



The Word on **GOLF**

*Recognized as one of the country's top teachers,
Laird Small takes a no-pressure approach*

By Tom Bentley

You may assume golf instruction starts with an aspect such as club grip or backswing or follow-through, but Laird Small would disagree.

"The difference between being a more polished player and not is a better understanding of the words that produce the action," says the pro golf instructor and director of Pebble Beach Golf Academy. "For a beginner, it's attitude and expectation. What happens is they get expectations about performance that take away the fun. Their internal dialog comes in and says, 'I can't do this; I'm no good.' They tie themselves up in a knot."

Small cuts through those knots. A PGA Teacher of the Year, he has been consistently rated by *Golf Magazine* as one of the country's Top 100 Teachers and by *Golf Digest* as one of America's 50 Greatest Teachers.

SCOTT CAMPBELL

Small says communication is key: “I look at students as being fully capable of doing wonderful things. All golfers, no matter where they are on the developmental scale, are doing exactly what they think they should be doing,” he says. “But there’s a misunderstanding of what they are trying to do; they don’t have the correct picture or knowledge, or they have missing parts that affect performance.”

Golfers can make extraordinary strides in their game, Small says. He instructs players at every level, helping them improve through words, examples, demonstrations, showing them videos, and comparing and contrasting techniques.

“People come here to go to the next level,” he says. “But that’s the kiss of death because it’s loaded with expectation. To get better, you need to do the work, go through the practice, enjoy the practice. And one day, you’re on the next level without even knowing how you got there.”



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However, the better a golfer gets, the more difficult it is to make great leaps.

“What happens is that the higher you get on the scale, the smaller the differences,” Small says. “Like climbing Everest, the last ascent is the most challenging.”

Small has seen more than 30 years of golf on the Monterey Peninsula and says the courses have remained essentially the same, although maintenance has improved. Still, certain aspects stand out. “Courses that have stood the test of time are treasures,” he says. “Golf courses have a sense of seasoning; greens settle by having people play on them. When you play a course like

Pebble Beach or Saint Andrew’s or Dornoch, each has its own presence, its own experience that makes it special.”

After all these years, Small still enjoys the challenge of teaching. “I find a way to help people get unstuck. It never grows old because people come with a willingness to learn. And if they do better at golf, they can do better at other things. Golf can be a window on how you do one thing and how you can do another.”

The Peninsula’s Golf Kingdom

Course	Yards	Par	Green Fees
PEBBLE BEACH			
The Links at Spanish Bay	6,821	72	\$260
Pebble Beach Golf Links	6,828	72	\$495
Peter Hay Golf Course	748	27	\$30
Poppy Hills Golf Course	6,863	72	\$55-\$200
Spyglass Hill	6,953	72	\$360
MONTEREY			
Del Monte Golf Course	6,365	72	\$110
Laguna Seca Golf Ranch	6,176	71	\$40-\$70
Monterey Pines Golf Course (discount for military)	5,554	69	\$10-\$38
CARMEL VALLEY			
Carmel Valley Ranch Golf Resort	6,200	70	\$85-\$165
Quail Lodge Golf Club	6,449	71	\$75-\$150
CARMEL			
Rancho Cañada Golf Club	6,357	71	\$10-\$70
SEASIDE			
Bayonet/Black Horse Courses	7,104	72	\$35-\$120
SALINAS			
Salinas Fairways	6,619	72	\$12-\$35
PACIFIC GROVE			
Pacific Grove Golf Links	5,727	70	\$25-\$52