

Hebron goes to Harvard for higher learning

Smithtown Landing Golf Pro furthers his study of the brain and how it relates to learning by attending selective graduate school seminar

By JASON KARPFF

When the Harvard Graduate School of Education listed who should attend its Mind, Brain and Education seminar this summer, the illustrious Ivy League institute forgot to mention golf instructors.

Of course, the good folks at America's oldest institute of higher learning may not have known there was a golf instructor out there like Smithtown Landing Golf Pro Michael Hebron.

A PGA of America Teacher of the Year and PGA Master Professional, Hebron is also a passionate student of the brain, how it works, and how it relates to learning.

Considering as much, the five day, 30-hour seminar at Harvard was right up his alley, even if he was the only sports figure attending the near 70-person program consisting of professors, school teachers, principals and administrators.

"They kind of got a kick out of that," Hebron said about adding some variety to those in attendance.

Focused on shedding light on the connections in the field of cognitive science, neuroscience and educational practices, Hebron got a kick out of the seminar.

In addition, the program also explored the emerging interdisciplinary relationships between knowledge and learning as well as working memory. For Hebron, the latter was most intriguing.

"I have such a background in this, a lot of [the seminar] was confirming," Hebron said. "But the working memory was very interesting to me."

For those unfamiliar with Hebron, his take on teaching and understanding golf – as well as life – is very much about learning. In fact, the web site



THINKING MAN'S GAME: Longtime Smithtown Landing Golf Pro Michael Hebron is also a longtime student of the brain, how it works and how it relates to learning which made the five day, 30-hour graduate school seminar at Harvard University's Mind, Brain and Education Center last week so intriguing for the once PGA Teacher of the Year

that garnishes his name is also accompanied by the title, 'Neuro Learning for Golf, Brain Compatible Improvement.'

"Learning is change," Hebron said. "There is no fixing. Rather than point

out habits you point out what is positive. People are on a journey and exactly where they should be."

With that in mind, the reason Hebron said he found the working memory portion of the seminar so interesting

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-Smithtown Landing Golf Pro Michael Hebron

is because it deals with the brain's unconscious ability to grasp concepts. Using the analogy of a person who watches a movie and then takes away information from the movie, Hebron said that 96 percent of learning is unconscious. He said the best way for the brain to do this is to evaluate concepts through a general principal and not finite instructions.

"We learn when we are not trying to learn," Hebron said. "Working memory is the cornerstone of coaching. Working memory breaks down when you give it too much to think about; the brain wants to work with a general concept."

In the "brain game" of neurological learning for nearly 20 years already, when Hebron saw the program was being offered by Harvard he wasted little time in completing the application and putting together a portfolio of his previous work on the subject.

Hebron said his interests in area of learning started around 1991, the beginning of what he calls the decade of the brain.

"I was the 1991 PGA Teacher of the Year; around the same time I realized that the people I was working with always asked the same questions," Hebron said. "I realized I needed to know more about the learning process. I was only working with one side of the story."

Since then he's been a golfing guru on the subject. And though his approach may seem strange and a bit unique, it's hard to argue his resume.

For well over a decade Hebron has been considered among the top 50 golf instructors in the country. He is a member of the Metro PGA Hall of Fame, has written a half a dozen books on the process of learning, and has also tutored a handful of local golfers to success.

Among the latest proteges of Hebron's include Suzie Lee and Victoria Snak, two local high schoolers who placed second and third in the state this past spring. Hebron has also worked at Smithtown Landing with, Rob Cerabone, a 2007 Commack graduate and Smithtown Landing Course record holder who – as just one of three out of 140 competitors – recently qualified for the National Public Links Championship in North Carolina where he will play for a spot in the Masters Tournament.

"All learning has peaks and valleys," Hebron said. "But our approach to learning has to be compatible to the way the brain decodes."

