

'The Kids Want To Belt It'

The school year came to a crashing end on a Friday, and the following Tuesday youngsters between the ages of 8 and 16 years enrolled in another type of classes—golf courses at the Whispering Willows course in Livonia.

But this time it was the kind of lessons they enjoyed and the type of instruction that has Pro Gary Whitener literally tearing out what little hair he has left.

"There's nothing a golf pro likes more than working with a group of youngsters, teaching them the fundamentals of the game at the earliest possible age," smiled Gary.

"But have you ever tried to take a group of anxious, earnest, determined kids and try to teach them such things as proper grip, stance, swing when all they want to do is belt that little white ball as far as they can regardless of the direction?"

"Come out some Tuesday morning and enjoy the classes; I guarantee that you'll get as much fun out of watching the actions of the youngsters as we do in teaching."

THE JUNIOR GOLF clinic has become an annual affair at Whispering Willows and generally attracts as many as 200. They show up in all style of attire, wearing all types of shoes but generally following the clinic rules and bringing along an iron instead of a wood.

"And the girls—well I'd have to say that they are generally the best students. They don't have the bad habits of baseball, unless you run into the occasional tomboy, and they are determined that they'll learn quicker, hit the ball farther and do better than any of the boys in their same age group."

"I GUESS YOU'D have to say that the battle between the sexes is apparent at an early age and none knows this better than a golf pro and his staff handling a junior clinic."

The clinic ends next Tuesday with a series of tournaments—three holes for the youngest players, six for those in the medium age group and nine for the older ones.

More than that, Gary will devote the final session to a lengthy lesson on proper etiquette on the course. One of those things geared to prepare the youngsters to be as good at etiquette as they are at hitting the ball.

"That will be the hardest lesson of all," says Gary. "These kids want to hit the ball as far as they can and then run up to it and bang away again regardless of whether there is anyone playing ahead of them or not."

"As I stated earlier, teaching a junior golf clinic is something else—sometimes the pro learns things he never thought of before."



Swings like this make for an interesting morning for Pro Gary Whitener.

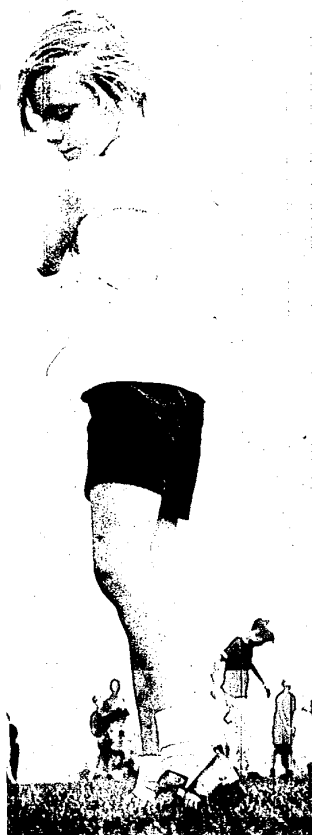
STORY: R.T. Thompson
PICTURES: Vince Witek



BUSIEST person at the junior golf school is Whispering Willows Pro Gary Whitener. He's all over the place, correcting grips, keeping a head down and instructing the youngsters in the proper swing. (Above) Gary tells this boy he'll have to keep his head down or he never will hit the ball. A touch on the back of the head helps get the point home. (Left) Marty Slater, 13, learns how to grip the club with the overlap hold so that she can get more distance on her drives.



TOO HOT! That's the feeling of Jane Belk who decides to rest a while between lessons while Laurie Uhl turns two clubs upside down for support while she also relaxes. The thermometer climbed up around the 90s but it didn't stop these youngsters—they came out to learn how to play golf and, heat or no heat, that's what they did.



WHERE'S THAT BALL? Eight-year-old Karen Adams may not have the best stroke in the world but her determined look appears to tell the story—she's going to hit the darn thing regardless of how the club comes through on her downswing.



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