



3G Golf Ventures co-founder Wally Armstrong demonstrates SNAG to a passerby at the PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando, Fla., in late January.

## Snagging them early

BY MICHAEL A. BOSLET

Martin Morgan wants his son to play golf. Problem is, Mathew is only 2½, so letting him swing a club isn't such a good idea right now. Most likely, something or someone is going to get whacked.

Morgan knows only too well. He gave Mathew a cut-down putter that a friend made and sure enough things started to get whacked. So, Morgan had to get that thing out of Mathew's hands diplomatically. A little while later Morgan, 48, being the dutiful dad that he is, put a Starting New At Golf, or SNAG, golf club in Mathew's tiny hands, and there has been less whacking in the Morgan family's San Jose, Calif., home.

Mathew is so fond of his Roller (which is the trademark name for the big, plastic putter in a SNAG set) that he demands to sleep with it. Hey, anything that helps get a child to go to bed is OK with most parents, and Martin and his wife, Mary, now expecting their second child who may or may not be named starting with the letter "M," oblige their boy. After Mathew has fallen asleep, they slip in and remove the putter, which is the first thing the toddler asks for when he wakes up.

"Mathew is very attached to his putter and his purple ball. Those are his two favorite things," says Morgan.

If you're golfing parents like the Morgans, and you're doing the math here, that's a toddler with a set of golf clubs, balls and accessories that are safe to use indoors and out and allow for minimal instruction and organization—and a putter that makes for a good sleeping buddy. All for \$145.

The Morgans and a number of PGA teaching professionals have been SNAGged.

Unveiled at the PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando, Fla., in late January, SNAG is the brainchild of former PGA Tour pros Terry Anton and Wally Armstrong, co-founders of 3G Golf Ventures in Lake Mary, Fla.

The SNAG show booth looked very similar to a Gymboree clothing store, with bright, primary colors adorning the equipment. Spouses mingled while their children played with the latest inventions aimed to bring youngsters into the game, and, as Armstrong stresses, let them—the little people—have fun.

Now there's a concept.

Actually, golf instruction and training-aid inventions are not foreign concepts to Armstrong. He's been teaching and preaching golf for more than 20 years, with a strong interest in drawing children to the game. One of the problems is that golf is not easy to teach to young ones or even to school-age children. The

### Colorful golf game gives children safe introduction

swing is mechanical, the clubs are heavy, the ball is rock solid, the instruction is intense, and when you put all those things together you have the makings for injury, property damage, crying and yelling. After a few whacks with dad's \$100 pitching wedge, the fun is over.

That is a scene that Armstrong wants to avoid. He and Anton worked for six years on SNAG, which is an assortment of brightly colored, oversized but lightweight equipment that kids can pick right up and begin playing with, using a Launcher (a giant wedge) to whack SNAG balls (tennis balls, sort of) off the Launch Pad (a tee mat), aiming for a Flagsticky (a flag with a base of Velcro-like material that the ball sticks to). It's all very simple and organic for children, or SNAG can be structured for recreational and instructional programs.

To Armstrong and a couple of teachers, SNAG is the next big thing for junior golf.

"This game is so user-friendly," says the 55-year-old Armstrong, who is often referred to as the "world's oldest junior golfer." "We've had people play (SNAG) in the snow and on beaches."

And indoors, too.

Butch Rhodes, PGA golf instructor at the Detroit Athletic Club, has introduced SNAG to the Detroit school system. He and Armstrong recently made a presentation to bring SNAG into the city's schools as part of their recreational curriculum. A SNAG course could be set up in a gym during cold weather or laid out over a field when the warmer air returns. Rhodes says he was drawn immediately to the possibilities that SNAG created for inner-city kids.

"One of the problems we have in teaching golf conventionally is giving the kids the opportunity to go out and play," Rhodes says. "There are transportation issues. What we're able to do with SNAG golf is you can pretty much make a gym a place to learn golf."

Rhodes says he is using SNAG as a vehicle to help teach kids life skills, such as discipline and good manners, and to provide a safe environment for kids to play. Rhodes works three days a week with children in an after-school program and recently introduced SNAG to them. "What we get out of it is enthusiasm for the game," says Rhodes. "They see (SNAG) and they are excited, and when you have ready

participants it makes it easier for you to teach the fundamentals. They want to work at it."

The LPGAs national teacher of the year for 2000 agrees. Nancy Quarcelino, also awarded the Tennessee PGA teacher of the year for 2000, remembers seeing the SNAG setup at the PGA Show and thinking "it's just the greatest idea." Debuting in April at the Nancy Quarcelino School of Golf at the Legends Club of (Franklin) Tennessee will be SNAG programs designed for children and their parents. The idea, she says, is to make SNAG a family event held at the course and other locations, such as parks, school gyms and church outings.

That's what Armstrong, one of the SNAG creators, hopes. He says he envisions the game spreading to summer camps, recreation and community centers, corporate outings, seniors facilities and school fairs held to raise money.

Tom O'Neill, chief financial officer of 3G Golf Ventures, says SNAG is drawing interest globally and distributorships might be set up to handle foreign markets. For reasons he is not all too sure, O'Neill says SNAG got a lot of attention in Canada after The Golf Channel aired a segment Jan. 9 on its Golf Central program.

"The thing that really surprised us was the response out of Canada" after the broadcast, he recalls with a chuckle.

O'Neill says SNAG has a "zero" advertising budget and is riding a wave of word-of-mouth testimonials. He declined to give figures, but a release by Jamison Golf Group, the public relations firm that represents 3G, said SNAG orders totaled more than \$250,000 at the PGA Show.

"It exceeded our expectations," is all O'Neill will say.

SNAG products are sold directly from 3G Golf Ventures. To order, call 866-762-4465 or visit [www.snaggolf.com](http://www.snaggolf.com).



Seven-year-old Brianna Blumenherst of Fort Wayne Ind., tries out SNAG at the PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando, Fla., in January.

