

## A LOOK TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Written by TMAC GOLF

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Competition, whether its in business or sports (especially golf) can be a case of overcoming challenges. Obstacles are part of the course everyone has to navigate. Some are more successful at meeting the challenge than others and some can be bigger tasks that can at times appear to be overwhelming.

Competing in a category that is dominated by one company can be the equivalent of playing a weekly Nassau with Tiger Woods.

The golf ball category in the United States is clearly owned by Titleist.

For example at this year's U.S.

Amateur, 242 players, or 78 percent of the field of 312, made Titleist their choice when it came to the golf ball. Second place requires its own area code, as Titleist had more than

8 times the number of players (28) using the next competitor's product. The numbers are equally lopsided when looking at the U.S Women's Amateur, U.S. Boys and Girls Junior Am, U.S. Men's and Women's Public Links as well as the collegiate level for the Men's and Women's NCAA Division 1 Championships. The pro level can be a case of economics but the amateur side of the ledger certainly isn't and the numbers clearly speak for themselves. It may be the equivalent of trying to fight city hall when attempting to undertake a strategy to change golfers' minds at looking or considering at an alternative product.

One company is meeting the challenge head on and taking a unique approach. A recent U.S. Kids Golf study at the World Championships in Pinehurst, N.C. revealed some interesting trends over the past four years. Bridgestone Golf has seen a steady rise in its usage, which has been partially influenced by its on site fitting process. Bridgestone has gone from 6 players out of 162 in the field in 2007 to 32 out of 170 in 2010. At the same time Titleist, which ranks #1 in usage at this event each year, has gone from 77 players in 2007 down to 45 in 2010. Keep in mind the participants (boys and girls) range in age from 6 to 16. Parents are obviously involved in the process, which in turn offers the chance for the fitting process to influence not only the very young but also another generation at the same time. "Parents are quite eager to give their kids every opportunity to be successful. But they need a logical explanation why there is a better ball for their child," explained Dan Murphy, Bridgestone Golf's Vice President of Marketing. The company found through its ball fittings that it was able to deliver improvement in more than 81% of the players (102 in total across all age groups) that it worked with. For internal purposes it was also able to capture plenty of information (swing speed by age, launch angle vs. swing speed and launch angle vs. spin rate in the driver for example) that it can use for future research development.

Perhaps an equaling interesting item that appears in the study is a questionnaire given to each player in the field. Phil Mickelson ranked #1 followed by Tiger Woods when it came to who their favorite player is. Nevertheless, Callaway ranked seventh in the ball usage at the 2010 World

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Championships in Pinehurst, while not one Nike ball was in play. The pyramid of influence at the professional level doesn't appear to have an influence on everyone.

While it remains to be seen whether the next generation of great professional players travel through the World Championships in Pinehurst, N.C., one company is taking some small steps that may lead to being bigger ones sometime down the road.