



Turning Summer Campers into Junior Golfers

PGA Professional Frank Mantua is in his 10th year as director of U.S. Golf Camps, the country's largest overnight golf summer camp

By Tony L. Starks

More than 400 junior golfers make their way to the Kiski School in Saltsburg, Pa., every summer. That's where U.S. Golf Camps has conducted eight-week sessions filled with golf and fun for the past 10 years. At the helm is camp director and PGA Professional Frank Mantua, who is recognized by U.S. Kids Golf as a Master Junior Golf Instructor.

Mantua has been with U.S. Golf Camps from the very start. In fact, it was his vision, along with that of fellow camp director Tim Geddis, that brought the idea to life. When the duo first started to brainstorm what they needed to build a top-tier junior golf camp, it was obvious that the first necessity was location.

"We wanted a nice facility that could house kids from all over the world," says Mantua. "More specifically, one that was conducive to golf. We were looking for something that could offer the country club environment, which had nice dorms, a golf course on campus and space to build a driving range and putting green."

Kiski School fit the mold perfectly. The private boarding school has a 350-acre campus with a nine-hole golf course, indoor and outdoor pools, a soccer field and many other amenities. "We found our

ideal location," says Mantua. "They have all the facilities. Not only can I give them top-notch golf instruction, but we can also offer non-golf activities so they don't get burnt out on the game."

To make sure the campers don't get "over-golfed", U.S. Golf Camps schedules activities like swimming, soccer, basketball or a movie each afternoon.

Over the last decade, junior golfers from 40 states and 35 different countries have journeyed to the Western Pennsylvania site to enhance their golf skills and make new friends. Many of the juniors are beginners who show up without even owning a set of clubs, while others are high-level players who are en route to Division I scholarships. The camp features three programs where attendees are separated by skill level: Fundamental (for beginners), Advanced (for intermediate players) and Elite (for tournament-ready players).

Among past campers are three junior national champions (representing Spain, Mexico and Bahrain), 19 PGA Golf Management University Program students and more than 100 Division I college golfers.

"We're very proud of the fact that we've been able to help so many juniors elevate their game and compete at a high level," says Mantua, who was elected to PGA membership in 1996. "But we're equally as proud of the kids who come in having never touched a club and leave with the inspiration to learn and play more golf."

"Our entire goal is to have these kids walk away from here wanting to play more golf when they get home. I want them to keep playing because I'm trying to build lifelong golfers."

One way U.S. Golf Camps helps to build more golfers is by showing campers how to build their own clubs. In a segment that Mantua likens to the "Arts & Crafts" component of golf camp, he teaches each attendee how to build a club: from gluing on the clubhead, to cutting the shaft and applying the grip. The coolest part is that after the club is assembled, the campers get to go out and play it. Many will even build a club for one of their parents or siblings to show off what they did at camp.

Mantua tries to be a mentor for the junior golfers at U.S. Golf Camps in the same way that PGA Master Professional Coleman Plecker mentored him. Mantua served his apprenticeship at Manor Country Club in Rockville, Md., in the 1990s, where Plecker helped him become the PGA Professional he is today. Mantua still returns to Manor Country Club to assist during his off-season.

"Frank's experience as a PGA Professional has been instrumental in our camp's growth and success since we started a decade ago," says Geddis. "The biggest testament to our success is the 60 percent return rate we have on campers from year to year."

"We have a great facility, a great staff and a great program," adds Mantua. "It's very rewarding that these kids come back from year to year, but the most rewarding thing is seeing them have success at golf and get enjoyment from the game." ■

Frank Mantua created U.S. Golf Camps to help juniors improve at golf and find greater enjoyment from the game.