

Parting Shot

Does Your Club Have a 'Mr. Fix It?'

Golf Courses should provide on-site repair facilities

by Lorne Rubenstein

That's an idea I've been thinking about for a while, but it crystallized recently when I was playing with Greg Witchell, a superb young golfer who runs a club-repair business in London, Ontario.

Greg calls his thriving business Checks and Balances, and it's located at the Greenhills Golf and Country Club in London, Ontario.

"I'm so busy these days," Witchell told me after he striped yet another three-wood miles down the fairway at the West Haven Golf Club near London. "There's so much equipment out there, and people are curious about what they're playing and whether their clubs suit them."

Witchell comes by his business naturally. His father introduced him to a golf club when he was three years old and taught him the swing. Witchell has competed in tournaments around Ontario, and has a beautifully classic swing. His clubs are also classic; he was playing a set of gorgeous-looking Macgregor blades the day I had the pleasure of his company.

"I love their clubs," Witchell said. "I've even named my dog Macgregor." Witchell knows everything, it seems, about all clubs. He studied my ball flight and told me that the shaft on my driver is right for me. "The test is whether a ball upshoots into the wind," he said. "Yours gets up a little high, but the wind doesn't affect it. It still penetrates into the wind."

Witchell works not only for the golfers at Greenhills, but for many players in the London area, and beyond. He'll talk step-down patterns, grip size, lie and loft with anybody. His business is expanding, and no wonder. Golfers at Greenhills are spreading the word about his fine work.

But he is hardly the only person who can do this sort of work. CPGA programs that certify professionals train them in club repair. But much more often than not, the club pro doesn't use his knowledge and so he loses it-or a lot of it.

Here's a typical scenario, in my experience. A golfer asks the club pro to take a look at his swing. The pro determines the golfer should have his irons bumped upright a degree and that he needs a softer shaft in his driver. The clubs are sent out for the work, which means there's usually an extra cost and that the work takes more time. It would be better if the club had a workshop on site, stocked with grips, shafts, proper equipment-lie and loft machine, the ability to grind heads, for example.

Golfers are always trying new equipment, and fiddling with what they have. Surely an on-site repair facility would lead to more sales in a club's pro shops. A feeder system would develop. Golfers would become even more interested in what they are playing, and would learn more.

Golf needs more people like Greg Witchell, and it needs them on-site. Clubs need more workshops such as the one he is running so successfully. I can't think of an argument against the idea. Can you?