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School Reaches Out To Female Demographic

By BILL CHASTAIN
Tribune correspondent

A lot of women want to get started playing golf for myriad reasons, such as using the sport as a business tool, having an activity to share with their significant other, or simply because golf looks like a fun activity.

The problem comes in how to start.

Traditionally, men have dominated the sport, which can make taking up the sport an intimidating endeavor.

Ben Sutton Golf School in Sun City Center recognizes the need for creating an outlet to facilitate women golfers getting started in the sport or improving their game with ``For Women Only" instruction classes.

A five-day program will be held May 1-5 and will be followed by a three-day program May 6-8.

``A lot of women golfers are more comfortable in that environment," said Jan Kleiman, who has taught at the school since 1994. ``Women are more concerned about other people watching. Some of the things you do, as far as course management, work better in a women-only situation. The distances are more in-sync, as a woman with a 15-handicap might drive it 150 yards while a man with 15-handicap might drive it 250 yards. In a normal circumstance here, they might be in the same class. As they go out and play together, the women also bond and they fight the same battles and relate to each other."

Kleiman cited the hand and arm strength as the greatest difference between genders.

Pat Hopson, who has taught at the school since 1998, said women will take instruction with more of an open mind than men.

``Sometimes men come to the tee telling you what they want to do," Hopson said. ``Women actually try to do what you tell them to do."

Because of the differences in strength, Hopson said men don't have to be as technically correct as women.

``Men have the athletic background," Hopson said. ``Women have more advantage in the short game because of feel. They are more willing to spend time practicing the short game because many men seem to want to go to the range and hit driver."

Women often come to golf instructional schools accompanied by their

husbands, but they want to be in a group of women with a female instructor.

``Women feel less intimidated in a group of women, and I tell my students that there is no such thing as a stupid question," said Sheryl Maize, an instructor at Ben Sutton since 1999. ``Men and women play a different game. They get around the golf course differently. Women are competitive but they also play for social reasons. During the video analysis, it is particularly helpful to have an all- women group. Women look at what they wear and they aren't as critical about their golf swings. Women are so hard on themselves and they will beat themselves up inside. We can encourage women in different ways."

Both curriculums include intensive-yet-fun, small-group instruction, transportation to and from Tampa International Airport, lodging at the nearby Sun City Center Inn, breakfast, lunch and a relaxing poolside dinner and wine tasting. Additionally, the program will offer optional extracurricular events geared toward women, such as on-site massages, manicures and pedicures.

``Women represent the most important market segment for growing the game, and we are excited to offer the For Women Only Programs," said Dick Sutton, president of the Ben Sutton Golf School. ``Attracting women to the game of golf and retaining them is essential for the game's long- term survival and prosperity."

Interested golfers can enroll by calling (800) 225-6923.

If you have a local golf story, news or an announcement, call Bill Chastain at (813) 204-9474 or send him an e-mail at william.chastain@verizon.net.

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