



PLAYING THROUGH



for Bob Burns, the design for a great game of golf starts here, with the clubs, not on the course

by Celia Powell

The Bob Burns No Bananas driver has recently caught the attention of top golf magazine editors and is regularly featured in golf equipment issues as one of the best game enhancement clubs on the market. The clubs are distributed around the globe and have been shipped to exotic locals such as Italy, Australia and South Africa. The Appleton based manufacturer of No Bananas clubs, Bob Burns, owns and operates Bob Burns Custom Clubs located on 428 Edgewood Dr.



Bob started in golf as a young boy as a caddy. He grew up in Indiana and worked at Innsbrook Country Club for thirteen years; all through grade school, junior high, and high school and in the summers while he was in college. Burns eventually worked his way up to the pro shop and became an assistant pro at Innsbrook.

“I started my apprenticeship there,” Burns said. “I worked for Dick Dodds, who took me under his wing and was like a father to me.”

Durring his days at Innsbrook Country Club, Bob had the opportunity to caddy for golf notoriety such as Tony Lema and even Arnold Palmer, who played an exhibition and offered a golf clinic.

Bob went to college at Northwood University in Midland, Michigan and worked at a 36-hole course called Currie Golf Course in the middle of Michigan. Midland College is where Bob met his wife, Jan, who is originally from Flint, Michigan.

“I worked at Currie in the fall and in the spring and worked at the course back home in the summer,” said Burns. “When I graduated from college, I finished my apprenticeship at this very exclusive country club in Chicago called Ravisloe. I was not only assistant pro but head pro at two clubs there, not only Ravisloe Country Club but also Ravinia Green County Club.”

Bob moved to Wisconsin in the early 1970s to take a golf pro position at Chaska Golf Course in Appleton. He started while it was still under construction and helped to develop the brand new course. Bob established all the different golf leagues, events and outings.

“It was a great experience,” Burns said. “The pro there was a wonderful man. I learned a lot from him in the terms of business. So we had many good years there.”

While Burns worked as a pro at Chaska, he opened a small shop in downtown Appleton. The golf season is very short in Wisconsin and Bob needed something to do in the winter.

“Downtown Appleton was the hub of shopping in the Fox Valley,” Burns said. “And that was long before the mall was ever around. That little shop that I had in downtown Appleton is where the PAC is now.”

Bob had always done a lot of club repair. He started making Persimmon golf clubs, specifically, handmade Persimmon woods while he worked in Appleton. As time went on, Bob built the machinery to do the routing, milling, and drilling necessary to make the clubs.

“Nothing like that is pre-built that you can buy from any company,” Burns said. “We actually built the machinery ourselves with the help of the machine shops to alter the building and boring machines.”

With the customization of the machines, Bob could actually bore a club flat, upright or closed.



“When the metal woods came out I helped a person, Gerry Adams, who started TaylorMade, Burns said. “We made the original TaylorMade golf clubs in my shop in downtown Appleton.”

The majority of drivers Bob made were closed because most golfers slice. People generally have the tendency to fade, push or slice the ball. Bob had drivers on hand for his patrons to try out that were one, two, or three degrees closed. Bob had upright clubs for tall golfers and flat clubs for golfers who were shorter.

“We could really fit somebody for the proper golf club, proper shaft, proper length, grip size,” Bob said. “Whether it was a left-handed person or a right-handed person you could pick up the right club. Where could a left-hander get clubs? He really had no selection anywhere.”

In fact, Burns got a tremendous amount of left-handed golfers; so many that he started a left-handed tournament. The tournaments had about had about two hundred fifty participants from all over the state.

“I developed quite a few left handed people in our business for lessons and clubs, Burns said. “They say that there are only about 7 percent of people who play golf who are left-handed. Any year that we have been in business we have had about twenty percent, so there are a lot of lefties out there.”

Of course, Burns can also custom fit ladies clubs.

“Most ladies have clubs that are too upright or the toe of the club is way up. [Burns demonstrates by grabbing a golf club.] They have to adjust to conform to the line of the club. When they get clubs from us we can adjust that for them. We can set the line loft and give them the proper length and grip size and the proper shaft and so forth,” said Burns.

Burns wasn't sold on metal woods when they first came onto the golf scene. He didn't think that he could customize it to fit the golfer. Bob has a strong belief about fitting people for the right clubs.

“There were so many different things that were coming and going in the golf business that I didn't get into it in its infancy”, Burns said. “I could have. Bob McClellan, who made the TaylorMade heads, said he would make a metal wood for me and put my name on it.”

But Burns still held out, believing in fitting people for clubs. He is a tra-

Burns wasn't sold on metal woods when they first came onto the golf scene. Bob has a strong belief about fitting people for the right clubs.



ditionalist and loved making wood clubs because nothing was as beautiful as a wood club and nothing felt as good as a wood club. Well, the metal business took off and as time went on Burns got into metal and titanium clubs.

“People are slicing and the bigger the heads are, the tougher it is for them to hit the ball straight,” Burns said. “Heads are now up to 460 cc [cubic centimeters]. I watch people slice the ball out into the field all day long.”

Thus came about the development of the No Bananas driver. The concept of the No Bananas is to correct a golfer’s slice. Burns started trademark names and the logos approximately five years ago.

“They are going to hit our clubs straight,” said Burns. “What I have done is make a titanium club that is along the lines of what I did with the wood club. I had a No Bananas wood club. We were making that before we made the titanium clubs.”

As one of the top 50 teachers in the country, Bob Burns can help most people correct their slice. That might take more than one lesson, but normally within two or three lessons, Bob can help most anyone correct their slice.

