PGA pro trains to create skillful excellence

Story and photo by Greg Mitchell, CFAY Public Affairs

Some consider golf one of the most difficult sports to master. The fact that one has to drive (hit) a 42.7 mm diameter ball down a range which could be anywhere from 250 to 700 yards long while maintaining a straight path down the fairway – could be seen as a daunting task for someone who has never played the game.

The Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) activity has tasked PGA (Professional Golfers Association) professional golfer Matt Burley to make sure to improve the chances of service members and their families' chances of surviving on the range.

"To become a good golfer requires practice, persistence, and patience. Along with that comes a person's dedication, desire and determination."

Influenced heavily by Greg "The great white shark" Norman, Burley has been playing golf for 24 years, and a member of the Australian PGA since 1995.

Hailing from Melbourne, Australia, he got into the golf game at the age of 12 as a hired hand to collect golf balls at the Ballarat Driving Range located in Ballarat, Victoria (Melbourne).

Soon after being hired, he started hitting balls at the driving range with friends eventually going off onto the course.

"It was then that I knew that this was what I wanted to do for a living," said Burley.

Based off of Burley's observation of world rankings, as a professional, the golf scene right now is at an interesting mix with the dominance of Tiger Woods now in question. Burley sees an open playing field.

"I would put Rory McIroy as number one and Luke Donald as number two and Lee Westwood as number three," said Burley. "I personally think the top 30 players in the world all have equal abilities to win each week but at the end of the day consistency in ball striking, mental stamina, and confidence wins tournaments."

With regards to the host nation of Japan, he also provided some insights on his observation of their best.

"Ryo Ishikawa is a young man with an excellent future in the game of golf," said Burley. "He, like Ai Miyazato, if they stay fit and healthy and don't have too much media stress and anxiety, will a have great future. They both have all the attributes for great play covering all aspects of the game, especially the mind set and belief in themselves which helps them compete on a world scale."

Burley has more than 12 years experience of expertise in computer golf swing analysis, individual and group lessons, program and marketing campaigns, tournament organization, club fitting and repairs, as well as pro shop management.

While at Yokosuka (MWR), Burley's focus is primarily on training with individuals on improving overall golf techniques.

"Depending on their physical capabilities, the techniques will vary from person-to-person," said Burley. "But, generally, basic fundamentals include the following: grip, stance, alignment, ball position, and posture. Everybody must build this foundation first and then I can develop a custom plan to capitalize on the person's natural strengths and abilities and work on strategies to reduce flaws in the golf swing."

He goes on further to say that his two basic themes used when approaching a student is to look at their body rotation and correct weight transfer - to maximize distance - and, secondly, he will look at the mechanics of the golf swing in relation to the intended target line to maximize direction.

"Distance and direction are key ingredients to having a good game of golf," Burley emphasized.

He also mentioned the importance of golfers to looking at custom fitting and club repair.

"Properly designed fitted golf clubs can enhance a players' ability to have better ball flight and develop more distance," he said. "Club-fitting looks at loft and lie angles, shaft flex, shaft length, grip size, and overall balance of the club."

Whether professional or amateur, Burley says a players' existing set of clubs must be made to suit their needs.

"Just by re-gripping your set you can gain valuable confidence of how the club feels in your hands," said Burley. "By adjusting the lie angles you can develop a straighter ball flight. This combined with a computer swing analysis under a lesson a player can see and understand the benefits of a better game."

Even though Burley is an Australian by birth, he now also holds dual citizenship with the United States. This is his first time working on a military base, as well as training in a foreign country and sees it as a honor to provide training for service members and their families.

"I feel honored to be here and serve as MWR's head golf pro for Yokosuka Naval Base," said Burley. "I have met some terrific people in the past seven months and I am very happy to be here."

Australian PGA golfer Matt Burley, teaches Loiuse Dehaven basic swinging techniques to improve driving capability during a recent golf training ceremony conducted at the MWR driving range at Purdy Fitness Center onboard CFAY May 15.