

Sports

Exclusive

club

Moynahan honored for work as creator of golf equipment

By **ROBERT COLLIAS**
Staff Writer

KULA — It's hard to call it a workshop in the garage. Mike Moynahan's laboratory resembles Santa Claus' — except that it is exclusively for golf.

Moynahan, an award-winning clubmaker whose expertise has been requested for the Mercedes Championships since it came to Maui in 1999, has sunk over \$30,000 into the back end of his garage and the hitting area in the backyard of his Kula home.

The 66-year-old former Naval Academy golfer, who once faced Jack Nicklaus in his amateur days, is the Professional Clubmakers Society U.S. Regional Clubmaker of the Year. It's only the latest award Moynahan can hang on a wall full of them.

Moynahan has helped professionals Jesper Parnevik, Sergio Garcia, Scott Hoch, Tiger Woods and Retief Goosen at the Mercedes, but his everyday passion as owner of Kamaaina Clubmakers is helping a 20-handicapper become a 15.

"I want to get you playing better golf, that is my goal," Moynahan said. "I'm not making a whole lot of money at this, and I don't expect to. Most of it is the love of the game and working with the people and that sort of thing. So if I can just change a shaft for you or just change a loft and lie and help your game and you smile and say, 'OK, that's great,' that's fine. If you want to go further, it is up to you."

Moynahan has the technology in his home to help just about any golfer get better. In the back of the garage, two computers help him measure everything from the oscillation of a shaft to the weight — in grams — of all of his customers' clubs. He has machines that help



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him grip clubs, assemble them and taper their use to any individual.

Downstairs, he has a swing analyzing area. Old clubs can be changed to their owner's specifications, or new clubs can be custom-made to fit.

"Where you can really help is the golfer who is (an) 18- to 20-handicapper, or I'd say 12 on up," Moynahan said. "If you are going to play twice a year and you want new clubs, go to Sports Authority. The clubs that come off the rack and have a nice swing rate and frequency, I see that nearly never."

Moynahan can help the average golfer in a variety of ways. Club heads can range in price from \$9 to \$40 for him, and he adds about \$30 to the total cost of building a club that might have \$100 worth of parts.

"I am going to have matching swing weight, the frequency is going to be in the right steps," Moynahan said. "Stuff that can make the clubs fit the person."

Moynahan became a clubmaker 10 years ago and has attended more than a dozen clinics on the subject. This is his sixth, and, he says, "next-to-last" golf shop.

Moynahan was a Golf Clubmakers Society regional club maker of the year nominee in 2001, the 2002-03 GCA Regional Clubmaker of the Year, and the 2004-05 GCA Hawaii Clubmaker of the Year before winning his most recent award, which made him one of six finalists in the world to win the PCS Clubmaker of the Year award.

He started playing the game when he was 8 years old and continued through his freshman season at Punahou School. Then he moved to the Washington, D.C., area where he played against Deane Beman, the former PGA Tour commissioner, as a junior golfer. In his three years of playing collegiately for Navy before graduating in 1961, he was either No. 1 or No. 2 on the team.

After a 20-year naval career, he retired near Pearl Harbor. His son, Brendan, eventually became a club pro at Hualalai on the Big Island.



The Maui News / ROBERT COLLIAS photo

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— Mike Moynahan,
Owner of Kamaaina Clubmakers

In 1999, Mercedes Championships tournament chairman Gary Planos asked Mike Moynahan to set up shop on the driving range of the Kapalua Plantation Course. Moynahan has been back every year since to assist the field of PGA Tour winners.

He's faced a series of requests in that time. One of the toughest came when Parnevik sought a new grip for a club.

"Every pro has got their own little idiosyncrasies about size of grip they want on putters or on irons or whatever," Moynahan said. "Normally, when you grip a club you will just put down two sides of tape and slide the grip on and it goes from covering the butt to about a half inch from the end of the grip. Jesper, if you put anything more than just a half inch of tape on there, he'll throw it back at you and ask you to redo it. To slide that grip without that nice slick surface with the adhesive and the solvent is very tough."

Hoch asked Moynahan to redo a putter grip eight times until famed

clubmaker Scotty Cameron came to the rescue. One year, Moynahan led the effort to locate the right grip for Woods.

With Goosen, Moynahan developed an understanding over the years. It was formed after Moynahan invited Goosen to use the clubmaking equipment.

"The next year he came out and he kind of smiled at me and I said, 'Hey (the equipment) is right there,'" Moynahan said. "A lot of (the pros) do their own work, but some of them wouldn't know how to put a grip on and they wouldn't know which end to put it on."

Because the Mercedes is the first PGA Tour event of the year, manufacturers' representatives can be found more and more at Kapalua.

"You have got everyone there trying to get, you know, 'Vijay (Singh), use Titleist,' — Vijay being a Cleveland man — 'I want you to try this out,'" Moynahan said. "So a lot of the things I do up there, the (manufacturers' representatives) will come in and say, 'Here, take this shaft out of this and

put it in this head. Take that shaft and you can have it.' Then he will run back out and he'll have Vijay hit it, trying to lure him away."

Equipment battles aren't the only thing that have changed during Moynahan's decade in the business. Hardware keeps going more high-tech — club heads for drivers have nearly tripled in size, to as big as 450 cubic centimeters — and technology continues to advance.

The evolution of material and science is unlikely to stop, but Moynahan plans to keep up.

That goes for not just Mercedes week, but the whole year.

"I am really more interested in getting you fit properly, making sure the loft lies are right, the swing weights are right, your clubs are matched," he said. "It is something that you, the average golfer, the below-average golfer, or the above-average golfer can do. That is what I am here for. I will probably keep doing this as long as I can."

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