

Bring back artistic flair, says coach

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GOLFERS of a bygone era had artistic flair compared to today's players who rely too heavily on science (technology) to succeed, says award-winning teaching professional Mark Gibson.

The topic of art versus science came up in a discussion between Gibson, Rodger Davis and Graham Marsh at last December's Australian PGA Championship.

The trio were chewing the fat when Marsh asked Gibson what inspired him to become a professional golfer.

Gibbo might have had to turn back the clock 48 years, but the memory was as vivid today as it was then.

"I told Marshy it was a day in 1969 when I saw the Von (Norman von Nida) do something extraordinary," said Gibbo, who runs Mark Gibson's Exceptional Golf at Royal Pines Resort.

"When I was 11 years old I caddied for the Von who was playing golf with three businessmen at Coolangatta Tweed.

"When we got to the 17th hole, we were 143 yards from the small dome-shaped green when the Von asked me to get a dozen balls out of his bag.

"I took out the box of Penfold Ace balls, unwrapped them and the Von said 'hand me a nine-iron' and he hit the ball on the green.

"Then he said 'hand me an eight-iron' and he hit the ball on the green.

"Then the seven-iron all the way through to his two-iron, four-wood, three-wood and driver.

"The Von hit every ball on the green with a different club from 143 yards," he recalled.

Of course, the story didn't surprise Marsh or Davis, who started their careers in an era where art usurped science.

Gibson said players of the Von's era were true artists and he feared the art (feel) is being lost.

"I don't want to lose that art, but unfortunately we are losing that side of the game," he said.

"A lot of young players today can't hit a ball 60 metres without reaching for their laser to give them the exact distance to the pin."

Without doubt, technology has advanced the game but there needs to be a balance, says Gibbo.

"Let's talk about the pitch shot. There is a degree of science to the bounce of the club, the loft of the club, the speed of the swing or the angle of attack.

"That's all science, but the art is the feel of getting the club on to the ball at the right speed, creating the contact that you want and getting the flight you want. All of those things are the art of it.

"The science somewhat diminishes the value of the art and as the science improves we are losing some of the artistic flair in the game.

"To be honest, the game should be a combination of both.

"If you get too much of one and not enough of the other it's not going to work properly.

"If we go back to the old coaches there wasn't much science and technology in coaching.

"It was all very artistic – feel based.

"Then came the start of cameras, videos, to video on computer and then add the dimension of FlightScope, FocusBand, Trackman and those things.

"Now some of the coaches today are losing the artistic ability to teach the game because they are relying on technology.

"There has to be a balance.

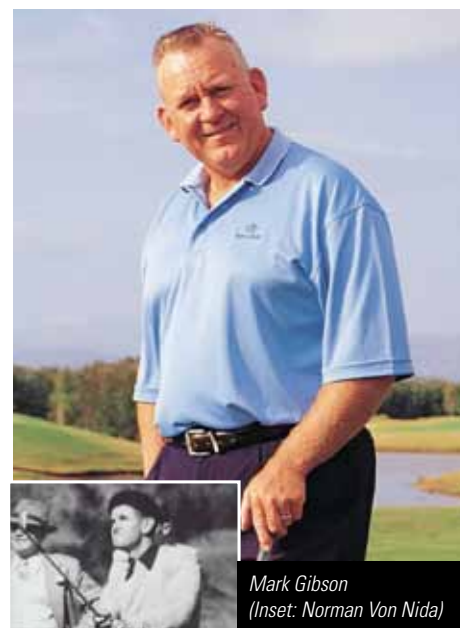
As an old-school coach, I'm just saying I am aware of technology and I use it, but selectively whereas a lot of the younger coaches rely on it and all the time.

"They are using that as a method of trying to teach, but they are diminishing their art skills by relying on technology and not balancing it.

"I'm certainly aware of the technology and its benefits, but I'm also aware of the pitfalls.

"When we look at history there is a shift and the shift will go too far which will kill off the beast and then it will shift back."

Gibson is all for science and technology to help players become stronger although he questions the relevance of spending too much time in the gym.



Mark Gibson
(Inset: Norman Von Nida)



"Everyone has become fixated on how far they are hitting the ball and we have very good players being somewhat

overtrained in the gym in the desire to hit the ball further.

"Some of those players are getting injuries in the gym which is stopping them playing up to a few months and those injuries could determine their future in the game.

"It's another case of science overtaking art.

