

PGA Entrepreneur Award - Michael Balderstone

I opened The Golf School of Excellence (TGSE) for business in January 2004, with the aim of providing holistic elite golf training for school leavers, to bridge the gap between junior golf and turning professional. We started with 7 full-time students and a week later we had 6. The business challenges and lessons had started already. A year later we had 24. For the first 4 years we provided elite golf training exclusively and our size remained fairly constant around 20-24 students.

From 2008 we started offering education alongside the golf training, which was to become our main business model. We started by offering the PGA Diploma, for which we have become the leading provider in SA. We now also offer Greenkeeping and Club Management as additional qualifications. The legacy of the PGA Diploma programme is our graduates that are doing great things in our industry. In 2013 we added a full-time Junior Academy, providing high school education combined with elite golf training from grade 8 upwards.

We have since expanded our market to providing high schooling to young athletes in other sports by setting up our Study Centre for Youth Athletes. In 2019 we changed our trading name to the Balderstone Sports Institute (BSI) in line with our multi-sport offering. We also opened a football academy in January 2019, which is growing rapidly.

Back in 2010 we expanded our academy base by opening our first franchise in Pretoria (no longer operating), followed by another franchise in Cape Town in 2013. At one stage we had 5 separate academies operating under the TGSE brand, but have since closed down 3 branches and currently focus on operations in Johannesburg and Cape Town. We have approximately 140 full-time students in our High School, College and Academy programmes.

I currently employ 18 staff members (including 6 PGA members) and contract to dozens more.

My main business philosophies:

- Build things steadily, focusing on quality of product.
- Constantly look to improve the product and service provided.
- Add new products to stay ahead of the curve.
- Hire for attitude first, skills second.
- Hard work, perseverance and sacrifice are essential for long-term success.