



PGA OF POLAND

The 15th in our series that takes a random look at member PGAs in turn.

Producing their own Pros as Golf Grows and Grows

In any quiz at the 19th hole, among enthusiasts of all age groups, the question: "Which European nation has advanced most in the 21st century?" the answers would be wide and varied.

HOW MANY, THOUGH, ONE WONDERS, WOULD GIVE THE ANSWER: POLAND?

Realistically there are many contenders, certainly in Eastern Europe, but the case for Poland being chosen as the ultimate example of just how much progress can be made by sheer desire, determination and team work, is a strong, and emotionally, rather a moving one.

Before 1939 and the start of World War II, there were three golf courses in Poland but then, under the communist regime, all sports had to be 'working class'. Since golf was considered 'bourgeois' it was not permitted. The facilities that existed were either ploughed up or left to decay.

As for other Eastern Europeans, politically

and economically, life has seldom been a joyride for the Poles. There is a powerful reminder of this in our Golf Europe 2000 yearbook which states: "Changes in the country's political system have enabled the PGA of Poland to be legally recognised for the first time as a union of professional golfing instructors..."

"Previously this was not possible since fundamentally there was no such thing as professional sportsmen. Now, duly recognised, there is a small but enthusiastic family of six professionals, all keen to see progress and development forthcoming in the years ahead...."

By then Poland still had only six courses at which those pros could be employed and a mere NINE HUNDRED amateur players from a population of some thirty-eight million.

Contrast that situation with this recent summing up of Poland's growth factor by their busy-busy, hands-on PGA President, Marek Podstolski. "Even five years ago we had only fifteen instructors," he recalled. "Now we have twenty-five fully-qualified professionals. This year alone we had twenty young golfers join us (on their training programme) so we've nearly doubled our intake in one year.

"This shows how much we're progressing. It's got to the point where some of the golf clubs are reluctant to release their professionals to play in tournaments at the weekend, because they are so busy."

On any given weekend there might be fifty or sixty beginners trying to learn the game as the number of golfers in a country that has been bitten incurably by the golfing bug, rises by the week.

He added "We've got a lot of good young amateur players coming through. One of them

has gone to America to develop his game. They all dream of becoming professionals and want to join the PGA of Poland. But we encourage them to go to university and finish their education first, so at least they have more than one option."

Marek has been a most enthusiastic figurehead for his association, regularly attending the Annual Congress and International Team Championship, along with other relevant events, and liaising closely with The PGAs of Europe's Education Committee, in order to establish, and advance, their education programme.

Driving this programme, and Poland's hunger for self-sufficiency as a golfing nation, has been their head of training, Mike O'Brien, winner of a ProSport Media 5-Star professional award last November for his outstanding service in this regard.

Mike was one of that 'small but enthusiastic family' of professionals who, eight years ago, sought to kick-start a golf rush in a country with

barely any previous pedigree, the PGA having been founded as recently as 1995. Now they have sound relationships with the Government and with the Federation and have a growing Order of Merit tournament schedule, run as Pro-Ams.

Full marks to all concerned for making it happen.



Marek Podstolski (centre) with PGA of Poland colleagues

'European Tour Event in 5 Years is Possible'

A clear, internationally visible sign that Polish golf is firmly on an upwardly mobile path, has been the successful staging in 2008 of two important tournaments, one on the Challenge Tour, and one on the European Seniors Tour.

The Parkridge Polish Seniors Championship at Krakow Valley was won by former World No1. Ian Woosnam who shot a superb final round 63 while Gary Clark took the DHL Wroclaw Open at Toya, both of them introducing the sport to a new public.

Of the latter event President Marek Podstolski observed: "We had a lot more spectators than we expected, about 800 in all, which was fantastic. What was really nice and surprising was that most of them already understood a little about the game, and hopefully they learned much more through attending the tournament.

"Our dream is one day to host a European Tour event. That's still a while off, but in five years' time, if everything goes to plan and a slot becomes available then I'm confident we will have a European Tour event in Poland."

On the immediate agenda is the hosting of the Omega Mission Hills World Cup European Qualifier at the Sierra Golf Club in September.

"We now have a chance to show the world what we can do," said the Polish President. "It's the first time an event staged by The European Tour will have been played in Poland, so it should be a proud moment for us.

"Looking ahead further, we'd be delighted to welcome back both the Challenge Tour and the Seniors Tour next year."

Wild Cards for Challenge Tour Events

Polish Golf Pro Tour tournaments offer wild cards for Challenge Tour Tournaments this season. The remaining schedule is:

- Sep 18-20: Pro-Am Championship – Warsaw Golf & Country Club.
- Oct 8-11: Szczecin Open – Binowo Park
- Oct 12-14: PGA Cup – Modry Las – (PGA Poland members only)
- Oct 26-28: PGA Cup – Rosa Private Golf Club, Czestochowa – (PGA Poland members only)

* Top eight players from the Golf Pro Tour ranking 2008 will receive wild cards for Challenge Tour events in 2009 varying from seven down to one.

PGA of Poland The Facts

	2000	2008
Number of facilities	6	30-plus
Number of players	900	15,000
Number of PGA Members:	6	35
(Trainees)	0	20

OFFICIALS

President: **Marek Podstolski**
 Secretary: **Filip Naglak**
 Head of Education: **Mike O'Brien**