

TOUR AND NEWS

# Bob Toski on trading a Tour career for teaching, what today's instructors do wrong, and his cheating scandal

Alan Bastable

Friday September 13th, 2013



*Toski, the original swing guru, channels Don Corleone.*

ANGUS MURRAY

You don't have to snoop for long around Bob Toski's Boca Raton, Fla., home to realize that the 87-year-old teaching icon has really lived. A samurai sword rests in a sheath in the foyer, a vestige of the years Toski spread his gospel in Japan. Framed photos of Toski at the 1954 U.S. Open at Baltusrol

and on the first tee at the 1955 Masters with his dear friend Sam Snead adorn the hallway. On a kitchen wall, another treasured snapshot: of Toski's late wife, Lynn, an amber bombshell. "She was a model," Toski says, beaming. And look! There's Hogan, one of Toski's two cats, named for the ball-beating legend Toski idolized and eventually befriended. (Well, sort of. More on that later.

And, of course, there's Toski himself, a 5'7" firecracker, bursting with stories and learnings and an apparent immunity to the ravages of aging. "I don't give a f--- how old I am," he barks. "God gave me energy, he gave me a mind, he gave me a body and said, 'Use the thing. Use it till it wears itself out and then I'll take you up to heaven and put you on my throne.' "

Colorful, confident and unabashedly candid -- that's Toski. Here's more from the five-time PGA Tour winner and Hall of Fame instructor, including why teaching is an art, who he admires, and how he handled the cheating allegations that rocked his senior tour career.

***FIX-IT WEEK ON GOLF.COM:***

***MONDAY: 39 WAYS TO WIX EVERYTHING***

***TUESDAY: THE ULTIMATE SLICE FIX***

***WEDNESDAY: HOW TO FIX YOUR MATCH***

***THURSDAY: THE NEW WAY TO PRACTICE***

***FRIDAY: GOLF MAGAZINE INTERVIEW WITH BOB TOSKI***

---

---

**You like to say you're the best 87-year-old golfer in the world. If we went out and played today, what would you shoot?**

Well, I shot 75 last week -- how is that? When you turn 87, go shoot 75 and then talk to me. You'll say, "That is fantastic!"

**Who's the second-best 87-year-old golfer in the world?**

I don't know, and I don't care. But if someone wants to play me for some money, let's start a little \$15,000 Nassau. I can afford to gamble \$15K...\$30K...\$40K! That's what all these great [golf-loving] athletes do. They have big egos and they think they can play.

**If a 15-handicapper challenged you to a money match, how many strokes would you give him?**

You won't get me into that deal, 'cause every handicapper I play with is a cheater. I have been hustled before and seen so many people lie about their handicaps. If you're a legitimate 15, then I'd give you 15 shots, and we'll both play from our respective normal tees.

**How far can you hit it on a good day?**

About 250. I can carry it probably 230 and if I can get some run, I'm fine. I try to put topspin on the ball. I hook it, which is something I never used to do. I have a two-degree closed driver. The minute I see that closed face, I know I can hook it. As I always say, an ounce of touch is worth a ton of brawn, and if you don't find it, you'll be there till dawn.

**This is our inaugural Fix-It Issue, so tell us: What's the biggest fix needed in golf instruction today?**

You can't teach golf the way they're teaching it these days. Everybody says that the body controls the swing. The body doesn't even touch the club -- how can it control the swing? The swing starts in **the hands**. The minute you hold a club in your hand, you feel like you have control of something.

### **So control and precision have taken a backseat to the power game?**

Exactly. Today's players don't know where they're aiming and swinging. They're swinging so fast that they can't square the clubface. They are one-dimensional: Bomb it, find it, hit a wedge, make the putt. Teaching players to become three-dimensional is a lost art. Players can't curve the ball anymore. They aren't shotmakers.

### **You've influenced countless golfers. Who influenced you?**

**Seymour Dunn** [the noted designer and author] would be up there. I didn't realize what a great teacher he was until I read *Golf Fundamentals*. The book was so sound and sensible that I made it almost my bible. But I've read every book that [Jack] Nicklaus has written and [Ben] Hogan wrote. You name it -- I've got a whole library. In the present day, I've admired Hank Haney, Butch [Harmon] and Eddie Merrins, who I've always thought was an underrated teacher. All these guys teach fundamentals, not something that's off the wall.

### **You've taught some great players -- Tom Kite, Judy Rankin -- but your best rags-to-riches story might be Birdie Kim, who came out of nowhere to win the 2005 U.S. Women's Open.**

She had one of the best swings I've ever seen. I needed to teach her how to score. I told her, "We're going to play every day, and you can't beat me." And I'd beat her. I'd shoot 69 and she would shoot 71. I'd shoot 70 and she would shoot 72. But all along I was giving her playing lessons: how to hit bunker shots, read greens. She was getting better, but she wasn't getting the ball home. I told her, "Birdie, if you can beat me, I'll give you \$20." All of a sudden, I shoot 70, she shoots 69!

