

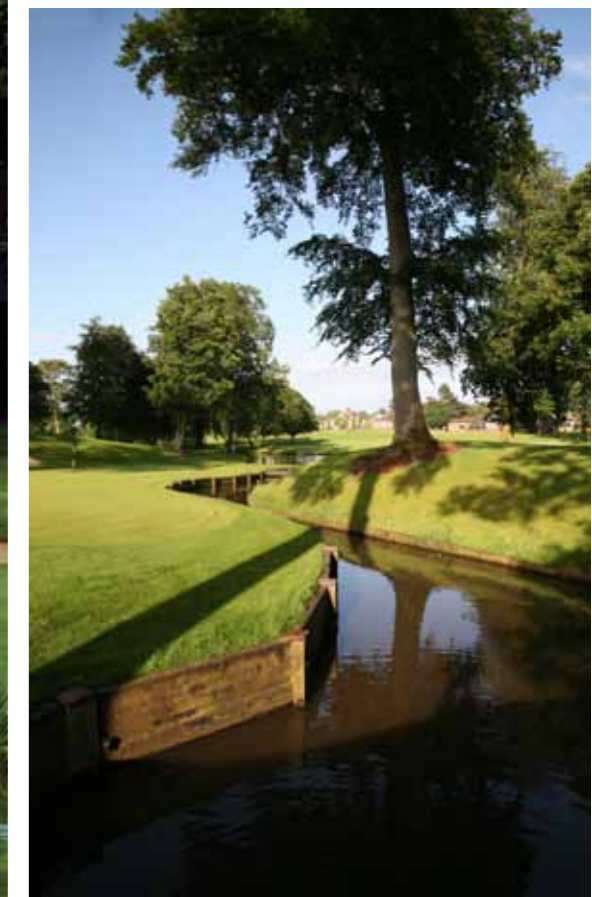
THE BELFRY

We pay a visit to the only certified PGA National Academy in Great Britain.

WORDS AND PICTURES BY DAVID J. WHYTE



CLOCKWISE FROM OPENING: 18th hole with hotel background; The Brabazon - 10th hole; The PGA National Golf Academy; National Custom Fit Centre; Open day at The Belfry.



The Belfry is synonymous with the Ryder Cup. Through the past three decades, the resort in the middle of the English Midlands has hosted the event no less than four times, more than any other course in history. Designed by Peter Alliss and Dave Thomas, The Belfry's magnificent Brabazon course is one of the finest inland tracks in all of Europe.

Opened in the late 1970's, it quickly became renowned as an exceptional inland test, ideal for hosting major championships. Magnificent fairways and meticulous, lightning-fast greens offered a world-class stage and in 1985 the Ryder Cup arrived followed in fairly rapid succession by repeat events in 1989, 1993 and 2002 not to mention regular

European Tour matches.

Today, The Belfry remains one of the UK's iconic golfing destinations. There are three courses on offer within The Belfry's leafy surrounds as well as an iconic hotel and spa and state-of-the-art teaching facility. It is also headquarters in to the British Professional Golfers Association.

Within the gates of the resort, The PGA National Golf Academy is the world's first PGA branded Golf Academy reflecting The Belfry's dedication to the game. It offers a world-class facility for locals, visitors and touring professionals alike. With a team of 20 PGA qualified teaching professionals, it is continually developing its tuition programs to assist golfers to attain their highest levels of performance through a variety of one-off

and residential packages.

Alistair Davies is one of The Belfry's senior coaches. He takes us through The Academy's philosophy and recommends four of his key practice drills. Alistair is a Swing Tutor and Examiner for the PGA, helping others to teach at the highest level.

Opened by Sam Torrance in 2003, the facility includes a 34-bay floodlit driving range, a dedicated short game practice area, spacious practice putting greens and five unique Custom Fitting suites housing the latest launch monitor technology with a complete range of club and shaft options. Also home to the National Custom Fit Centre, there is a wide choice of the world's leading club manufacturers coupled with the service of The Belfry's custom-fit specialists.



THE ACADEMY'S PHILOSOPHY

The Senior Teaching Professional at the Belfry gives us some tips to "Train like a Tour Player"

BY ALISTAIR DAVIES



The PGA National Golf Academy can offer programs ranging from tour player performance to simple drills that will greatly assist club golfers. Our 'Train Like a Tour Player' program is one of our most popular. This adopts a holistic approach to training better players to take the next step towards improving their game. What it covers is course management, how best to practice, how to consider and apply strategy-based practicing and evidence-based practicing.

Then we point the player to the most beneficial program that will suit their needs. This would include physiotherapy, psychology, nutrition, strength and conditioning coaching. A lot of the coaching we do is based on getting the body to perform at its best and how to maximise the player's potential.



THE POSTURE

Taking a neutral, shoulder-width stance, place a club across your groin with your thumbs by your hip joints. From where the club is placed, bend forward until your heels start to leave the ground. Flex your knees slightly to maintain balance. Your left hip should be slightly higher than the right. Your left arm on to the club should be nice and straight with the gap between grip and groin a hand-span maximum. In this classic address position, muscles will switch-on that possibly haven't been switched-on previously. You'll feel very conscious of this structured posture for a period until it becomes unconscious. Establishing a solid posture like this should be routine for every shot.



