

F E A T U R E P R O F I L E

From the Fairway to the Future: How Brad Sparling Built a College Golf Empire

With 165 players placed in college golf, a 95% success rate, two NCAA championships, a national number one high school ranking, and two new books, the former NCAA Division I coach has seen it all as a player, coach, mentor, parent, and author.

There are people in the world of junior golf who talk about what it takes to reach the next level. And then there are people who have actually done it, lived it, coached it, and raised kids through it. Brad Sparling is one of the rare few who can check every single box.

Over the past 16 years, Sparling has built Play Golf In College (PGIC) into one of the most trusted names in college golf recruiting, teaching, coaching, and mentorship. The numbers speak for themselves: more than 165 players have gone on to play college golf under his guidance, with over 95% of his clients receiving college offers. In an industry full of promises, those results are nearly unheard of.

But the story behind PGIC is what sets Sparling apart from every other service in the country. This isn't someone who read a book about the recruiting process and decided to start a business. This is someone who has lived on every side of the equation, and the journey that brought him here is as remarkable as the results he produces.

It Started on the Course

Sparling's path to coaching royalty didn't follow a straight line. He played college golf at Guilford College, where he developed the competitive foundation that would shape the rest of his career. After graduating, he stepped away from the game and launched a career in business. But the pull of competitive golf never let go.

Eventually, Sparling found his way back to his true passion. He took a position as a golf professional at Duke University Golf Club, working under the legendary Ed Ibarguen.

That experience reignited everything. Being inside a world class golf operation, surrounded by elite players and coaching minds, confirmed what Sparling had suspected all along: coaching was his calling.

Learning from Legends, Building Championships

What followed was one of the most impressive coaching apprenticeships in college golf history. Sparling joined the Duke coaching staff as an assistant for both the men's and women's golf programs, working alongside Hall of Fame coaches Rod Myers and Dan Brooks. He wasn't just watching from the sidelines. He was embedded in championship caliber programs, learning from the best in the business while actively recruiting and developing elite talent.

Over his time at Duke, Sparling rose from assistant to associate head coach to interim head coach. He was part of two NCAA championships and helped build programs that produced 14 All Americans, two National Players of the Year, and an NCAA individual champion. He didn't just contribute to those programs. He helped shape the culture that made them possible.

From Duke, Sparling moved to Ohio State as associate head coach, working under legendary coach Jim Brown, a National Coach of the Year and NCAA championship winner. He brought the same standards and approach to another powerhouse program. At every stop, the pattern was the same: build character first, develop the whole person, and the golf results will follow.

“Brad was a tremendously successful coach at Duke University and The Ohio State University. In my opinion, he was one of the best coaches and recruiters in the country. He knows what college coaches are looking for when they recruit talent.”

— Jim Brown

Ohio State Men's Golf Coach (Retired), National Coach of the Year, NCAA Championship Coach

During those years, Sparling evaluated hundreds of recruits and watched thousands of junior golfers compete. He saw which ones had what it takes and which ones didn't. More importantly, he learned to identify the difference early. And what surprised him most was that the difference between the players who made it and those who didn't was

rarely about talent. It was about character, work ethic, coachability, and the ability to handle adversity without making excuses.

Building a Business on Credibility

In 2009, Sparling founded Play Golf In College. His mission was straightforward: help junior golfers and their families navigate the recruiting process with the same insider knowledge he had gained as a college coach. But PGIC quickly became more than a recruiting service. It evolved into a comprehensive teaching, coaching, mentorship, and consulting business built on relationships and results.

That credibility has fueled PGIC's growth year after year. The 95% success rate isn't a marketing gimmick. It's the result of a proven system built by someone who understands the recruiting landscape inside and out. Sparling doesn't just help families send emails to coaches. He develops individualized plans that position players for the right fit, at the right level, with the right program. And when he picks up the phone on behalf of one of his players, college coaches take the call. Not because of a database. Because of decades of trust built by sending them players who showed up ready.

When Sparling launched PGIC, the endorsement from his former colleagues was immediate. Dan Brooks, the seven time national champion women's golf coach at Duke and NGCA Hall of Famer who Sparling had worked under for years, offered a straightforward assessment of what families could expect.

“Brad Sparling is very familiar with what it takes to get recruited onto a college golf team. His coaching, teaching, and recruiting experience is extensive. He will help your child realize his or her dream of playing golf in college.”

— Dan Brooks

Head Women's Golf Coach, Duke University; Seven-Time National Champion Coach; NGCA Hall of Fame

“I can't imagine a coach more capable and qualified to advise, counsel and help a young golfer choose a university that is an appropriate fit for them.”

