



PGA OF SLOVENIA

The second in a monthly series that takes a random look at each member country in turn

Growth in Player Numbers Opens up New Horizons

The PGA of Slovenia has achieved a great deal in its first 14 years of existence... but all the signs are that the fledgling, central European organisation will increase this impressive rate of progress as it heads for the beckoning new horizons.

When Slovenia joined the PGAs of Europe in 1993 it was only 12 months after this comparatively small area of the former Yugoslavia had become an independent state. With golf at best a minority activity, (way behind football and winter sports), and fully qualified golf professionals almost non-existent, the challenges it faced were both obvious and daunting.

Happily, the signs now are encouraging. Having planted the necessary seeds by joining our European community of golf professionals as soon as they had formed their own PGA, all the indications point to progress. This embraces both the number of players (including professionals and amateurs and juniors of both genders) and of a comprehensive education structure taking shape.

Figures tell the story: in the year 2000 there were approximately 3,000 golfers in Slovenia. By six years or so later this total had doubled. Since then the numbers have grown by about 10% cent per year. Assuming the pattern continues, more courses will be needed and career opportunities will open up for more professionals, preferably home-produced.

The PGA of Slovenia is acutely aware of the equation, and intends to provide its solution by means of a modern training philosophy.

Happily, also, there is awareness that the

support of their peers who possess longer experience in the golf business is an absolute necessity, and this will be both readily available and willingly provided.

When **BOGDAN PALOVNIK** (below), the Secretary of the PGA of Slovenia, attended the Tournament Organisation Seminar at the Belfry back in March, the value of the visit



proved to run deeper than the information taken on board from the official presentations.

Once the business of each day had been completed in the Academy, Bogdan discovered, as he did at the Annual Congress

and Team Championship in Murcia the previous November, that his fellow officials from larger more advanced PGAs were ready and eager to help and support Slovenia's progress.

Like the officials of his neighbouring former Eastern Bloc countries such as Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Bulgaria and Russia, Bogdan Palovnik, and office administrator Metka Jamar, who accompanied him on the three-day seminar, are left well aware that they are part of a golf community in which the sharing of knowledge and experience comes as second nature.

As their official web site explains "The PGAS has two primary goals that should be realised in a short time. The Golf Association of Slovenia is preparing a **Programme for the Technical Training of Workers in Golf**, which



they will submit to the Ministry of Education and Sport. The second goal is the **Approval of the Slovene Training System** by the PGAs of Europe.

"We in Slovenia also **want to raise a professional golf player in the future**. This will contribute to the identification of Slovenia abroad and increase the interest of golf sponsors in Slovenia."

Here, also, setting a lead for future Slovenian elite players to tread the fairways with the best in the business, there are pioneering individuals. The latest of these is **Matjaz Gojcic**, who reached the second stage of the European Tour Qualifying school at Catalunya last winter.

Perhaps and even longer-term indicator of future progress is the likely appointment of PGA pro **Uros Gregoric** as their Head of Training to pursue the dream of establishing a programme that will ultimately acquire PGAsE approval.

Slovene Players Shine in ITC Despite their limited background and resources, Slovenia has been a great supporter of the PGAs of Europe International Team Championship featuring **Daniel Kraljic and Janez Grlic at the top of the competition's 'appearances' chart.**

Such devotion and persistence deserved to be rewarded by advancement in results and

this arrived in 2003 when Danny, Janez and Bogdan Palovnik finished in an admirable sixth place.

Kraljic has been something of a trail-blazer as a Slovenia player, claiming to be the first from that country to win an event on the European Challenge Tour and with 13 Slovenian Order of Merit wins to his name along with many pro-am successes and several appearances in the PGAs of Europe Starwood Championship in Sardinia.

New Junior Programme

The current year has seen the launch of a new junior programme in conjunction with the Federation of Slovenia whereby equipment is supplied and financial help is received by means of government grants.

PGA professionals take part in a junior program every year, during which they 'share their knowledge and experience' with the young up-and-coming players and they also appear at tournaments organised by other organisations and at **Slovene Golf Days** which are staged to attract newcomers to the sport.

Plans are also in place for PGA professionals to educate selected schoolteachers in the rudiments of golf so that they can then introduce their young pupils to the sport at an early age using special TRI-GOLF-type clubs and balls, appropriate to the age group.

This means that, just as kids can kick a football at a young age to get the 'bug' for that particular game so, too, they can also pick up a mock, plastic golf club and have a swing at a larger soft ball without endangering anyone's safety.

Tournaments at Home

Slovenian professional golfers have had a schedule of tournaments for the past 12 years. The largest competition in Slovenia is called the **Slovene Honorary Rank**. For the last four years, it took place along with with the **Slovenian Cup**, an open competition for professionals and amateurs. .

How it all began ...

After the First World War (1914-18), the then Yugoslav king Aleksander Karadjordjevi chose Bled as his summer residence, attracting other wealthy guests and nobility from all over Europe.

A golf course was built at Bled in 1937, upon the suggestion of the royal family and the diplomatic community, but then World War 2 hostilities put an end to the sport in the entire region for many years. Bled was closed down and not re-opened until 1972. Even by the turn of the century Slovenia still had only 10 golf facilities.

The Bled course (pictured above) is the cradle of Slovene golf and one of the oldest in that part of Europe. From the start, connoisseurs have declared it to be 'one of the most beautiful in Europe', with its magnificent, mountainous views.

PGA of Slovenia The Figures of Growth:

| | 2000 | 2007 |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|
| Number of Facilities | 10 | 17 |
| Number of Amateur Players | 2,948 | 5,651 |
| Number of Professionals | 11 | 28 |
| Number of Trainees | 0 | 6 |

Officials:

| | |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Chairman: | Renato Krajnc |
| Secretary: | Bogdan Palovnik |
| Head of Education: | Uros Gregoric, Dusan Jurman |
| Head of Tournaments: | Slavko Papler |
| Ladies Section: | Maja Bozic |