first 30-minute session and are then able to work on what they have learned in the ensuing lesson.

Plantation's Academy also emphasizes character. Those in the program are taught about trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. Many who start this program end up playing golf competitively in high school or possibly even in college.

Bruce Sims, who is the assistant general manager of Plantation, also has noticed that many who come up in the program not only end up playing high school golf, but also do so with many fellow players

they meet while being instructed at the course. In a number of cases, players have gotten to know each other through the Academy and then decided to play golf at a particular high school because they wanted to play with their friends from the Academy.

Frisco's two other courses also have great youth programs of their own. Each of the three local facilities offer lessons to anyone who is interested, for a fee of course. Like the game itself, golf lessons are open to everyone. No matter the age, it's never too late to learn a few things about the game since it truly is a sport that can be played for a lifetime.

### ALL BUSINESS

It's no secret that a great many business deals are completed on the golf course. Even today, in this age of e-mail and instant messaging, golf is often the "tie that binds" in the business world. Many who become golfers do so because of their work. In normal circumstances, they would not have even thought about picking up a club but, because of their occupation, they hit the links with



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some colleagues and were immediately hooked.

That is definitely what happened for Frisco resident Joey Payton, who works in the mortgage business. He remembers some co-workers and colleagues wanting to hit the links and joining them for his first round. Mr. Payton saw it as an opportunity, not just to network and help expand his business, but also possibly as a great way to unwind and get some exercise.

What's amusing about Mr. Payton's situation is that he hit the links solely looking to increase his business and now considers himself an avid golfer, but for different reasons. He realized that he enjoyed the game and found it a great way to pass the time on weekends. While a small number of his trips to the course are business-related, he admits that a majority of his rounds are now for pleasure, instead of work.

Mr. Stribling, who owns a local sales training business and publishing company, estimates that about 25 percent of his rounds are for business. He admits that work-related golf is much different than

the rounds he plays for pleasure. Rounds with colleagues are more about getting the deal done, which often means making sure business associates have everything they need and making small talk with them.

Those in the program are taught about trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. Many end up playing golf competitively.

That is in sharp contrast to when Mr. Stribling hits the links with his son, rounds which aren't complete without a healthy dose of good-natured ribbing and good times for all. Playing golf for business purposes isn't so much about the organizer having a good time. It's more about making sure the client is happy.

One of the cardinal rules of business is that if the client is happy, then business is good. No place does that hold more true than on the golf course.

Businesses also use memberships at private clubs like Stonebriar for business purposes. Imagine a prospective client brought in for an afternoon of golf at one of the area's top courses complete with some of the best facilities in DFW. The day would be topped off by an incredible meal in the club's dining room. Sounds like the perfect recipe to close any business deal.

#### NOT JUST A MAN'S WORLD

Many male players hit the course not just because they enjoy the game, but also because golf is a very social activity that can be enjoyed with a group of friends. However, many national and local courses are seeing an increase in the number of women players. Mr. Sims admits that Plantation's ratio is still 75 percent male to 25 percent female but has noticed more women playing than ever before.

He adds that it's common to see a



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male player show up alone for a round and then get placed with another group of players. But, this rarely if ever happens with female players. He has noticed that a majority, if not all of his female players come as a group and play as a group.

Much like their male counterparts, it is a great way to get out of the house, get some exercise and have a good time. It is kind of a girl's night out but instead of hitting the town for a few cocktails, they decide to hit the links to play a round of golf. And if you think that women don't take the game as seriously as their male counterparts, you are wrong, There are a fair share of women who are as into the game as male players and who want to become the best player they can be. Some might call it "an obsession" but they call it "a commitment to excellence."

## GOLF FOR A CAUSE

A number of local nonprofit and charitable organizations use golf tournaments as a great way to raise funds in a popular and enticing forum. Heading up the list is Frisco Family Services Center (FFSC), which is the beneficiary of the annual Mayor's Golf Classic. This year's event will be held on May 7, on the Tom Fazio course at Stonebriar. Last year's event raised \$50,000 or about 5 percent of the FFSC annual budget. They are expecting between 70 and 80 players for this year's event.

Each September, the FC Dallas Foundation, the charitable arm of the Major League Soccer club and Pizza Hut Park, hosts their annual golf tournament. The event features FCD players paired with tournament players. Last year's event was at Castle Hills and was a rousing success.

