



PGA OF ITALY

The 17th in our random look at member PGAs in turn

'A Significant Influence on European Golf'

Bearing in mind Italy's almost obsessive addiction to football as its national sport, it is hardly surprising that golf's popularity among the nation's general public has been more of a slow burn than an explosion of interest... yet, long-term, it is none the worse for that.

The recent staging of the PGAs Champions Trophy of Europe at Lignano GC in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region is just one recent example of the pivotal role that its professionals increasingly intend to play in making a significant influence on European golf.

Italy were, indeed, among the pioneers of The PGAs of Europe in 1989/90 by virtue of the valuable input by **Donato Di Ponziano**, who remains on the association's board as joint deputy chairman, and is also on the Policy Board of The Ryder Cup.

By his launch of the innovative Teaching

& Coaching Conference series in Milan in 1990 he ensured that Italy's contribution to the concept of a common European educational policy will remain in the annals of the sport forever, a cause he continues to pursue as Director of the National Golf School (Founded in 1982).

Also, with The PGAs of Europe stroke-play championship having been staged five times at Pevero (pictured below), on the captivating island of Sardinia, under the sponsorship of Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, there can be no doubting the part that Italy has played in the expansion of European professional golf.

More than 40 years have passed since **Aldo Casera**, **Ugo Grappasonni** and **Alfonso Angelini** founded the Italian Golf Professionals Association in 1962. In that early period, Angelini finished third at the World Cup while in

1976 an Italian pro, **Baldovino Dassù**, (twice) was the first winner of European Tour events.

Italy's arrival as a genuine golfing nation was underway... a fact that was later confirmed by the emergence of Costantino Rocca (above) in the 1990s as a three-time Ryder Cup player when he won six of his eleven matches.

The Italian PGA Championship was played for the first time in 1977. Since then, thanks to the valuable contribution of all members, and the hard work carried out by past Presidents, important results have been achieved in bringing the PGAI much closer to the Italian Golf Federation.

As a result, the importance of the PGA Professionals in Italy's policy of development and promotion of the game of golf has been



Did You Know?

- The declared aim of PGAI since the start of the new century has been that of building a modern structure and of achieving higher professional standards, both in teaching and playing.
- The National Olympic Committee has now shown an increasing interest in professional golf and the presence of three Professionals representatives on the Italian Golf Federation Board has become official practice.
- Since 1997 the President of PGAI has been Stefano Betti. He works as a teacher in one of the oldest Italian golf facilities but he also achieved excellent results in the tournament field.
- During his Presidency significant steps have been taken with regards to the creation of an independent and efficient office; an insurance scheme for members covering serious illness and disability; legal assistance for members; communication between the board and the members through a newsletter published every three months, and a new website providing a more interactive communications outlet; initiatives for golf teachers; organising for the past six years an annual Teaching Seminar presented by world famous teachers and coaches such as Denis Pugh, Hank Haney, Chuck Cook.

widely acknowledged. This was re-emphasised in 1994 when The PGAs of Europe included Italy in the historic meeting in Rome between Great Britain, Sweden and France to form the first four-country agreement on universal training standards.

This principle grew from there to steer The PGAs of Europe's Education Committee towards the influential role that it currently plays.

More & More Sponsored Tournaments

"Strenuous efforts are being made to market, increasingly, the PGAI trademark, both through press and television, as a source of income," explained General Secretary Laura Rendina.

Over the years this policy has brought them over 500 events, including: 32 Italian Championships, 10 Ladies Championships, 20 Seniors Championships, 11 Club Professional Championships, 18 Four-Ball Championships and **almost 90 Pro-Am events every year.**

Dream Destination

Italy has all of the necessary ingredients to grow and grow as a dream destination for golf tourism, and the event recently supported by the tourist authority in the attractive **Friuli Venezia Giulia** region is an example of the efforts being made in this direction.

The number of players in Italy has grown by some 28,000 in the last eight years, and the number of professionals by more than 300 while the amount of playing facilities has increased by around 36.

In terms of scope for more dramatic growth the potential is incalculable, bearing in mind the centres such as Rome, Milan, Naples, Venice, Florence, Trieste, and Bologna, not to mention the more rural surrounds.

When more of the population discover that the attractions of the wonderful sport as an alternative to football, Italy will become a very big player in European golf indeed.

PGA of Italy 8-Year Figures of Growth

	2006	2014
Number of facilities	216	252
Number of players	56,140	84,153
Number of PGA Members: (Trainees)	193	526
	0	59

OFFICIALS

President: Stefano Betti
General Secretary: Laura Rendina
Director National Golf School: Donato Di Ponziano