

The Instructor

Babe Bellagamba is both teacher and entertainer, making him one of the most popular golf instructors in the country

By Jeff Wallner

For those who enjoy a casual 18-hole stroll around the links on a Saturday morning, golf is just a game. For them, it's a leisure activity – a means by which to pass the time.

But, don't tell that to Babe Bellagamba. For him, golf is not merely a hobby. It's a science.

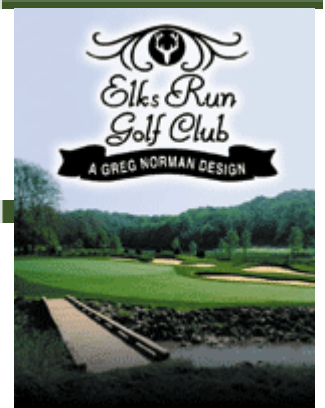
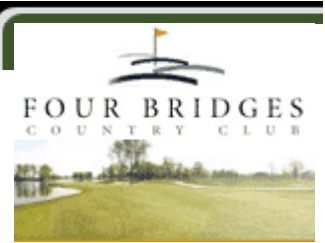
Bellagamba, 78, has been teaching people how to play golf for nearly three decades. He scoffs at a recent poll that ranked golf near the bottom of the list of most difficult games to master.

"That's crazy," he says. "Golf is a very confusing sport. There are pros who'll play a 65 today and an 85 tomorrow. That's golf."

Bellagamba has forged a living from our frustration. He has gained the attention of youngsters, amateurs and pros from Florida to Iowa to Germany and points in between. Bellagamba has been called a "genius." But, he makes one thing clear. "I'm not a magician," he says. "I don't have an instant swing."

What Bellagamba does possess is one of the most innovative and inventive golf instructional philosophies in the world. It all begins with this basic premise: If you control your body, you'll control the golf club. If you control the golf club, you'll control the golf ball. If you can control the ball, you'll be in control of your game.

It may sound simple in theory, but it's not. That's why Bellagamba has made it his life's work to help golfers understand and execute this approach. Contrary to popular belief, Bellagamba says just playing golf regularly won't make you better.



"People think that if you do a bad swing often enough it'll get good," he says. "That's not true. You have to learn how to do it correctly. Then it's repetition, repetition, repetition."

Bellagamba was born in Cincinnati. He was raised in Walnut Hills and attended Purcell High School where he excelled in both baseball and football. He was a featherweight boxer in the U.S. Navy for three years and even spent time as an infielder/outfielder in the Washington Senators farm system before an injury derailed a promising big-league career.

Bellagamba later became a nightclub owner and entertainment promoter. He produced and managed the original Van Dells and helped bring the likes of Ray Charles, Red Foxx and Chuck Berry to Cincinnati. It didn't take long for Bellagamba to realize his passion for golf. When he talks about the game, Bellagamba the "entertainer" steps to the forefront.

He might have an unconventional background and atypical training methods, but there is a method to Bellagamba's madness. Before his students swing a club, he likes to give them a quick anatomy lesson.

"You have tendons in your body," he says. "When you stretch all of your tendons you become flexible. If you're right-handed, your left side is weaker. You must develop the muscles on your weak side. When the muscles on your weak side get built up, you get coordinated. I use exercises to build golf muscles."

Bellagamba has enlisted the aid of physical therapists to help him better understand how the body works and which muscles and movements contribute to the action of swinging a golf club.

"We have a deal," he says of his relationship with the therapists. "They teach me about the muscles and I teach them golf."

In order to help golfers strengthen their "golf muscles" and rid themselves of bad habits, Bellagamba has invented and patented a number of unique training apparatus.

Bellagamba's latest brainstorm, the Golf Workstation, is an all-inclusive golf muscle training and posture control system. It has a Velcro belt which prevents a golfer from moving up or down during their swing.

"The Workstation prevents you from swaying up and down," he says. "That's something you can't afford to do in golf."

The Workstation uses resistance to develop only the muscles needed during the golf swing. Bellagamba says that resistance will develop those muscles 10 times faster than any other form of exercise.

"There are so many bad swings," he says. "The only cure is correct experience. If you do enough reps you will get the feel for it. Each leg has a job description on the back swing and forward swing. So do the left arm and shoulder."

Bellagamba, a member of the United States Golf Teachers Association, also invented S.A.M., the first full circle swing trainer for beginning golfers to help them learn the up, down and around golf swing on a controlled single golf swing plane. His company, ReMark-Able Products, Inc. has marketed a number of golf games, training equipment and tools.

One of Bellagamba's favorite training methods is the 60-second golf swing where he takes a pupil through each individual movement in the process of swinging a golf club. The process gradually speeds up until they are completing a normal swing at full speed.

"I have a complete golf controlling system to help a person prevent bad habits," he says. "Everything is about controlling the body."

Bellagamba is both a teacher and entertainer making him one of the most popular golf instructors in the country. Because of his diverse background in athletics, Bellagamba says he's learned something from each sport that he can apply to golf.

"The turn of the body is what gives you power in boxing," he says. "It's the same in golf."

Bellagamba is still an avid golfer, although he admits he gets far more enjoyment out of teaching others to play.

"You must believe," he says. "It will start to work. It just takes patience and discipline. I get more of a kick out of teaching. I get a kick out of watching someone hit a ball that couldn't. Sometimes, I don't even want to charge them."

