

THE GBN INTERVIEW



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By: Golf Business News

GBN talks to EDGA President Tony Bennett about the journey that the Association has been on to introduce disabled people to the joys of golf

Marking the 25th year of the European Disabled Golf Association (EDGA), GBN talks to its volunteer President Tony Bennett about how ‘thoughtful inclusivity’ can help many more people to experience, enjoy and compete in golf and grow the whole industry.

GBN: It’s 25 years since EDGA was set up. How does it feel for the team to reach this landmark?

TB: Well, it’s remarkable really. When you think back to 2000, most people were worrying about the ‘Millennium Bug’, and ‘G4D’ (golf for the disabled) was hardly on the golf world’s radar at all. We have come a long way since then. We built on what our founders started, and we have stayed true to a

very simple idea: creating more opportunities for people with disabilities to experience, enjoy and compete in golf.

Reaching 25 years is a proud moment, of course, but for us it's still a date in the diary. As we head towards 2026, the intention is to work even harder for all our golfers. We are very aware of the people who got us started, the founders, and the volunteers who have given countless hours to build a community unlike anything else I've known in golf.

And honestly, we still feel like we're only at the beginning. Twenty-five years is nothing in the wider history of the sport. EDGA has always welcomed golfers with all disabilities, and it's that mix, the diversity of players and their experiences, that makes G4D so special.

GBN: Why did you decide to get involved in EDGA in the first place?

TB: I first came across EDGA and golf for the disabled in 2007 and immediately thought, "How on earth did I not know about this?" I asked questions, watched events, and eventually began studying disability more formally, which turned into a part-time PhD.

At the time, my wife Sue and I didn't have anyone with a disability in our immediate family, but the players we met were extraordinary, talented, resourceful, and with a refreshing 'can do' attitude. I was asked to write a development strategy which was originally contained on a single page, and we worked from that for many years.

Later, I was invited to take on the role of President of EDGA, something I wouldn't have considered without the full support of my wife Sue, who, like me, volunteers for the association.

GBN: What made EDGA relevant back in 2000, and what makes EDGA important today?

TB: For us, it's always been about people. The founders, from a handful of European countries, were extraordinary. Some had faced real discrimination themselves, while others weren't disabled but had a deeply inclusive mindset. They found people who shared that ethos, passionate people, skilled people, and they chose to bring others together, not divide them.

That wasn't easy. Bringing together different cultures, languages and ways of working in a measured way was a huge challenge, but they persisted. Over the years we have seen remarkable growth: more players, more countries involved, more tournaments, more programmes and research, and more tools freely shared with the golf world. Yet through all of this, EDGA remains fundamentally about people.

Our volunteers and service providers work with purpose and mission. Our players show incredible resilience and are never afraid to tell us where we can improve. And the truth is simple: we achieve more when we do it together.

GBN: What are the central elements of EDGA's philosophy?

TB: At its core, EDGA's philosophy is about ensuring golfers with disabilities are fully welcomed, supported and able to thrive within the golf ecosystem. To make that happen, we work hand-in-hand with many good people in that ecosystem.

In the early days, EDGA had to deliver almost everything ourselves: tournaments, coach education, eligibility systems, rankings. But over the last eight years we've transitioned some of these responsibilities to the organisations best placed to carry them forward. It's about helping them build capacity and ownership.

We will continue supporting federations, PGAs, Tours and industry partners as they build their own G4D pathways. We will keep working with disability organisations and creating opportunities for people with disabilities to engage with the game. Above all, we will champion an inclusive sport that empowers people and welcomes everyone.

GBN: What is the opportunity for the wider golf industry?

TB: The opportunity is enormous. In the UK, around 24% of the population is considered disabled, an 8% rise since 2000. The 'Purple Pound' estimate of the economic influence of disabled people and their households is around £274 billion.

If golf clubs, facilities, services and attitudes were more inclusive, far more people with disabilities, and their families and friends, would feel confident enough to try golf. Yes, the economic upside would be significant, but more importantly it would help shift the lingering perception of golf as elitist or exclusive.

Of course, organisations also have legal responsibilities around protected characteristics, including disability, and ignoring them can have serious consequences. But the positive opportunity far outweighs the threat. This is a moment in time which the whole golf industry should try to embrace.

GBN: What have been the key impacts since 2000 from EDGA?

TB: EDGA has unquestionably been a catalyst for change in the G4D space. One of our early breakthroughs was the 'Definitions of Impairment', which grew into a comprehensive eligibility system and sport classes, essential for golf's involvement in major multi-sport disability events. Our tournament guidelines helped shape a consistent competitive structure, and several elements are now reflected in Rule 25 of The Rules of Golf, ensuring that a number of slight Rules modifications to aid, but not advantage, G4D players due to the practicalities of their impairment can be seen and respected by all golfers.