The Boys and Girls Club of Collin County also have an annual golf tournament as a way to raise funds. This event is usually held in McKinney in either May or June.

## WHY GOLF?

Many who don't play golf just can't seem to grasp what is so great about hitting



a little white ball around huge expanses of grass. To them, it looks like a boring game with no satisfaction and they just don't get it. Sure, golf is hands-down the most frustrating game on the planet. But at the same time, it can also be the most relaxing. That paradox only helps to begin explaining golf's enduring appeal.

#### STRESS RELIEF

Ask anyone who plays golf and they will surely tell you they do it for stress relief. How many doctors and lawyers are there who play golf? Now, a number of them likely do so for business purposes but having such a stressful occupation can often be offset by a trip or two to the golf course each week.

Players also come from many other similarly stressful occupations. Many policemen and firefighters choose to let off some steam after a long shift by taking in a round of golf with a group of co-workers. If you know anyone who is

a policeman or firefighter or have been around a group of them, a group outing of any type is sure to be a spirited affair and golf is no different.

Imagine a prospective client brought in for an afternoon of golf at one of the area's top courses complete with some of the best facilities in DFW.

But you don't have to have a job that forces you to face life-or-death situations every day to enjoy the therapeutic aspects of golf. The game allows a player to clear his or her mind. All they have

to focus on while at the golf course is how they will play. No more worrying, at least for a few hours, about their latest project at work or having to pick the kids up from soccer practice. This time is all about the game and nothing else.

#### IT'S AN ADDICTION

Many avid golfers are candid when admitting they are addicted to playing. When they don't get their golf "fix," they feel like completely different people. The game can do that to people—it can draw them in and consume them. Many figure that being addicted to golf is still much better and more socially acceptable than the alternatives of being addicted to harmful things like drugs, alcohol and other similar vices.

These addicts are usually easy to spot. They subscribe to every golf magazine available. Also, they know anything and everything about the latest technological advancements in the game, which keeping



*photo by Chris Frutchie*

up with those, that change almost daily, is a game in itself. Another tell-tale sign is that they likely carry a set of clubs and golf shoes in their car so they can possibly fit in a quick nine holes or maybe even a little extra practice either on their lunch hour or before or after work. Golf addicts are also sure to get more than a little ribbing from their friends and family, but they figure it is a small price to pay for the game they love.

### THE CHALLENGE

Whether we want to admit it or not, deep down we are all competitive and love a challenge. No game can challenge the body and mind like golf. There isn't a range of motion more complex in sports, except possibly a baseball swing, that's more complex than a golf swing. One part of the perfect swing that is out of sync can produce huge negative repercussions for a player's game. So, it's not a huge surprise that the most serious players put a great deal of effort into their swing. This can include lessons, video analysis and other techniques.

Executing the perfect golf swing is the ultimate exercise in focus and concentration. It is also great because the act of hitting the ball works much of the body.

The best analogy to describe golf has to be the carrot dangling in front of the horse-drawn cart. When a golfer hits a good shot, the carrot, it represents playing the ultimate round of golf and the cart gets that much closer. When a player hits an equally bad shot, the perfect round gets a little bit farther away. In that sense, golf represents the ultimate metaphor for give and take.

A dedicated player gives a lot in terms of time and commitment with lessons, practice and playing time and what do they get in return? Well, the answer to that is simple. They get just enough to keep them coming back. Thinking as

a golfer, hitting one great shot will lead to two with that number continuing to grow exponentially. Of course, as many linksters know, it doesn't always work that way but still, at least in theory, it sounds good.

### UNIVERSAL APPEAL

Yet another of golf's strong points is that it is one sport that can literally be played for a lifetime. Other sports like baseball, basketball and football, take their toll on the human body and can only be played for a finite amount of time. That is not the case with golf. Since the player decides how much walking, if any, is involved in their game, the individual can control how much stress playing golf has on their body.

That explains golf's universal appeal in a nutshell. In no other game are there more diverse groups of players. Look at your local course and you are just as likely to see a group of teenagers playing as you are to see older players, a group of women or a father and son.

Part of golf's enduring appeal is that relative to many other sports, it is somewhat inexpensive to play. A player can spend several hundred dollars or more on equipment or can pick up a set of clubs from a garage sale or possibly even get the same set of clubs that one of their parents used to play with as their first set.