“Working at all the different resorts and courses I worked at, whether it was at Century World, Springs Resort or at Chaska, I could give people lessons, get them hitting the ball straighter and they would do something completely different on the course,” Burns said. “When they see the trees on the right-hand side, when they see the water, or the out of bounds on the right-hand side they don’t trust their swing so they aim to the left. The more they aim to the left, the more pronounced the slice.”

Golf takes a lot of practice and the driver is the toughest club to hit. People might think they can buy a club without taking lessons to improve their slice but unfortunately, that is not the case.

Bob’s son, Robert Burns, who has gone into the golf business with his father and brother Chris Burns, stresses both the proper club fit and golf lessons are necessary to improve on the course. According to Robert, people are unable to swing correctly even though they would like to because of clubs misfits. Bob Burns Pro Shop fit beginners with clubs and give lessons.

“We teach everybody,” Robert Burns said. “We would never tell anybody they can’t play. We really believe that we can get everyone to hit the ball straight with the combination of length, swing weight, the right grip size, and the right flex.”

Bob Burns makes clubs to accommodate every one of those elements. Bob made the first 310 cc No Bananas Driver a couple of years ago. He fashioned one that was offset for the slicer and that had a draw bias for a person who fades or pushes.

“Golf Digest found out that I was doing this,” says Burns. “Mike Stachura from the Digest called me a year ago right after the PGA show. He said, ‘I thought this would be a perfect opportunity for you to test your driver against the TaylorMades and the Callaways and see if it is in fact straighter than the others. I said, ‘I know it is. You can compare it to any club that you want to compare it to.’”

Burns sent Stachura a 310 cc, 360 cc and a 430 cc overnight. Golf Digest did robotic testing plus they had a cross section of good players, including low, medium, and high-handicapped golfers test the clubs. As it turned out, they picked the No Bananas driver as the ultimate fix.

“The driver issue came out June 12th or 13th at the news stands, Burns said. “I first get a call from Tony Kubek, who played for the Yankees with Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris, from the airport. He was on his way to New York to play in Yogi Berra’s tournament. It just happened that we had made Tony some clubs with the Yankee logo to give to Yogi. Yogi was getting a set for himself and another set was going to be used for a raffle or auction. I was out giving a lesson and they brought the phone out to me. Kubek said, ‘You made the Digest! You’re in the Golf Digest! I can’t wait to show Yogi and all the Yankees this.’”

Burns maintains that he has been very fortunate. He is able to give lessons to over a couple thousand people in a season. A lot of those lessons are to people who buy clubs. Everyone who makes a club purchase is sort of getting a lesson when they are getting fitted. Everybody who gets a set of clubs gets a follow-up lesson personally by Bob Burns.

“People think that if they buy some of these drivers, if it’s a Callaway or Nickent or such, they are going to play like Tiger,” Burns said. “Even Tiger, at the PGA championship, was not using his driver.”

Burns was in charge of the range at Whistling Straits for the week. He was there at 6:00 in the morning when Tiger and David Duval were practicing and was there when Vijay Singh was still hitting balls in the dark.

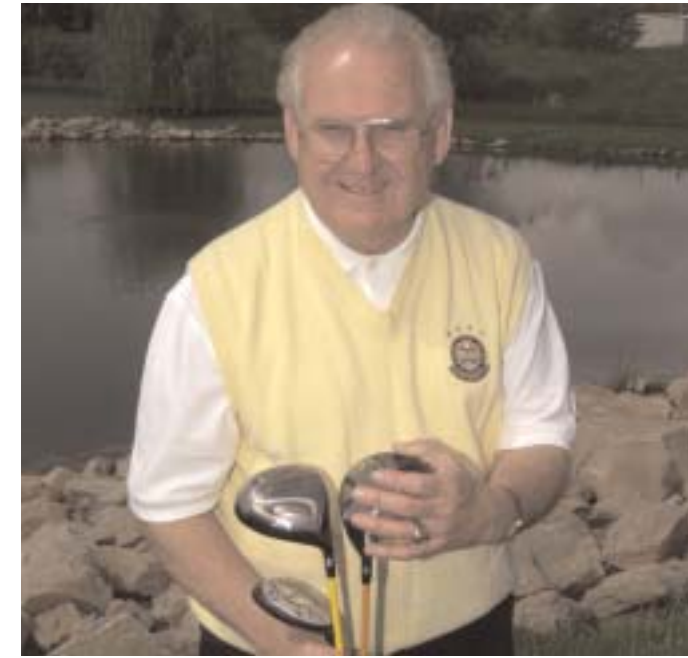
“People would be all around the range trying to find out what kind of shaft they used and what the loft was on their driver,” Burns said. “After the tournament there were people trying to buy a Blue Grafalloy shaft in a club like Tiger was hitting. I would tell the guys, ‘You can’t really hit a seven degree lofted club. You won’t get the ball in the air and if you slice it, you are really going to slice it to the right.’”


“What they don’t realize is that as well as Tiger was hitting the ball on the range, he never used that Nike driver on the golf course.” Burns continues. “In the afternoon he would come out with his Titlest driver and hit that. It might be a completely different type of makeup in shaft, length, grip, flex, maybe even different head style than what the pros are playing with. They have swing speeds that are over one hun-

dred twenty miles per hour. The average person would be lucky if his swing speed would be somewhere around eighty-five to ninety. He is not going to be using the same shaft that the pros play with.”

Burns has had a great time with the No Bananas. He now has the hybrids and is coming out with the 460. Bob has also developed the No Bananas teaching glove. It will also help the people hit the ball straight.

“It’s been a lot of fun,” Burns said. “Especially fun for me because I am sharing this with my sons who have the same love I do and work with me in this business. In the future they will take over



and this will continue, hopefully, with their sons.” 

Burns maintains that he has been very fortunate. He is able to give lessons to over a couple thousand people in a season.