"Jack Nicklaus didn't have a lot of science, but he hit the ball far enough."•

David, 81, a regular age-breaker

DAVID Mitchell has become somewhat of a legendary figure around Phillip Island Golf Club in Victoria for doing something every senior golfer dreams of doing ... breaking his or her age.

For the 11th year in a row, David, 81, has managed to beat his age.

In fact, he has even lost count of the number of times he has achieved the feat.

Playing off a 10 handicap, David regularly shoots scores in the 70s.

The octogenarian developed the age-breaker bug on Sunday, February 4, 2007.

That's the day he fired a 69 off the stick at the age of 70.

Then he broke his age twice more before his 72nd birthday.

"They were the important ones," he told Inside Golf.

Since then it's been a regular occurrence for the man born at Mildura and who started life as a caddie at Metropolitan Golf Club towards the end of World War II.

"We had moved to Oakleigh during the war years and one day I went outside to kick the footy, but there weren't any other kids around," David recalled.

"They were all caddying and playing golf down at the golf club so I decided to join them.

"We had access to the golf course and that when I first took an interest in the game.

"Mum wasn't a bad golfer and had a set of hickory shaft clubs so I grabbed them out of the cupboard and started hitting balls at Metropolitan.

"It wasn't long before David was playing off single figures.



David Mitchell keeps on keeping on.

Aged 18, he joined Huntingdale Golf Club and was captain of the junior pennant team and a member of the first Victorian junior golf squad.

"That was good because we played every Sunday for three months at Royal Melbourne, Metropolitan, Huntingdale, Kingston Heath, Yarra Yarra, Commonwealth and Victoria golf clubs.

"I didn't really appreciate playing on those great courses then, but I certainly appreciate it now."

When David married Denise and started a family he put the golf club in the rack for 10 years.

"I gave it away when I got married, bought a house and had kids," he said. "It was a busy time with a growing family."

Then a mate talked David into playing golf again on Saturdays at Spring Valley Golf Club.

When he retired, he moved to Swan Hill and played pennant for Murray Downs winning the flag in his second year at the club.

From there, David moved to Welshpool and played at Welshpool (where he equalled the course record) and at Yarram golf course before moving to Phillip Island Golf Club 21 years ago where he continues to beat his age.

"When I was 80 I had a 75 off the stick to beat my age by five shots and when I turned 81 in September last year I had a 76 to again beat my age by five," David said proudly.

Aside from age-breaking record, David has been a prolific winner including the Mid-Murray Amateur in the late 1990s and the Phillip Island club championship when he was 65 years old.

He plays golf two or three times a week "but not if it's raining".

"I also play in the vets and enjoy that because we play a few different courses around South Gippsland," he said.

Another feather in David's cap is winning the 36-hole South Gippsland Classic stroke title three years in a row (1998-'99-'00).

David told Inside Golf that holes-in-one have been hard to come by although he did ace the third hole at Spring Valley many years ago.

"I worked it out some years ago that I have had 10,000 shots on par-3s and only got one ace," he said.

In his young days, David was virtually unbeatable in head-to-head contests and didn't mind a side bet on the result.

One regular bet was against his barber, who didn't quite make the cut.

"In those days I used to play the barber for haircuts and when he closed his shop he owed me 67 haircuts," David laughed.

"I never paid for a haircut in my young days."

The games golfers play

DAVID Mitchell turned back the clock more than 60 years to reveal something that arguably will never be achieved again.

Back in the mid-1950s, David and his mates played one hole on four different golf courses without picking up their golf balls.

"There were four of us (junior pennant players) hitting golf balls at Huntingdale late one afternoon and just before dark," he recalled.

"Anyway, when we came in we dreamed up this ridiculous idea over a few beers.

"The bet was we hit off at Yarra Yarra where we had to hole out on one hole and play another three courses without picking up our golf balls.

"So off we went early one Sunday morning and after holing out at Yarra Yarra we hit across Warrigal Road to Fitzgerald's Blood and Bone factory. It was the only time we were out of the golf course.

"We played through that and hit across Old Dandenong Road on to Commonwealth golf course and then played through Commonwealth golf course.

"In those days, Metropolitan had four holes that came down to Centre Road so we didn't leave the golf course there.

"We just hit over the road and played the quickest way possible through Metropolitan and had to hole out on the 18th at Huntingdale."

Long story short, the gallant young golfers achieved the feat and it was time to celebrate over a few beers, of course.