

**J**ames Smith grew up with a golf club in his hand and a golf ball in his pants pocket. But, unfortunately, the 33-year-old club pro also grew up knowing that many thought golf was played strictly by rich, cigar-smoking, knickerbocker-wearing white men who hailed from the sumptuous suburbs.

Now a father of three, Smith wants to help rid his profession and the game he loves of this ugly stereotype. He doesn't want his kids growing up believing that golf and segregation are linked like John Daly and controversy.

So Smith, also the golfing instructor at Fair Oaks Golf Park in Fairfax, Va., took action in the form of simple sentences and colorful illustrations. He and his wife, Lauren, authored a children's book. *My First Golf Book* was released last summer and is in its second printing.

Smith pursued the project four years ago because he couldn't find a children's golf book to read to his kids at night. He sought such a book because he wanted to better convey to his children what he does for a living.

"There was nothing to share the game with them," says Smith, who played Division III golf at Messiah College in Grantham, Pa. "I thought there would be a few books, but there weren't."

*My First Golf Book* is geared toward kids ages 1 to 7. While it was written to explain golf's basics ("The grass on the golf course needs mowing every day."), it is also intended to rid golf of its infamous class distinctions.

Study after study of children reveal that adults don't give kids the credit they deserve when it comes to understanding ideas and forming opinions when they are young. Smith believes kids can learn early about important issues such as racial harmony and good sportsmanship.

There are subtle and not-so-subtle messages in the book. For instance, the four children playing golf in the book are comprised of two boys and two girls. One of the boys is African-American and one of the girls is Asian. From page one, Smith wants kids to realize that golf is a game for everyone.

"It was important that we didn't put four blonde-haired, blue-eyed kids out there, and have a book authored by Archie Bunker," Smith says.

## Kids Golf Book Breaks Stereotype

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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Growing up, Smith noticed that too many people were too uptight when playing golf. His book continually stresses that golf should be a fun game. If you hit your ball in the drink ("Oops! The ball went in the water!" a kid golfer says), don't throw your club in after it, like some irate golfers do.

The book is also big on nature and features a cast of friendly animals (even the geese and a border collie get along!). Smith wants children to understand that golf courses can be environmentally friendly and a haven for wildlife.

There's also a snippet that will have superintendents cringing, but chuckling. When the kids encounter their first bunker, they opt to build a sand castle ("Sand play is very important," the book says). Smith laughs about the bit, knowing well that bunkers are hallowed ground in some superintendents' minds.

"I knew that wouldn't wash with the purists," he says with a laugh. "But when a 3-year-old sees sand, he automatically thinks in his mind, 'What can I build in there?'"

Smith believes superintendents, designers and others in the industry can benefit from the book because their children can learn more about them. "If you're in the golf business, the book helps explain to a kid where daddy is for 12 hours a day," Smith says.

The National Golf Foundation stresses that golf needs to be more "comfortable" and "exciting" for women, juniors, minorities and middle-income players.

Smith's book — and its simple but powerful message — is helping to convey that message to the babes of the world.

*My First Golf Book is available by calling 800-262-1556.*

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