



Could it be time you went Back to School?

In Ireland, golf schools are still something of an unknown. Unlike in the United States, where schools have been prominent for the last 30 years or more, tuition in Ireland has thus far been almost exclusively club professional-based. Since 2008, however, the team at the Dave Pelz Scoring Game School in Killeen Castle have been working to change all that. By **Colin O'Brien**

NAMED FOR THE LEGENDARY SHORT game coach whose tuition has helped some of golf's best-known stars reach the summit of performance, the school offers golfers the chance to benefit from the same level of tuition, using the unrivalled research and first-hand experience that has made Pelz so respected.

Obviously, when you're the short game coach to a player like Phil Mickelson, you don't stick your name on just any old school. Pelz's group of academies are located in only the most impressive resorts and employ only hand-picked coaches from around the world. The newest facility in Co Meath is no different.

Impressively, it's the only Pelz school outside of the US, making it a magnet for golfers from all over the world who know and trust the teachings of the man who *Golf Digest* voted one of the most influential golf tutors of all time.

It's also important to note that this isn't just some franchise that's been handed out without a thought in exchange for bags of cash; it's a joint venture between Killeen Castle and Pelz golf and is part of the coaching legend's – extremely exclusive – network of schools. Even the booking system is run through his website.

Staffing such a facility was no easy task; it took months to complete the interview process and involved personality profiling and a number of visits from Joanne Pelz, Dave's wife and the business brain behind the Pelz empire.

"It's golf, golf, golf 24/7. It's total immersion in golf coaching – and there's no better way to learn." – *Conor Devery, Pelz School Instructor*

There was significant investment in the two tutors. Once the intensive interview process was complete, the two successful applicants, Jussi Pitkanen and Conor Devery, were sent packing for five months training in the States at Pelz's facility in Florida. Not that the lads were over there on holiday.

"I was impressed from the start," Conor told me recently when I met him and Jussi in Killeen, "with just how enthusiastic about golf all of the guys were. It's golf, golf, golf 24/7. It's total immersion in golf coaching – and there's no better way to learn.

"We were put straight in it," he continued, "and we were under constant observation the whole time. The head guys were present all the time to make sure it's exactly how they want it. It was a pretty nerve-racking experience!"

"There's a huge amount of background,"



Jussi added. "All of the research Dave has done over the last forty years and the lessons he's learned. That's the hard part. Teaching someone how to chip isn't that difficult, it's the *why* that's important. That's how you get it to work long term."

"Even from a personal perspective, I played on the EuroPro Tour and in the region, but I didn't appreciate how important the short game is, and how much maybe I'd missed out on by not practising the right things. If I'd known five years ago what I know, I think it would have been a different story."

So what was so attractive about the Dave Pelz way of teaching?

"I owned Pelz's books," Conor admitted, "and I tried to use some of the philosophy in my teaching, but I actually didn't know they were opening a school in Ireland."

"I wanted a challenge, so I sent a CV off to all of the best coaches in the world, just to see if I would get a response. I got a reply back from the Pelz company asking me if I'd been aware of the plans to open a facility in Ireland. I told them I hadn't, but I was definitely interested, so they said they'd keep my CV on file and put me in



However, even with the impressive array of practice areas – including some fiendish looking greens – and the many golf gizmos patented by Pelz himself that promise to cure what ails you, the most important part of the whole school is still the two instructors and the knowledge they possess.

It would be an over-simplification to call everything Pelz does technical, but he is probably the most thorough coach out there, and unsurprisingly for a former employee at Nasa, everything he does is based in science. The not-so-secret key to success is how Pelz, and instructors like Conor and Jussi, convey that science in layman's terms to golfers everywhere.

Conor agreed with this, saying: "To be a successful coach, I think being able to communicate is more important than anything else.

"Obviously, you need to be a proficient golfer, but more than anything you need to be able to get the message across. And You need to believe it. If you don't care about what you're teaching or about whether or not you can improve the client's game, then you can't do this job; simple as that. You have to care about that improvement, no matter if it's for a professional tournament or for the monthly medal."

The man behind it all

Dave Pelz is generally regarded as the "man to go to" for all things short game.

After giving up his dreams of becoming a professional golfer and following his natural aptitude for science into a career at Nasa, Pelz eventually came back to the game in the late 70s with the type of study that would differentiate his methods from the rest.

the process. So I'd pre-empted the news."

"I was a fan," Jussi interjected, "and I'd read the books and tried to use it in my teaching, so when the positions were advertised I sent in my CV straight away. A lot has changed since then.

"I've been asked a few times to sum up my experience, and the only word I could come up with is 'unbelievable'. It's groundbreaking for Ireland, and for golfers in general. There's nothing else like it. And the difference between me as a coach now and before Pelz is just night and day. There's no comparison."

In terms of the Pelz way of thinking being a game-changing experience, Conor couldn't agree more. "The very first time I read his books, a light came on. It was a

revelation.

"I realised that, if I only have a small amount of time with a golfer, the best way for me to help them improve their game is to help them chip better and putt better, because even if you add 20 or 30 yards to their long game, it might have no effect on their scores. The short game is key."

Since opening its doors two years ago, the school has attracted a lot of interest, and happily for both Conor and Jussi, they've been busy. The custom-built facility is, by Dave Pelz's own admission, the best equipped and designed of all his schools, something that anyone who's ever visited Killeen Castle will know is completely in keeping with the standard of the rest of the resort.

"I've been asked a few times to sum up my experience, and the only word I could come up with is 'unbelievable'. It's groundbreaking for Ireland, and for golfers in general. There's nothing else like it. And the difference between me as a coach now and before Pelz is just night and day. There's no comparison."

– Jussi Pitkanen, Pelz School Instructor



In 1977, he began a three year analysis on every shot used from up to 100 yards away from the pin, entering data from thousands of rounds. He came to the conclusion that 60% of golf shots are from 100 yards in, and players with the strongest short games tend to be more successful.

This research formed the foundation of his teaching methods and in 1978 he began teaching pros on a one-to-one basis, before opening his first school to the public in '82. Today his star-studded list of alumni include Phil Mickelson, Colin Montgomery and Vijay Singh.

Since then, he's written several seminal books, countless magazine articles and appears regularly on US TV network the Golf Channel – on which he famously sank a 206-foot putt, while filming a segment at the 2006 US PGA Championship.

That Pelz felt incapable of making it as a pro can largely be put down to some really bad luck in the match-up department. While a student at Indiana University, he lost 22 college matches, and all confidence in his ability to succeed in the pro ranks, to another young hopeful ... called Jack Nicklaus.

Still, golfers the world over are thankful that his talents have been put to good use – helping them with their game.

Golf Digest Ireland **Tested**

They say it's the best investment you can make in your golf game ...

IS IT FACT OR IS IT FICTION?

Lets test it!

If you would like to be part of our **Golf Digest** testing panel, please send us a letter or email and in no more than 200 words tell us why you should be given the chance to undergo the complete Dave Pelz Scoring Game School experience!



www.pelzgolf.com/insidescoringpage to get FREE TIPS from Dave Pelz on how to improve your game.

Killeen Castle is located just 2 km from Dunshaughlin in Co. Meath on the N3.
Book now

DAVE PELZ SCORING GAME SCHOOL

