

SPORTS

The swing guru' has Faldo to thank for rise to top

BRAD EWART
Special to The Japan Times

David Leadbetter's career in golf is best described in two ways. There is "before Nick Faldo" and "after Nick Faldo." Before Leadbetter started coaching Faldo he was considered to be a good instructor in England. Leadbetter was known as a golfer who had to excel on the European PGA Tour but was respected by his peers as someone

who understands the golf swing.

Then, nine years ago, David Leadbetter's life changed for good when Faldo asked him for help. After working together for less than a year Faldo went on to win the British Open and the Masters, and became the No. 1 player in the world. Faldo credits his success to Leadbetter.

Just as Faldo's career skyrocketed, so did Leadbetter's. He virtually went overnight

from an unknown teaching professional to the most sought-after instructor in the game of golf.

Everyone wanted to see Leadbetter — "the swing guru" — for advice. He formed a golf academy in Florida, produced a series of swing videos and instruction books, swing machines and more.

Leadbetter went from being a struggling tour professional who barely made enough

money to eat to being the highest-paid golf instructor in the world. His golf academy in Florida has now expanded to include branches in Palm Springs, Hawaii, Ireland, France, Austria, England and Thailand.

The list of Leadbetter disciples includes Faldo, Nick Price, Larry Mize, David Frost, Ernie Els, Bernhard Langer and Ian Woosnam. These are just a few of the top names that most golfers would recognize.

Here in Japan, Leadbetter works with Tommy Nakajima, Hideki Kase, Seichi Kanai and a number of other good young players.

Over the past five years, Leadbetter has made 12 visits to Japan as a contract-instructor for Dunlop Sports Enterprises.

"My emphasis here in Japan is to try and give these players a better concept of what we are trying to do with the golf swing. There are certain characteristics that are inborn into the Japanese golfers. It started with the elder statesmen such as (Isao) Aoki and Jumbo (Osaki) and has just gone down from there through the ranks.

"I think pound-for-pound the Japanese players hit the ball further than any other race of people in the world," Leadbetter said. "The fact is, they are just not very good

"There is some really great talent here in Japan. There are some tremendous long ball hitters but they just don't have the control of the golf ball," Leadbetter pointed out. "When they get an iron in their hand they don't know if it will come up short of the green, finish pin-high or go over the green. Just no control. That's partially because of technique and poor practice conditions."

Leadbetter compares the level of golf instruction in Japan to what it was in North America and Europe 20 years ago.

He feels that the base for teaching is very thin and the people who are teaching the game never were very good players. They are teaching an old system without good players. They are teaching an old system without a good understanding of the mechanics of the swing, bio-mechanics and how the body works in the swing motion.

"Many of the Japanese instructors are not really aware of the whole swing motion. They are not aware of how the body works in the golf swing but are more concerned with the positions of the hands and club," Leadbetter said. "There is a lot of redundant instruction and the problem is, a lot of people follow it."

For almost a year now Leadbetter has been working



DAVID LEADBETTER — "the swing guru" for professional golfers. BRAD EWART PHOTO

to ties record Carp notch h win in row

Kira Eto hit his 16th homer August on Tuesday night, tying the Japanese record for grand-slam homers in a month, to top the Hiroshima Carp beat

Yokohama BayStars 4-2 at Hiroshima Stadium. The second-place Carp won their eighth straight game. I saw the Yomiuri Giants' Central League lead cut to 2 games.

Yokohama took a 1-0 lead over rookie Toshio Haru's solo homer off Makoto Kito in the first inning. But in the bottom of the 7th, Eto drove in a game-tying run with a bases-loaded

