

The flexible pro

Some pros know from the word 'go' that they want to work in golf, while others take a more roundabout route. Mike Karl is one such pro. He also tells Pro-Shop how he ended up on the sunshine island of Mallorca and why he is now contemplating a new venture in golf

Mike Karl is not a bitter man. A golf pro who has recently parted company with ArabellaStarwood Group, the owners of the Arabella Golf Academy Mallorca where he worked for the last 12 months, because he and his former employer had differing ideas on the importance of the role played by the golf pro, Karl is using the time to consider his options for the future.

"I've taken off 10 days to structure ideas," he says.

Karl is a pro who has very definite ideas as to the significance of a teaching pro at a hotel's golf academy.

"If golfers are happy with the golf lessons they receive at a specific resort and if they improve in a short time, they will come back to play every year as they're used to the golf teacher," he emphasises. "However some resort owners do not understand the value of experienced pros and they do not see the benefits of a good golf academy."

Despite the alteration in his circumstances, the pro is no stranger to changes in his life. As a relatively late starter as a youngster, he soon found out that golf was his preferred sport.

"I started at the age of 13. It was a classic example of having a 'taste of golf'. You are in a group of 10 and the pro teaches you how to stand and how to hit the ball. I did this with my parents and sister. It was a lot of fun. As a youngster, I went through riding, judo, volleyball, but the golf experience was the one I liked the most. So I was very happy when my parents told me they were going to join

the golf club. Then by the age of 17-18 my best friend was the golf pro in the golf club, so I told my parents I wanted to become a golf pro as well," recalls Karl.

However, it was many years before he could realise his dream.

"My parents said I had to finish school and then go to university. I wasn't very happy to hear this, but I did everything my parents asked. I learned IT after which I studied media science. During my university years, I didn't play a lot of golf so I had a handicap of 21.7.

After university I had a job in the media business, and when the dot.com bubble burst and jobs were cut, I founded my own media company that is still operating in Munich.

"At the same time I thought about how much time and work we invest into other people's business just to be dismissed with a little bit of money," says the pro before adding: "I sat at home at my desk and thought about it. It had been a great experience, but do you really want to do this for the next 30 years?"

He then recalled his original desire to become a golf pro.

"How great would it be to work as a golf teacher, working on a golf range, not to be responsible for other people? I checked the PGA website and other golf websites and I read about what you need to become a golf pro. As I had not played for eight years, the highest handicap was my handicap."

Undaunted, Karl decided to take two years off from his company and 'reactivated' the friendship with the golf pro. His



aim was to achieve a handicap of 10-12 in the first 12 months and then go down to 6.4 in the second year.

"I managed to get my handicap down to 5.4 then I started the traineeship under the PGA of Germany which takes another three years before you become fully qualified."

How did he end up in Mallorca?

"I was looking for a place to work and practice all year round. Golf de Andratx offered me a job and free practice sessions before I started my traineeship so in essence I would work for free. As it turned out, my boss offered me the chance to do the traineeship in Mallorca.

"Of course I had to fly back to Germany for the tests and exams. This meant I had to sell everything in Germany and move to Mallorca in Spring 2003." Karl pauses before adding: "It was hard and cost a lot of money."

As the island is a small place, he has dealings with companies like Simply Mallorca Golf who

arrange golf holidays.

"Simply Mallorca Golf do a great job. They deliver a lot of customers to golf clubs, which is great in terms in green fees. The company is professional and fast so it's a pleasure to work with them," enthuses Karl.

What does the future hold?

"In future, part of my work will be to give golf club managers an idea of how important it is for the golf club or resort to offer a complete service. It is important to look at the big picture, for example, to have a high quality pro shop, a good golf course, a great clubhouse and of course a perfect golf academy. As a consultant, I believe people listen to what you say in a different way. You are not part of the system and nor do you get into a relationship with the directors and employees. This makes things easier."

Karl pauses before reflecting: "There are good things that happened last year but I learned a lot from it. It's not been all bad."