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Targeting golfers

Range-Play inventor thinks driving ranges can be a lot more fun

BY JEFF THOMAS

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Usually it takes some pretty darn poor golf shots to get me this perturbed at the driving range. But Keith Brenner is hitting the other target with some regularity, as I can tell by the rather annoying voice coming from the scoreboard, announcing “Target One.”

I, of course, am shooting at Target Two, along with my playing partner, photographer Michael Myers. He is of little help.

Brenner, who just got back from shooting 77 at Lake Valley, is teamed with Izzy Reinish. It is entirely Reinish’s fault that I am here, getting far too worked up over not being able to regularly stick a shot from my sand wedge on a 4-foot-by-6-foot target only 70 yards away.

His fault, I say, because Reinish invented the *&%\$ thing.

Yes, this otherwise mild-mannered man may have made the driving range just as annoying and frustrating as playing an actual round of this (as TV announcer Tom McCoy is fond of saying) “silly game.”

All kidding aside, what Reinish set up at the Gateway Park Fun Center’s driving range in North Boulder actually may change the business model for driving ranges around the world.

And Range-Play Golf is already in negotiations with driving ranges in Longmont, Boulder and Highland Hills to install this new competitive system.

The system itself is fairly simple. The targets, which look similar to mini-trampolines, are set up at 45-degree angles. As the targets get farther away, they get larger and are stood up closer and closer to 90 degrees, for instance, at a driver distance.

The small scoreboard used at the Gateway could only display



MIKE MYERS

Izzy Reinish, left, founder of Range-Play Golf, and Jack Dale, CEO of the company, demonstrated their new golf game system at the Gateway Park Fun Center driving range in North Boulder. Reinish believes the game could be a new business model for driving ranges, letting them offer individual and team competitions to bring in more customers and revenue rather than just the typical fee for a bucket of golf balls.

two scores at the same time, but the larger scoreboard in development will display nine. The system now works off a laptop computer and simply records how many times the target is struck by a ball during a certain time frame.

Reinish has been working on finding the right technology for the system for about six years. There are other systems already in play, he said, but most of them are extremely expensive – up to \$5 million to set up a driving range – because they try to keep track of which player has struck which target.

That’s entirely too expensive for the average driving range, Reinish said. The Range Play system will sell for somewhere around \$55,000, plus a yearly licensing fee of \$12,500 and other fees for national advertising.

Reinish says most of the games he envisions actually will work

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better by just keeping track of the number of times individual targets are struck – such as the team play in which we participated.

“I took up the game rather late in life,” Reinish says. “It occurred to me that — other than playing an actual round, which is time consuming and expensive – there really wasn’t a good alternative for developing skills. No one would ever develop the skill set for baseball or football if they had to go to a big stadium, or put on all those pads. You develop those skills on sandlots, or in pick-up games.”

What Reinish envisions is people developing their golf skills more at the driving range, by participating in individual and team competitions and even leagues. More so, what this fledgling company hopes to accomplish is to actually change the business model for driving ranges.

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FOUNDER, RANGE-PLAY GOLF

“Usually if someone wants to put in a range, they do a traffic and demographic study and then just wait for folks to show up,” said Range-Play Chief Executive Jack Dale. “All of a sudden, you (the owners) have a way to promote the range. You create memberships; you form leagues; you form teaching leagues.”

Competitions also can become a self-reinforcing type of advertisement, Dale said. For instance, winners of various competitions might get a discount or voucher at a pizzeria. At the pizzeria, meal tickets over a certain price might receive a free bucket of range balls.

Creating the exact business model for itself and its clients is actually the biggest task ahead of this fledgling company before it begins to market aggressively.

And once national, who knows? Maybe we’ll all have someone to cuss at when our swings go awry at the driving range, at least.

That name is Izzy Reinish.



MIKE MYERS

Keith Brenner tests his skill at hitting targets in the Range-Play Golf system, which was being demonstrated at the Gateway Park Fun Center in north Boulder.