



## **Brian Crowell, Bernie Najar, Sean Palmer Headline 2026 PGA of America National Awards Class**

*13 Award Recipients to be Recognized at 73rd PGA Show*

***Editors:***

For bios of all award recipients, [click here](#).

For photos, [click here](#).

**FRISCO, Texas, and ORLANDO** (January 21, 2026) - The PGA of America today announced its 2026 National Award Recipients at the 73rd PGA Show in Orlando, Florida. The awards class is headlined by PGA of America Golf Professional of the Year **Brian Crowell**; PGA of America Teacher & Coach of the Year **Bernie Najar**; and PGA of America Golf Executive of the Year **Sean Palmer**.

The Association annually recognizes 13 award recipients for their extraordinary accomplishments and efforts within the golf industry, standing out among more than 30,000 PGA of America Golf Professionals.

“Our 2026 PGA of America Award recipients are shining examples of the passion, leadership and service that define our Association,” said PGA of America President and Master Professional Don Rea. “To be recognized among more than 30,000 PGA of America Golf Professionals is truly impressive. These 13 honorees have dedicated themselves to elevating the game of golf and enriching the lives of those in their communities. Their commitment to the game inspires all of us and it is a privilege to celebrate their remarkable achievements this year.”

The award recipients will be recognized today at the 73rd PGA Show at the Orange County Convention Center. The presentation begins at 4:30 p.m. EST on the PGA of America Industry Stage presented by CapTech.

Also honored on stage will be the recently announced [2025 PGA of America Professional Players of the Year](#) presented by Rolex: Men’s PGA Professional Player of the Year Ben Pollard of Jackson, Wyoming; Women’s PGA Professional Player of the Year Sandra Changkija of Daytona Beach, Florida; and Senior PGA Professional Player of the year Justin Hicks of Oyster Bay, New York.

## **2026 PGA of America National Award Recipients**

- **PGA of America Golf Professional of the Year**  
Brian Crowell, PGA - Bally's Golf Links at Ferry Point - Bronx, N.Y.
- **PGA of America Teacher & Coach of the Year**  
Bernie Najar, PGA - Caves Valley Golf Club - Owings Mills, Md.
- **PGA of America Golf Executive of the Year**  
Sean Palmer, PGA - The Union League of Philadelphia - Philadelphia, Penn.
- **PGA of America Professional Development award**  
Robin Shelton, PGA - Newport Beach Country Club - Newport Beach, Calif.
- **Bill Strausbaugh Award**  
Carl Alexander, PGA - The Golf Club of Purchase - Purchase, N.Y.
- **Herb Graffis Award**  
New England PGA Section
- **Deacon Palmer Award**  
Mike D'Agostino, PGA - Penfield Country Club - Penfield, N.Y.
- **Patriot Award**  
Bo Preston, PGA - The Links at Boynton Beach - Boynton Beach, Fla.
- **PGA of America Player Development Award**  
Ryan Young, PGA - Chambers Bay - Tacoma, Wash.
- **PGA of America Youth Player Development Award**  
Henry Stetina, PGA - New Mexico State University PGA Golf Management - N.M.
- **PGA of America Merchandiser of the Year - Resort Category**  
Jared Henzlik, PGA - Big Cedar Lodge - Ridgedale, Mo.
- **PGA of America Merchandiser of the Year - Public Category**  
Alex Abbruzza, PGA - TPC of Louisiana - Avondale, La.
- **PGA of America Merchandiser of the Year - Private Category**  
Chris Rowe, PGA - Whispering Pines Golf Club - Trinity, Texas

**PGA Master Professional Brian A. Crowell**, President of Bally's Golf and General Manager of Bally's Golf Links at Ferry Point in Bronx, New York, is the recipient of the 2026 PGA of America Golf Professional of the Year Award. This is the highest honor given annually to a PGA of America Golf Professional. The award represents leadership, strong moral character and a substantial record of service to the Association and the game of golf.

A Member of the PGA of America since 1994, Crowell exemplifies the qualities of a PGA Professional through his dedication to mentorship, education and growing the game. At Bally's, he oversees a team of up to 150 employees, manages an \$11 million budget and is a tireless advocate for the positive power of golf.