---

---

### **Money motivates.**

Right, and I had pissed her off. You can't beat me? I'm over the hill! I aggravate my students so they play better. It's called tough love. I finally told her, "You'll have to beat me for pride tomorrow." And she did. I knew then she was ready.

### **She was. At the Open, she holed out from a bunker on the 72nd hole to win by one. What ever happened to her?**

After she won, she gave my wife and I two watches. They were knockoffs, fakes. I hardly ever saw her again after the Open. I told her, "I'm your best friend; I made you a champion! Your first victory was a major. You need to stick with me." But [she] left me. Now check her career. She plays on some satellite tour [the Symetra Tour, the LPGA's development circuit]. How can someone with a great swing, fundamentally a 10, lose it? She's naive. That's the story of Birdie Kim. She could have been a great player.

### **Another of your students, Ken Duke, finally won his first PGA Tour event earlier this year, at 43, beating Chris Stroud in a playoff at the Travelers. Were you watching from home?**

I was at the club [Sherbrooke G&CC in Lake Worth, Fla., where Toski teaches] standing around with all the members. On the 72nd hole, when the kid [Stroud] knocked his ball over the green, everybody came up and patted me on the shoulder. I told them he still had a shot of holing out the chip shot and not to celebrate early. Sure enough, he holed it. Everyone was stunned. I stood up and said, "It ain't over till the fat lady sings, folks!" That's why they call me "The God-father." I bust ass. Then they asked me, "So now what do you think?" And I said, "Ken loves one-on-one. He's a competitor and has fortitude coming out of his ass. He'll beat this kid." Ken put his approach on the second playoff to two or three feet. I knew he could yip from that distance, but he didn't. He made it and won.

**If you were to seek out one player to work with, who would it be?**

Well, I'm not one to approach players. If you're sick, you go to the doctor; the doctor doesn't seek out patients. But I'd love to work with Michelle Wie. That girl can play! She has dynamic talent like you can't believe.

**So what's wrong with her? She hasn't won since 2010.**

Potential energy has to be turned into kinetic energy. Lightning has great kinetic energy, but it doesn't know where it will strike. My job is to take potential energy, make it into kinetic energy, and teach you how to strike and know where to strike.

**Of all the players you've come across, who would you say has accomplished the most with the least raw talent?**

Bob Rosburg. He had the worst grip you'd ever seen, like he was grabbing a baseball bat. You've never seen anyone hold a club like that, and yet he won a PGA Championship. He had a swing that really looked like a good 15-handicapper's. He didn't hit it very far, he didn't hit it very hard, he hit those squirrely shanks, but he knew how to control the ball. He could chip and putt with the best of them.

**Nearly every player on Tour has the talent to win any given week. What separates great players from good ones?**

There are two types of swings: a competitive swing and a noncompetitive swing. That's why these guys on the practice tee all look good. That's also why these guys get up on the first tee and hit it O.B. There's a lack of

understanding of self-control. I learned to win and compete under the tutelage of the best players in the world. Byron Nelson and Sam Snead tutored me. They helped me every day on the first tee and practice range.

---

### **You don't see that same camaraderie much on Tour today.**

We couldn't afford teachers. [Tour pro] Ted Kroll was my mentor. We traveled together and he taught me the swing that I have today. Now, other guys helped hone it, but he spent hours with me every day. He would call over other guys like Hogan and Nelson to take a look. They would say, "Yeah, that looks good, even better than it did two weeks ago." That's the way it would go. We were a little fraternity. We were close-knit, because we didn't have teachers and gurus or psychologists. We had to become our own best teachers. Hogan was the best at teaching himself how to become a great player.

### **Would guys gather around Hogan while he practiced?**

I used to watch him practice by the hour. He never said a word to me. He just hit balls. You couldn't talk to him. He didn't go out there to talk to people. He went out to work on his mind and body. If you wanted to watch, fine. I would stand behind him down the line. I would study his grip, body position, body turn. The tendency is to stand closer and closer when you're watching someone. Once I stood too close to him and he gave me this glare [Toski's eyes narrow]. I immediately stepped back.

**Did Hogan ever let down his guard? Could you ever just relax with him?**

We weren't that friendly. He knew who I was -- a rookie or whatever. He finished practicing at Riviera once and his locker was close to mine. He was taking off his shoes and he said to me, "Bob, you were out there a long time today." Now, you don't talk to Hogan like this, but I pointed at him and said, "I was out there as long as you were." And he said, "Yes, you were. Did you learn anything?" I said, "Ben, every time you made a swing, I learned something." He said, "Good." He closed his locker and walked out. We became closer because he knew I had balls. After that he would come talk to me.

---

**What are your memories from the first of your five Tour wins, in Hartford in 1953?**

Winning got you into the fraternity, to be one of the boys in the inner circle. It wasn't about money for us. It was about winning. Suddenly people were asking me to go to dinner.

