

# Teaching Teachers to Use Technology

*MIT-based organization seeks to educate golf instructors on how to help their students improve using the latest technology*

By Don Jozwiak, Associate Editor

For the golfing public, the most visible technological leaps in the last 15 years have been equipment related. The greater long-term benefit of technology for the average golfer is likely to manifest itself on the lesson tee, according to a group of researchers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

MIT played host to the second annual Better Golf Through Technology conference in April, and dozens of PGA Professionals were present as presenters and attendees. They heard one of the event's organizers, Dr. Kim Blair, explain his vision of how golf instruction is on the cusp of a renaissance led by technology.

"The future of golf is in learning," said Blair, the founding director of the MIT Center for Sports Innovation. "We're going to see motion capture systems, GPS, and advances in video and fitting systems allow teachers to reach golfers more easily through technology that was not previously available."

To that end, the conference was focused on a pair of goals – using the latest tools to gather research that helps instructors better understand the golf swing, as well as helping instructors use today's technology to best pass that information along to their students. This approach was applauded by PGA Professionals in attendance who have seen the potential technology has to change the way the game is taught.

"I remember buying my first video camera 25 years ago with the idea of using it in my lessons," says James Leitz, PGA director of golf at Pinewood Country Club in Slidell, La. "I only used it to give three lessons that year because I didn't know how to use it. I'd tape somebody's swing and not really know what to do with it. I had to learn on my own."

Leitz did learn how to use that video camera, and has added several other tech tools to his lesson tee over the last quarter century. Leitz now has four

computers in use during lessons in his teaching center at Pinewood, monitoring data from a pair of 3D motion sensors, a club-head tracking system, a six-camera video system and a launch monitor – and every student gets a DVD of their lesson to watch at home. He estimates that he invests half of his lesson income back into education and technology. The payoff is a full lesson sheet and the 2005 Gulf States PGA Section Teacher of the Year Award.

At this year's Better Golf Through Technology conference, Leitz delivered an in-depth presentation on the relationship between the clubface and plane at impact and how it affects ball flight. Other presenting PGA Professionals – including PGA of America Director of Instructor Rick Martino and respected teachers Jim Suttie, TJ Tomasi, David Edel and David Orr – similarly addressed the conference using their instruction instincts and backed by comprehensive scientific research. Better Golf Through Technology, now established as a not-for-profit organization, is working to spread this information to instructors throughout the game – and to spread the word that technology will never replace PGA Professionals.

"If I told my students that every part of their body needs to decelerate at impact, they might call me an idiot," Leitz says. "But it's true, and I can show them using the 3D software. It takes teaching out of the realm of folklore, and it gives us a very understandable, quantifiable way to provide our expertise as teachers." ■



PGA Director of Instruction Rick Martino spoke at the 2007 Better Golf Through Technology conference, and is helping its organizers plan for future conferences and research.