Crowell's dedication to the PGA of America is extensive, including serving as a member or chair of 55 Section and 11 national committees. He is a current member of the National PGA Education Committee (2025-2026) and has served on numerous national committees, including as Chairman of the National PGA PR/Communications Committee (2013-2014), Co-Chair of the

National PGA Member Engagement Committee (2015-2016) and as a member of the National PGA Membership Committee (2021-2024). Crowell served as the 26th President of the Metropolitan PGA Section (2016-2018), has been a Met PGA Board member for over 20 years and a Section Officer for more than a decade. He was instrumental in modernizing the Section Board structure and constitution, and in 2020 Crowell became the first PGA Professional to serve as President of the Metropolitan Golf Writers Association.

A champion for access and inclusion, Crowell was instrumental in bringing the APGA Tour to the Bronx for the first time in 2024, and again in 2025 for their MasterCard Tour Championship. Deeply committed to community engagement, Crowell provides free access for local scholastic teams and weekly golf clinics for the Bronx Boys & Girls Clubs and for the Metropolitan Golf Association. He is a coach and host for the Met PGA HOPE League, and he coaches PGA Jr. League teams along with a talented staff at the NYC Parks Foundation.

Crowell is also widely recognized for his contributions to golf media as a television broadcaster for CBS, a longtime host on SiriusXM PGA Tour Radio and an accomplished author of four golf books including: *Teach Yourself Visually: Golf*; *Slice-Free Golf*; *Idiot's Guide: Golf*; and *Visual Quick Tips*. In addition to CBS, Crowell has appeared as a host or analyst for NBC, Golf Channel and USA Network. Over his career, he has covered 14 PGA Championships, 15 Masters Tournaments and has co-hosted "On Course" on SiriusXM PGA Tour Radio with Frank Darby, PGA, for 10 years, sharing passion and expertise with a national audience.

Dedicated to giving back to his community, Crowell and his family founded the Stewart Crowell Foundation, awarding nearly \$40,000 in scholarships to high school seniors. He also created the "Crowell Bowl," a Super Bowl Pool now in its 8<sup>th</sup> year, raising over \$35,000 for the Met PGA Foundation.

Crowell's achievements have been recognized with numerous awards, including the 2024 Met Section Patriot Award, 2020 Met Section Golf Professional of the Year, 2003 Met Section Professional Development Award and 2024 Northeast Callaway Professional of the Year. He has been recognized as a "Top Golf Instructor in the US," a "Top 50 USKids Instructor" and is a PGA Master Professional in Teaching & Coaching (2022).

**PGA Master Professional Bernie Najar**, Director of Instruction at Caves Valley Golf Club in Owings Mills, Maryland, is the recipient of the 2026 PGA of America Teacher & Coach of the Year Award. This honor is presented annually to a PGA of America Golf Professional who has made outstanding contributions to teaching and coaching, player development and the advancement of golf instruction.

A PGA Master Professional in Teaching and Coaching since 2023, Najar is recognized as one of the nation's top instructors. He is ranked among *Golf Digest*'s 50 Best Teachers and has been Maryland's No. 1 instructor since 2011. He is also a *Golf Magazine* Top 100 Teacher and a Golf Range Association of America Top 50 Elite Growth of the Game

**Teaching Professional.** Najar is a four-time recipient of the Middle Atlantic PGA Section Teacher of the Year Award (2004, 2014, 2022, 2023) and a two-time winner of the Section's Professional Development Award (2011, 2012).

Elected to PGA membership in 1998, Najar has served as Director of Instruction at Caves Valley since 2012, building one of the Mid-Atlantic's top player-development centers. His students have won eight of the last 12 Maryland State Junior Boys Championships as well as major club and college tournaments and national events including the U.S. Junior Amateur and Under Armour National Championship. Notable students include Bryan Kim, Kyle Berkshire and Ryan McCormick. Najar's players have earned Division I scholarships, won state and national titles and competed on the PGA Tour, DP World Tour and European Challenge Tour.

A dedicated mentor and educator, Najar has chaired and presented at Section teaching summits for 16 consecutive years and launched the Instructor Resource and Networking Program, providing virtual learning for PGA Professionals and PGA Professional Golf Management students nationwide. His educational events have raised more than \$10,000 for the PGA of America REACH Foundation. He serves on the MAPGA Education and Employment Committees and has been a faculty instructor for the PGM Program.