We created the first meaningful world ranking for golfers with disability, which is now managed by the World Amateur Golf Ranking (WAGR). Today there are more than 120 world ranking G4D events each year, plus many more local competitions serving their communities.

The G4D Tour, delivered primarily by the DP World Tour, evolved from the EDGA European Tour launched in 2019, which was genuinely groundbreaking. And with our wholehearted support on all levels, The R&A first created The G4D Open in partnership with the DP World Tour in 2023; in the third edition in 2025 welcoming 80 G4D players from 20 countries to Woburn, from as far afield as Canada, Australia and Japan.

Our coach education programme has now been adopted, in full or in part, by 12 PGAs worldwide, with a streamlined online version available too. Perhaps our most far-reaching work today is the 8-Stage Pathway, supported by The R&A. Through it, we help national federations build the capacity to take real responsibility for golfers with disabilities. We currently work with more than 50 federations, sometimes behind the scenes, sometimes directly, and increasingly through strategic guidance.

GBN: How big has the impact been over the years from players in inspiring others, and breaking down barriers?

TB: You will have heard the phrase: 'If you can't see it, you can't be it'. And it's true. If you've never seen someone play golf from a seated position, or with very limited vision, or with a limb difference, it can be hard to imagine what's possible. But the moment you see someone do it, your whole perspective changes.

Over the last decade we have built a substantial media library of films, videos, audio, pictures and written stories, which showcase these players in action. It's now the largest resource of its kind, telling the stories of extraordinary golfers. We're fortunate to have men and women, boys and girls, who inspire simply through how they play and who they are. The '[Mulligan](#)' film in 2020 captured this beautifully, and we believe the forthcoming '[You Can](#)' film will do the same when launched soon on December 3.

Another huge role our golfers share is helping to signpost new players, explaining what to expect, how to get involved, and guiding them towards opportunities that reflect their goals. Our work with media is not only about challenging perceptions; it also plays a crucial part in ensuring each player is directed toward the most rewarding pathway, helping them remain engaged and supported in the game.

Today's players aren't just inspiring others; they're breaking down barriers every time they go to the course. They're changing perceptions of the game one round at a time.

GBN: Who does EDGA rely on to carry out this work and grow awareness?

TB: A huge amount of our work is driven by a dedicated team of volunteers, service providers and the players themselves. Many of the people we help train become vital in this drive. The growing number of coaches who understand the value of adding G4D to their portfolio, for the good of the game and their own businesses, is a prime example.

So too the directors and staff at national golf federations and golf facilities who are widening their experience via the 8-stage Pathway. Meanwhile, G4D players naturally have their own ambitions, that's only human, and the vast majority genuinely want to be part of a stronger, more inclusive G4D landscape for everyone.

We are fortunate to have excellent advocates who understand that progress takes time. Some golf organisations are still early on their G4D journey, less than a decade in, and are only now fully recognising their role. There is a natural lag, but the intent is there, and that's what keeps pushing things forward.

Many bodies have backed our philosophy over the years and we are fortunate to list as core long-term supporters The R&A, the DP World Tour, PING, RSM and Srixon; all highly valued partners.

GBN: How are you addressing current challenges, and what more can be done by the golf world?

TB: Challenge is part of golf's DNA, it's what makes the game wonderful and infuriating in equal measure. At EDGA we are expanding our research capacity, and we'll be publishing important findings in December that will clearly show the industry why embracing golfers with disability is not only the right and fair thing to do but also strategically smart.

Golf has grown since COVID, with more people playing and the rise of screen golf. There is also a large group of older players who benefit physically, mentally and socially from playing regularly.

Ultimately, a golfer with a disability or health issue needs accessible facilities and thoughtful design. For me, the way forward is simple: thoughtful inclusivity. Ensuring people can actually access the facilities, enjoy the environment fully, and have a quality experience every time they visit. Small, intentional changes can make a very big difference.

GBN: You're a professional coach first. What have you learned from G4D and EDGA, and are you still learning?

TB: Every day is a learning day, never more so than when you're working with the players we meet through EDGA. As a former National Coach who has worked with winners on the European Tour and the Ladies European Tour, I've always been fascinated by how players self-organise to perform at their best.

Players with physical, sensory or cognitive limitations often find incredibly creative ways to play the game. As a researcher, I have huge respect for science, but sometimes science needs to catch up with what these players are already doing. Whether progress is practitioner-led or science-led doesn't matter, what matters is that G4D players are redefining how golf can be played.

GBN: How do you think the team and G4D players might celebrate the milestone?

TB: I think many of our team, and some of the long-standing players, will feel quietly proud of what's been achieved over the last 25 years. I'm sure there will be some kind words and the occasional pat on the back, but knowing the people involved, most will acknowledge the moment, smile, and then get straight back to helping build the future we all believe in.

GBN: Three words to sum up the EDGA of today?

TB: People. Purpose. Possibility.