



# BORN TO TEACH

As a trainee professional Mark Gibson wanted to teach. He did his apprenticeship at the same time as another young Queenslander, Greg Norman. While Norman was only ever going to make his name as a player, Gibson was one of the few trainees who raised his hand to become a teacher. "He probably had a touch more talent than me," jokes Gibson. "Teaching made as much sense to me as playing did for him."

By Andrew Berkman

**G**IBSON, 42, is the current Australian PGA Teacher of the Year, the second recipient of an award which recognises the elite teachers in the country. As a young professional in 1980 he worked under some of the best in Queensland. First Reg Want at Coolanagatta-Tweed, then Charlie Earp at Royal Queensland and later Ian Triggs at Keperra.

A third generation Gold Coaster, today his influence on the Australian teaching scene is growing. He was the driving force behind the fledgling Australian PGA Academy, based at Royal Pines and has spent a lot of time working, developing and coaching players from the Pacific island of Vanuatu. "You're joking aren't you," said the television personality hosting the award at the PGA's presentation dinner at Melbourne's Crown Casino. Gibson smiled, knowing just how important his time spent coaching in Vanuatu had become.

"I taught a young girl from there called Angela Savy who is a very gifted, natural golfer," Gibson says. "She came from a small village and they wanted to get her

some coaching because she was talented." Young Angela came to the Gold Coast where she was billeted and eventually won the National Championships by 54 shots.

"I've got some good friends that live in Vanuatu and I've been there on holidays and to play golf, so they asked me to help with their national side and develop programs for young golfers. I'm hoping that a young Vanuatuan guy is going to do an apprenticeship out here and then go back home and continue on."

It's strange to see a large man with spiked hair speak so passionately about his chosen profession. He gave a moving tribute to one of his mentors Norman Von Nida after The Von had held court for more than an hour at the Tommy Armour Coaching Summit earlier this year. It is The Von's ability to simplify the game and his continued involvement in his 80s that Gibson labels as inspiring.

"It was The Von who used to say 'golf isn't difficult, people make it difficult,'" says Gibson. What lesson would he like to pass to young golfers looking to

become teachers? "Don't teach for the money, teach for success of your pupils," he says.

It was a passion cultivated in the Central Queensland town of Gladstone. There the master teacher learnt his first lesson. "I had a local, a gun tennis player, arrive for a lesson. His tennis career had ended and he'd just started playing. For his first nine holes he had 49 then a 44 and I gave him four lessons. I had him to a stage where he couldn't break 60. Someone was doing something wrong and it wasn't him because he was fairly gifted as an athlete. I was teaching things that I'd been taught to teach but I wasn't teaching for him."

Gibson's passion grew through further stints at Brisbane clubs Keperra and Pine Rivers and then at Caloundra GC on the Sunshine Coast. But he wanted to teach full time, during a period when many Australian pros were just starting to see a future for full-time teachers.

"Mark's biggest assets were his very positive mannerisms and he was always going out of his way to help people," says Ian Triggs.

His search for a full-time teaching job led to his return to the Gold Coast and the range at Royal Pines in 1994. He set up a strong client base at the Japanese-owned resort. "I wanted to teach full time. It was a monstrous step. I wouldn't have done it without Susie's support."

Sue Gibson and Mark had been friends for a long time and the pair were married in 1995. Sue, who was assistant secretary-manager at Caloundra, today works for Gold Coast-based club fitting specialist Henry-Grif-