Najar is a frequent presenter at national and Section teaching summits, including the PGA Teaching & Coaching Summit, *Golf Magazine* Top 100 Summit and TPI World Golf Fitness Summit. He has authored two books: *Speed/Power/Finesse: How to Play the Three Games of Golf* and *The Game: Enjoying Golf On and Off the Course*.

Committed to growing the game, Najar works with juniors in the First Tee Program, supports the Caves Valley Foundation and conducts charity clinics for hospitals and other community organizations across the Baltimore-Washington, D.C. metroplex. He has developed innovative programs for seniors, women and players with disabilities, ensuring golf is accessible and enjoyable for all.

**Sean Palmer, PGA**, Chief Operating Officer of The Union League of Philadelphia, is the recipient of the 2026 PGA of America Golf Executive of the Year Award. The honor recognizes outstanding services in an executive management position, as well as leadership, vision, courage, moral character and a substantial record of service to the Association and the game.

Palmer's career began at age 13 as a caddie and now oversees more than 1,400 employees and seven properties at one of the nation's largest and most respected

private clubs. After graduating from Penn State's PGM program and learning from industry leaders at top clubs, Palmer joined The Union League in 2014 as Head Golf Professional, tasked with launching its first golf property, Torresdale. Starting with no golf members or staff, he led the creation of three successful golf operations, growing golf membership from zero to more than 1,200 and annual golf revenue to more than \$22 million.

In the past decade, Palmer has overseen more than \$64 million in capital projects and played a lead role in the acquisition and development of additional golf properties. Under his leadership, The Union League's membership has grown from 3,200 to 4,700, and annual revenue has increased from \$34 million to \$117 million. As COO, Palmer manages all Union League operations, including golf, hospitality and business functions, with a focus on innovation, culture and team development.

Palmer leads the Union League University, a staff training and mentorship program that has become a model for peer organizations. The program provides golf interns and employees across all departments with a structured curriculum, mentorship and career development opportunities. More than 25 assistant professionals, caddie masters and retail associates have advanced to leadership roles under his guidance.

A champion for community engagement, Palmer has led The Union League in supporting PGA HOPE (Helping Our Patriots Everywhere), hosting the 2022 PGA Works Collegiate Championship and raising more than \$1.4 million for HBCU golf programs. The club is a proud partner of The First Tee of Philadelphia, providing facilities, fundraising support and enrichment programs for youth. Palmer also created the UL Caddie Scholarship Program and has expanded access to golf for juniors, women and families by removing traditional barriers and offering innovative membership and instruction models.

Palmer serves on four Philadelphia PGA Section committees and is active in the PGA Reach mentorship program. He is a frequent speaker at industry conferences and has served on the Penn State PGM Alumni Board for nine years, including as president. His leadership has been recognized with the Philadelphia Section's Professional Development Award (2024), Golf Professional of the Year Award (2021) and Assistant Golf Professional of the Year Award (2014), as well as Penn State's Frank B. Guadagnolo Award for Mentoring Excellence (2021) and Pride of the Lions Alumnus of the Year Award (2019).

*For full bios of Crowell, Najar, Palmer and all 13 PGA of America National Award recipients for 2025, please [click here](#).*

*The formal National Awards ceremony is scheduled for November during the 110th PGA of America Annual Meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada.*

#### **About the PGA of America**

The PGA of America is one of the world's largest sports organizations, composed of more than 30,000 PGA of America Golf Professionals who love the game, are expert coaches, operators and business leaders, and work daily to drive interest, inclusion and participation in the sport. The PGA of America owns and operates numerous championships and events, including major championships for men, women, seniors and the Ryder Cup, one of the world's foremost sporting events. For more information, visit [PGA.com](http://PGA.com) and follow us on [X](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

#### **Media Contacts:**

Jesse Dodson, PGA, PGA of America, [jdodson@pgahq.com](mailto:jdodson@pgahq.com)

Jared Minksi, Mastro Communications, [jared@mastrocomm.com](mailto:jared@mastrocomm.com)