



PGA OF BELGIUM

The 14th in our series that takes a random look at member PGAs in turn.

An Educated Way of Building a Golfing Future...

As professional golf has spread its influence for progress around the continent and beyond, The PGAs of Europe, has developed, and continues to develop, as a multi-cultured 'association of associations' in which no two of its 37 Full and International members, are the same.

While, for instance, GB&I is well in excess of a hundred years old, the PGA of Belgium is currently in merely its 20th year of existence, having been formed as recently as 1988.

In its location as one of the 'Low' or 'Benelux' countries, alongside Holland and Luxembourg, Belgium naturally has yet to attain a worldwide recognition as a leading golfing nation... but the foundations are being put down in a painstaking

and thoroughly professional manner.

Unfortunately, for the immediate growth of golf popularity in Belgium, there is an obstacle in the path of both the highly co-operative Federation and an ambitious PGA, in terms of shortage of golf courses and insufficient political backing to create them.

Looking back to the turn of the century, there were fewer than 37,000 golfers in Belgium using 76 courses or driving ranges. Under the chairmanship of Willy Vanbegin (known by some as the father of Belgian professional golf), and later Chris Morton, who both won PGAs of Europe 5-Star professional awards, their fledgling PGA has grown steadily since then.

Eight years on there are more than 47,000 players but still only two additional courses, at 78 facilities in all.

The Secretary General back in 2000 was Bernard de Bruyckere, who still occupies that crucial role as the day-to-day, hands-on, driving force in representing the Board of Directors' administrative plans, though now comfortably located in new office facilities.

After six years accommodated at Waregem Golf Club, the PGA of Belgium has made a significant move to its own offices. There, Bernard, a well-qualified official who has often been a part of The PGAs of Europe's tournament team, has much to reflect on with satisfaction.

"The biggest advantage of the new office is its central location, just on the outskirts of Brussels," he explained. Waregem is 80km from Brussels and although all was in place for administration and education, a lot of time was lost going to and back from Brussels for meetings. Moving here saves a lot of time."

Perhaps the most significant milestone of all for Belgium was the official recognition by The PGAs of Europe Education Committee, of their training programme in 2002. This resulted in their having a regular flow of trainees, currently standing at 87, who are proceeding through the three-year course.

'Unfortunately the political world is not convinced...'

The next major milestone in terms of establishing golf as a 'sport for all' in Belgium would be recognition by the government of golf as an unrivalled activity for both schoolchildren and adults in terms of health, exercise, well being, respect and good manners.

State recognition of the need for more golf courses as an aid to developing the country as a destination for golf tourism would also be an advantage.

This, however, will not be easy, as Bernard de Bruyckere points out. "The Education programme has developed over the years into a joint effort with the government through the assistance of the amateur bodies," he said. "Trainees now receive a general sports education next to the golf specific PGA education.

"The game is becoming more popular, through efforts from the amateur bodies to bring golf to the people. Unfortunately, the political world is still not convinced and getting planning permission to build a golf course takes sometimes up to 10 years or more.

"Basically, while we are trying to get more people interested in the sport, there is no place for them. This is a great pity.

"However, we will be concentrating more on junior golf and how to work with juniors."

A moment of mixed emotions for Bernard de Bruyckere, Secretary General of the PGA of Belgium.

Seen here with PGAs of Europe Chairman, Sandy Jones, and the Ryder Cup, he experiences the pleasure of being part of Europe's great record in the competition and, maybe, a long-term hope that his country will produce future members of victorious teams.

The PGA of Belgium has an excellent and productive training programme in place and are concentrating hard on stepping up their efforts with juniors but need more political awareness of all of the many benefits of nurturing a strong national golfing culture.

*** The PGA of Belgium, along with all PGAs of Europe member countries, send their 'get well soon' hopes to Sandy Jones, who is currently recovering well from surgery.**

It's Belgium Again in Annual Match Against Dutch



An important prestige event on Belgium's tournament schedule is the "Challenge Vercoutere", an annual local challenge match against neighbouring Holland which was revived in 2007 after a 14-year cessation in hostilities, due to lack of a sponsor.

Staged in mid-June it was won for the second successive year by Belgium 6 1/2 to 2 1/2 at Royal

Golf Club des Fagnes. First introduced in 1952 with a format comprising a Pro-am on the first day followed by 36 holes on the second day, (foursomes and singles) the match inspires great 'friendly' rivalry between the two countries.

PGA of Belgium The Facts

	2000	2008
Number of facilities	76	78
Number of players	36,648	47,000+
Number of PGA Members:		
(Male)	112	161
(Female)	6	17
(Trainees)	0	87

OFFICIALS

Chairman: **Frank Dhondt**

Secretary General: **Bernard de Bruyckere**

Head of Education: **Aubin Van Waetermeulen**

Head of Tournaments: **Philippe Vanderstricht**