**After just seven years on Tour, you quit to teach full-time. Do you regret not playing long enough to win a major?**

If I hadn't been so successful in my marriage and as a teacher, I would have regretted not playing longer to try and win majors. My marriage to a woman that I still love and miss very much -- we were married from 1953 to 2010 [when Lynn died] -- was something that I can't replace. I don't need another woman. My spirit and life is with her every day. I'm closer to her



two years after her death than I ever have been. As for teaching, I never thought I would become the teacher that I have become. Playing is a skill; teaching is an art. I learned to become an artful teacher because I studied the swing from an anatomical and psychological standpoint.

**Did teaching come naturally to you?**

No. Early on, I was giving people their money back. I thought I could teach because I was the top money earner [on Tour], but I couldn't. I had to learn it. I was a doctor trying to learn about cancer. Bad thoughts and bad swings are cancer in golf. I initially wasn't a good communicator. I could only teach me. By breaking down the swing, I learned how to teach.

**Eventually you went back to playing competitively. In 1986, you voluntarily left the Senior PGA Tour for six months after two of your fellow players alleged that you improperly marked your ball. Were those allegations correct?**

If I marked my ball incorrectly, then a lot of other people have marked the ball incorrectly and haven't been called on it. It wasn't that I cheated, it's that I may have been a little negligent in putting the ball down exactly behind the mark. I may have moved it a little right or left, but I never cheated to move the coin forward, or took advantage of where I was placing the coin. There were two players that called me on that. You know who they were?

---

---

### **Gay Brewer was one of them.**

The other was Billy Casper. They confronted me in Tokyo, when I beat Brewer in the tournament. Brewer and I didn't get along for a number of reasons: I had the better swing, I was getting accolades because I was a teacher. There was a lot of animosity. He confronted me after the round and said, "Bob, you were mismarking your ball." And I said, "If I mismarked a ball, I apologize. I'm not aware of the fact that I mismarked a ball to the point that there was an advantage, like I was trying to move it ahead."

### **But placing your ball to the left or right of your marker can also be an advantage if it helps you avoid spike marks.**

I'm intuitive, instinctive. I do things quickly. And I said if I marked a ball incorrectly, I apologize. I said to Deane Beman [then the PGA Tour commissioner], "You either believe me, or you believe Billy and Gay. You're the judge." So he says, "Well, we're gonna have to ban you from the Tour for six months." I said, "If that's your decision, that's fine with me. You gotta live with that decision...I'm not worried about it. I don't care what the public thinks. You guys wanted to do a number on me, you got even, you did a number on me." For me to have done this as a senior player, and I won all my tournaments on the regular tour and never cheated, and now they accuse me of cheating? Are you gonna think I'm a worse person because of it?

### **What did that experience teach you about yourself?**

It told me that the Tour pros who I thought were my friends were not my friends. I can live with my own heart, my own mind. I've done so much good for golf. Just think about what I did as a player, and as a teacher what I've done for the masses. Now I'm 87, and I'm still doing great things. God put me on this earth for a reason: to succeed as a player and a teacher.

---

---

### **How have you remained so motivated?**

I'm not happy just sitting here and saying I did this or that. I'm going to test my body and swing and see how well I can play at 88 or 89. When I'm 90, I want to shoot 70. I'm not going to sit on my ass and just talk to you about how good I am. I'm going to go out and prove it. Every day when I wake up and go out and play golf, I look up and say, "Hey, Lord, how long is this going to last?" And he says, "As long as you want it to."

### **And how long is that?**

As long as I can still whip ass. Aw, I'll tell ya, I just love to whip ass!

### **So, in other words, as long as the game's still fun, right?**

Fun? Now, there's another subject. Fun is playing good golf. You don't have fun playing bad golf. When I go out and shoot 75 at 87, I have fun. But if I went out and shot 87 at 87, that's not fun, because I know I'm unique, I'm different. I don't have to compare myself to anybody. The only thing I compare myself to is myself and the guy upstairs. That's it.

### **How's that comparison with the big man working out?**

[Laughs] Listen, I just try to do the right thing. I try to be a Good Samaritan. I've been a good father, a good husband, a good teacher, a good player. What else do I have to prove? I've got to prove to myself that I can still teach, still produce winners, still shoot low numbers, all while making friends through teaching and playing. That's my life. I don't need anything else.

---

## **Sponsored Stories**

Recommended by

Subscribe to  
**GOLF Magazine + Digital**  
A year for only \$10

[SUBSCRIBE NOW](#)

---

 **Sign Up For Newsletters**

*Receive insider analysis, swing tips, equipment news, special offers and much more.*

[SIGN UP NOW](#)

---

**GOLF**

[CONTACT](#)   [SUBSCRIBE](#)   [CUSTOMER SERVICE](#)

[SITE MAP](#)   [ADVERTISING](#)   [PRIVACY POLICY](#)

[YOUR CALIFORNIA PRIVACY RIGHTS](#)

[TERMS OF USE](#)   [AD CHOICES](#)

© 2017 Time Inc. All Rights Reserved.