As far as equipment, players can get their sticks, bags and other necessities at a number of places. For the most serious players, a golf shop like Golfsmith, which has a Frisco location, offers a wide selection of equipment and expertise. The less avid golfers might make their first venture into the sport with a trip to a sporting goods store like Dick's Sporting Goods, Sports Authority or possibly Target or Wal-Mart.

In the coming months, local players will get another great place to find equipment when the PGA Tour Superstore opens at the southeast corner of Preston and I21. This is only the second location of this PGA-branded store to open outside of Georgia. Among the things players will be able to do is get in-store instruction, club fittings and take a few practice swings.

The same goes for courses. Just as there are clubs and equipment for every

## UPCOMING CHARITABLE GOLF TOURNAMENTS

April 9-15

Power of a Dream  
FUTURES Golf Classic,  
Frisco Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Trails of Frisco Golf Club

April 10

Little Elm Chamber Golf Tournament  
The Tribute Golf Club

April 14

Frisco Ballet Annual Golf Tournament,  
Frisco Ballet  
Plantation Golf Club

April 16

Tee Off for Kids, Frisco Noon Rotary  
Annual Golf Tournament  
Tribute Golf Club

April 17

WalMart Classic benefiting  
Boys & Girls Clubs of Collin County  
Stonebridge Ranch Country Club

April 23

Junior League of Plano's 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual  
Lone Star Links Golf Tournament  
Tournament of Players Club at Craig  
Ranch

April 30

2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Frisco Special Olympics  
Golf Tournament  
The Tribute Golf Club – The Colony

May 7

Mayor's Golf Classic  
Frisco Family Services  
Stonebrair Fazio Golf Course

May 14

ITIP Golf Classic 2007  
Infant & Toddler Intervention Program  
Brookhaven Country Club

May 22

2<sup>st</sup> Annual Meals & Wheels  
Golf Tournament,  
Collin County Committee on Aging  
Tournament of Players Club at Craig  
Ranch

June 25

Charity Golf Classic  
presented by Capital One  
for Boys & Girls Clubs of Collin County  
Eldorado Country Club



class of golfer, there are golf courses for every type of player. The casual golfer might want a nice, reasonable place where he can go play a round and have a good time. While, the more serious golfer might expect more out of their experience and seek a course with more aesthetic beauty and in the process, be willing to pay a bit more for those extras.

#### EXERCISE

For players who walk the course, playing a round of golf can provide a great aerobic workout. Players walk several miles throughout a round and when you throw in time looking for lost balls and the like, the distance walked can increase considerably.

But that's not to say that players who use carts don't also get a workout. Golf is a great game because it exercises the mind as much as a body. Executing the perfect golf swing is the ultimate exercise in focus and concentration.

Golf is also great because the very act of hitting the ball works much, if not all, of the body. Think about it, a player might hit with his or her hands, but the whole body (back, legs, chest, stomach and other parts) is definitely involved.

The game of golf isn't just a very popular leisure activity; it can also be a metaphor for life.

Golf also isn't as hard on the body as other sports can be. Runners know all about how hard going for a jog can be on the lower body. Just ask anyone who has ever had shin splints. It's more of the same with other sports. But with golf, it's a bit different. About the only

thing that could come home hurting is maybe a player's back. Of course, those who choose to walk instead of ride will come back with a couple of sore feet, but that is about the extent of their injuries, if you want to call them that.

The game of golf isn't just a very popular leisure activity; it can also be a metaphor for life. Want to see how the economy is doing in a particular area? Try checking out the state of the local golf scene. If courses and associated businesses are doing well, the economy is nice and healthy because prosperity means more disposable income, which for many can be spent on new golf equipment and more rounds of golf.

For many, golf is so much more than just a game. Some see it as a great way to do business. Others view hitting the links as great exercise while other players see playing golf as a great way to bond with friends and family. No matter why we play, all players, whether avid or



photo by Chris Fritchie

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casual, agree that golf has woven itself into the very fabric of the American lifestyle. Golf has become as American as baseball, mom and apple pie. After all, it is the perfect family activity that everyone can enjoy. But it is also a sport that one can play individually or in a group.

Here in Frisco, we are fortunate to have three great courses, several practice ranges and a number of great places to buy golf equipment. Whether a player is or isn't governed by a budget, there is definitely something for every local golfer in terms of courses to play, equipment to buy and instruction. Judging from how many people are playing golf and more importantly, how many are being introduced to the game, the local golf scene, much like our community itself, is vibrant and full of life.

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