THE RAMSAY BELT BODY DRILL

This is a 'dry' drill (not using a golf club). In this instance we're using a posture-belt to help activate the deep core and postural muscles, especially around the scapula. This counter-balances the bad posture that golfers often develop either through a sedentary lifestyle or even through working on their games. This drill will give you the correct movement and feel during the backswing while also limiting any hip-sway. Stomping while turning activates the gluteal muscles and also creates more stability in the lower half making it more difficult to sway.

BACKSWING 'STOMPING' DRILL

Once you have 'the feel' from the body drill move on to hitting balls. It should be done with a slow backswing, stomping through the backswing then stopping and hitting balls normally. It's difficult – it requires a bit of coordination but it works. The idea is to get a specific area of your body moving better through the golf swing - in this case the pelvis. The rationale is 'you can't do two things at the same time'.



THE IMPACT DRILL

This drill is to help you get the feel of where the club and your body should be at the point of impact. The idea is to preset the perfect impact position then hit a punch shot only around 50-60 yards. This will enable you to build 'feel' for where your body should be at the point and through impact as well as how the club should feel as it strikes the ball. Again, adopt the impact position, take the club back only slightly and hit the ball from there. This more powerful impact position will gradually begin to translate into your full swing giving a much more powerful strike.



THE BELFRY

Director of Golf Gary Silcock tells us why the Belfry contains the finest golfing experience in the Midlands. BY GARY SILCOCK, DIRECTOR OF GOLF



CLOCKWISE FROM OPENING:
The Brabazon course; 10th Hole;
The Brabazon hole 10th; The
Brabazon hole 18th.

The Belfry makes an ideal resort break with three very different golf experiences. The PGA National can be summarised as an inland links divided by swathes of fescue, areas that are generally left untouched - though we do thin them out over the winter so they're not as fearsome as they appear. The course plays shorter than The Brabazon due to its fast-running fairways.

Built in 1999 and designed by Dave Thomas, the greens are large with gentle slopes. They're not quite as fast as The Brabazon's but the overall condition is similar. Throughout the course the greens are plateaued, lifted up to give a links effect. Deep bunkering protects both the fairways and greens making the overall challenge quite different from the Brabazon.

The bunkers are large with sloping faces; we haven't gone for the riveted faces as you find on links courses but the size of the slopes give a good defense. The grass on top of bunker-faces is also left to grow thick and that's a nice visual feature.

The Derby was built at the same time as The Brabazon and shares the same designer (Alliss and Thomas). It's a Par 70 course with delightful views over the Warwickshire countryside. The layout is most enjoyable with many birdie opportunities. The fairways do have a bit of bump about them and are quite fast, similar to the PGA National. The par 3's are all mid-iron in distance, which makes a change compared to many new courses. It is the main course our members play at and is a great choice for something completely different from the other two.

The Brabazon is a golfer's course, a genuine test for the best of players. It's beautiful to behold and always in an emerald green condition, no matter the weather. The vast fairways always play their full length and with many holes moving left and right, the course plays it's full distance. Looking at the way the course sets up, the first two holes offer a nice, easy introduction. Then you are tantalized with a par 5 that you can reach in two - although the second is a do-or-die

challenge with water sitting on the left.

The fourth is a very tough, long par 4 and the 5th is a bit more relaxed. At this point you might think to yourself, 'this course isn't so tough!' Then you walk straight into 6, 7, 8. This is the toughest part of the golf course. The recently remodeled 6th offering risk and reward scenario - the more you hug the lake with your drive, the easier to attack the green which is also over water. The 7th is one of The Brabazon's resilient par 3's. The 8th skirts a lake with a concealed ditch crossing ahead of the green.

The Brabazon tends to be known for historic holes such as the 9th, one of the best driving holes, or the 10th - another long par 3 that has not been aced until very recently. These holes are all part of golfing history.

The back nine generally has a similar rhythm of challenges, respites then more challenges. You are always asking yourself how best to play each hole. The par 5 15th is a birdie opportunity but the 17th is another quandary - an acute dogleg right. You can make eagle here but if you cut too much, you're looking at bogey or double.

And then there is the famous 18th, probably one of the toughest finishing holes in golf. With water front and left and again short of the green, you need to strike a strong, well-positioned drive. The further left, the shorter your second shot will be. The green from back-to-front measures 62 yards; that's 5 club lengths! Aiming at the middle doesn't help here.

Staying at the Belfry, you'll be delighted with the 324-bedroom hotel - charming with a touch of old-world atmosphere. The spa treatments have a golf element but they cover everything else. One nice thing to keep in mind is The Bel-Air. Our famous nightclub is open on a Friday and Saturday nights. It's very vibrant, never quiet and lots of fun.

David Whyte travelled to Birmingham courtesy of Cross Country Trains. For further information visit www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk

Book The Belfry

Golf Tuition packages start from just £150 for tuition, golf and B&B. Popular golf packages of 2 nights B&B plus 3 rounds start from £280.
www.thebelfry.co.uk

HOW TO GET THERE

The Belfry's location is second to none. Birmingham International train station is 15 minutes from the resort as is Birmingham International Airport. It is also linked by the country's main road system, the M42 and M6. London and Manchester are both around an hour away.

NEARBY AND AROUND

Staffordshire starts just a mile down the road while Stratford-upon-Avon - Shakespeare Country - is about 40 minutes away and so is Sherwood Forest. Bicester Village, near Oxford is the largest boutique shopping centre in the UK and around an hour's drive. If you are looking for more golf, there are 1,000 golf courses about an hour from here. The Forest of Arden is one of the iconic courses around this area and worth considering.