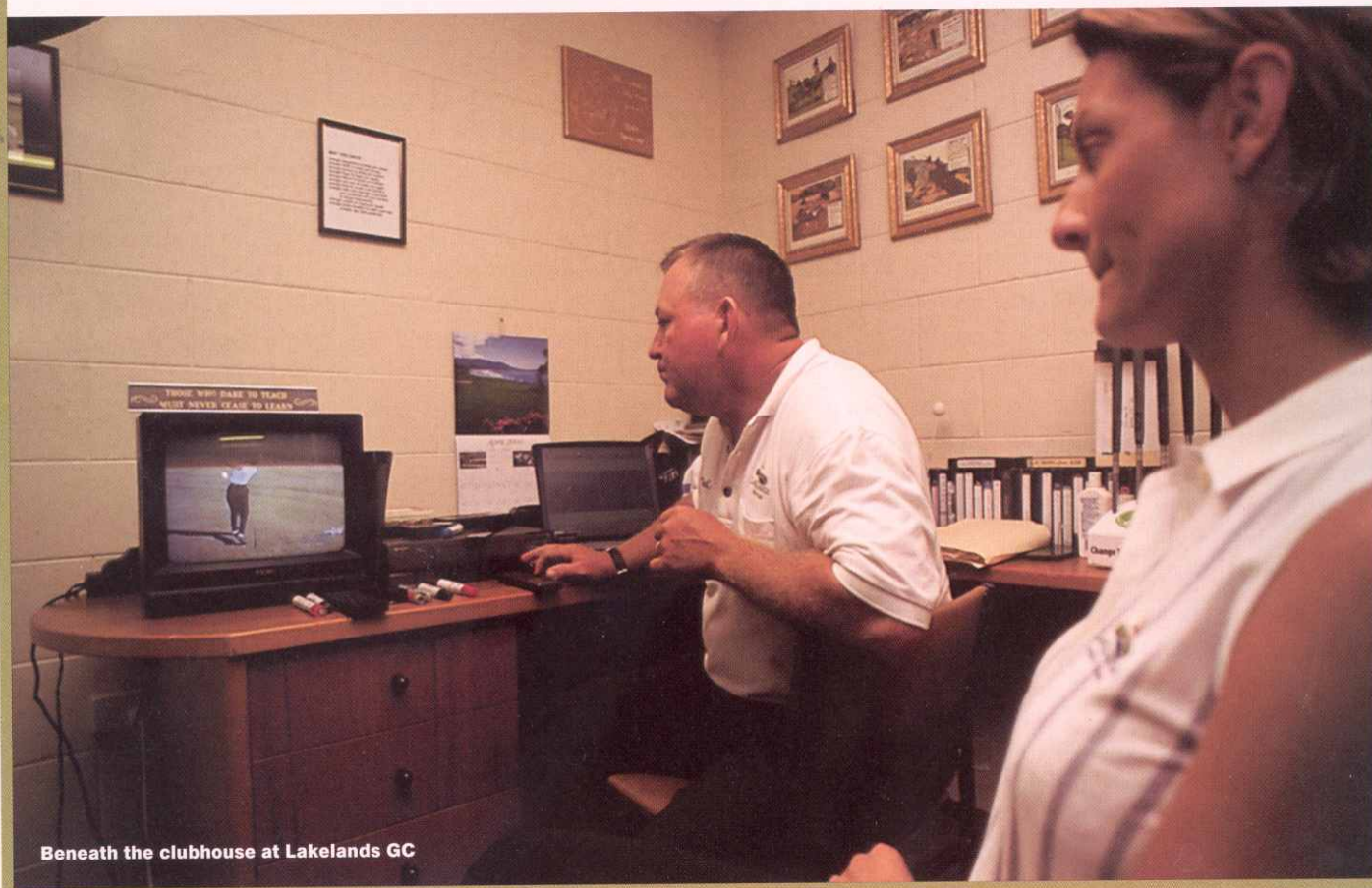
fitts. Mark is also heavily involved as both a fitter and HG's northern region manager. He argues it's just another string to his bow as coaching moves towards a holistic structure.

"You've got to have good structure, good body support, good levels of flexibility and strength," he says. "That's the roll of physios. You've got to have good equipment and that's where club fitting comes into it. These days coaches have to be aware of advice from dietitians, sports psychologists, the whole lot."

He was to instil this mantra in a massive project at Royal Pines—the setting up of the Australian PGA Academy. Gibson knew the PGA were looking towards the future and an academy. At Royal Pines he worked for an organisation which serviced hundreds of golfers weekly. With the PGA's assistant director Ian Robbiliard he mapped out a blue print. The fledgling academy is now staffed by former Australian ladies coach Lawrie Montague after Gibson moved on in 1999.

This time he was lured to Lakelands by current general manager Gavin Kirkman, a former director of golf at Royal Pines. "To tell you the truth it was the easiest negotiations I've ever been through. They had everything I wanted and I'm settled there. It's exciting with new owners and a new future for the club," he says of the recent purchase by global course owners and managers ClubCorp.

A future he will continue to embrace with a passion.



Beneath the clubhouse at Lakelands GC

ALL BY GREG MINNS