

Although some golf fans might not be readily familiar with the Toptracer brand name, the product itself has impressed all who view the game on TV. Consider the last PGA or LPGA tournament you watched. You surely recall that spectacular red or blue swirl that tracks the players' tee shots. The graphic depicts in real time the moment the tee shot is hit, the peak of the ball's flight and then its descent to the landing area. That's Toptracer technology – called Protracer when the software was first introduced by a Swedish group to the European tour in 2006.

Today, a scant 13 years after Toptracer's unveiling, guests at the Mistwood Golf Dome in Bolingbrook can be just like the pros and utilize the complex data tabulated by the Toptracer system for fun and as a learning tool. More than just that pretty animated arc that you see on the video screen, the software application



starts with a quartet of high-speed video cameras positioned above the hitting bay which registers the flight of the ball and proceeds to transfer a dizzying array of information to a TV screen. This data includes ball speed, trajectory, shot shape and distance. From an entertainment standpoint, these data points allow golfers to play games, have contests with companions and even play a virtual round at some of the greatest golf courses in the world, including Pebble Beach Golf Links in California.

Mistwood Golf Dome is the first golf dome in America with Toptracer Range technology. Jim McWethy, owner of Mistwood Golf Club in Romeoville, purchased the former Ditka Dome a few years ago with the express goal of evolving it into the metro area's premier indoor range. While improved lighting and atmosphere were elements of that plan, the opportunity to introduce the Toptracer Range technology to the facility immediately intrigued him. "Andy (Mickelson) and Dan (Bradley) came up with the idea to bring Toptracer to the dome," McWethy recalled during grand opening ceremonies. Mickelson is Mistwood's director of golf, Bradley the general manager. "It was an incredible opportunity to upgrade the facility and bring something new and exciting for our guests to enjoy," McWethy added.

Mickelson echoed McWethy's sentiments. "Our goal from the outset of buying the dome was to provide an experience for our guests that they couldn't get anywhere else in the metro area. We're convinced that Toptracer Range is the home run we were looking for. The feedback you get when using this system is critical for game improvement. But just as importantly, golfers have a real blast using Toptracer both as a learning tool and for competition with friends."

All 30 hitting bays at the dome are equipped with Toptracer Range technology which involves four overhead cameras that read, interpret and record the result of each player's shots. As a teaching tool, the system can tabulate the results of multiple shots taken with each club to provide insights on all facets of one's performance.

Six games are available on the system. Launch Monitor is a training mode that registers distance, ball speed and height to compare with others in your group. Points Game is a challenge competition based upon proximity to targets stationed across the landing areas. Long Drive turns the dome into a long drive grid on who among your group can do the best Brooks Koepka imitation. Closest To the Pin rewards the most accurate shots in a group. What's In My Bag reveals the most accurate player over the entire spectrum of clubs. By far the most popular competition at the facility is Virtual Game which allows players to play a virtual round at a world renowned golf course.

During my last session at the dome, I used Toptracer Range to focus on wedge shots and 9-iron shots of my favorite hole in America

Toptracer Makes an Impact at Mistwood

By Neal Kotlarek

– the iconic No. 7 at Pebble Beach. Played from a tee perched high above a putting surface which rests on the edge of a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the hole is a mere 107 yards, made even shorter due to the steep decline. Wind plays a factor on the hole, of course, and sand bunkers protect the front of the green. One by one by one, I aimed my shots toward target flags set up around the dome at varying lengths. I would strike my shots toward the flagstick and would admire the image of the 7th green on the screen above the hitting bay. A streak on the screen indicated the exact arc of my shot and where on the green (or, in one case, the ocean) my ball would land. The experience was a wonderment for a guy who grew up hitting striped Wilson K-28s at a rugged driving range built next to a used car lot on the south side of Milwaukee.



After hitting about

25 shots on the iconic par 3, I was ready to enjoy still another amenity provided at the sports complex. The entire teaching staff at Mistwood Golf Club has taken winter residence at the dome. This talented roster of PGA teaching pros includes the aforementioned Mickelson, winner of the 39th PGA Assistant Championship four years ago, and the affable Dan Phillips, teacher and player development director at the club.

My instructor on this day was none other than the newest member of Mistwood's teaching staff, Nicole Jeray.

"Looking for a little more loft on your approach shots?" Jeray asked, studying my ball flight and the computer data. A slight adjustment of my stance and shoulder position happily provided immediate results. A star at the University of Northern Illinois where she won eight collegiate tournaments, Jeray was the youngest athlete elected to the NIU athletic Hall of Fame. She played on the LPGA Tour for almost two decades and also enjoyed stints on the LPGA Symetra Futures Tour and on the LPGA Legends Tour.

"I've been a fan of Mistwood ever since the club began hosting the Illinois Women's Open in 1998," Jeray said. "I cannot imagine the opportunity to teach the game at a better facility."

As with most of the other teaching staff members, Jeray will transition to the Mistwood Golf Club Learning Center during the spring, summer and fall seasons. One of her goals as a Mistwood teacher is to develop teaching programs geared to women and girls and to expand Mistwood's elite junior program that prepares high schoolers for collegiate golf.

The Mistwood Golf Dome is a fully heated 60,000 sq. ft. facility that offers a full service restaurant and sports bar, operating throughout the winter until April 30. Hourly rates per hitting bay are \$30 weekdays. That works out to a reasonable \$7.50 per person in a foursome.

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