— Devon Brouse

"I've placed players at every level of college golf, from the Power Five to Division III," Sparling has said. "The key isn't just getting an offer. It's finding the right situation where the player is going to thrive as a student, an athlete, and a person."

"The best decision I ever made was to call you and have you work with my kids."

— Amy Yu

Mother of Ethan and Hebe Li; Ethan ranked #1 Junior in the Country, age 10

Developing Champions, Not Just Placements

What separates PGIC from every other recruiting service is that Sparling doesn't just place players. He develops them. His background as a college coach and instructor means he works with junior golfers on every dimension of their game: technical skills, mental performance, competitive preparation, and self management. The recruiting piece is the final step in a much larger process.

The results of that development approach are staggering. Sparling has coached 19 individual state high school champions across his career. His players have won AJGA events, Ohio Junior Championships, and state titles at every division level. They've gone on to compete at programs including Duke, Texas, TCU, Ohio State, Georgia, Illinois, Georgetown, Columbia, Harvard, William and Mary, and dozens of others.

"Coach Sparling played a pivotal role during some of the most formative years of my life, not just as a golfer, but as a person. He consistently held a higher belief and standard for me than I knew how to hold for myself. Over our six years together, he helped me elevate my game, strengthen my character, and expand my sense of what I was capable of. He is one of the rare coaches whose influence endures long after junior golf."

— Kristin Jamieson

Ohio Junior Champion, Ohio Women's Amateur Champion, Ohio State University

A Parent Who Gets It

Perhaps the most powerful dimension of Sparling's expertise is his experience as a parent. All three of his children have played Division I golf, and their accomplishments speak volumes. His son Nick was a two time D1 OHSAA Individual State Champion and played at Ohio State and Western Washington. Son Jack was All Ohio and an Academic All American at Miami of Ohio before going on to play professionally. Daughter Emma earned Academic All American honors at Dayton. Sparling hasn't just coached other people's kids through the recruiting process. He's walked through it with his own family, three separate times, at the highest level.

That dual perspective, coach and parent, gives Sparling an empathy and understanding that's hard to replicate. He knows the anxiety that comes with wondering if your kid is good enough. He knows the late nights researching programs and the stress of waiting for coaches to respond. And he knows how to cut through the noise and focus on what actually matters.

"I learned more about junior golf development from raising my own kids than I did from any coaching job," Sparling has written. "I made mistakes. I pushed too hard sometimes and not hard enough other times. That experience made me a better coach for every family I've worked with since."

The Mentorship That Keeps Giving

One of the most telling measures of a coach's impact is what happens to their players long after the lessons end. In Sparling's case, the answer is remarkable. His former players don't just go on to play college golf. They go on to lead.

JD Fletcher first met Sparling in 2009, when his family became one of PGIC's early clients. Under Sparling's guidance, Fletcher developed the habits, discipline, and recruiting strategy that earned him a college golf career. He went on to have a successful collegiate career and eventually transitioned into coaching. Today, Fletcher is the Head Men's Golf Coach at Miami University.

"I owe many of my professional accomplishments and much of the man I have become to Coach Brad Sparling. He was demanding, but never

demeaning. He could challenge you directly, then turn around and lift you up when you needed it most. Coach Sparling changes lives.”

— JD Fletcher

Head Men's Golf Coach, Miami University (OH); Former PGIC Client

Fletcher's story is the ultimate proof of concept. A kid who walked in as a junior golfer dreaming of college golf is now a Division I head coach himself, recruiting and developing the next generation of players using lessons he learned from Sparling. That kind of full circle impact doesn't happen by accident. It happens because the coaching was real, the mentorship was genuine, and the principles were timeless.

“Eight years ago, I started lessons with Coach Spar as an 8th grader dreaming to play college golf at a top D1 school. Yes, I transformed into the golfer I aspired to become: winning the individual state title, capturing three team state titles, and ranking among the top five players in my class in Ohio. But more importantly, I developed as a person and a man. Coach Spar has been one of the most influential people in my life, both on and off the course.”

— Stephen Ma

D2 OHSA Individual State Champion, Washington University in St. Louis

A Return to the Sidelines with Record Breaking Results

In addition to running PGIC, Sparling took on the role of head coach at Dublin Jerome High School in Dublin, Ohio. What happened next has been nothing short of extraordinary.

The team won the Ohio Division I State Championship, broke all time scoring records at the sectional, district, and state tournaments, and finished the year ranked number one in the entire country.

That's not a typo. Number one in the country. For a high school golf program.

Sparling didn't do it by recruiting talent. There is no recruiting in high school. He did it by installing the same system he used at Duke and Ohio State. He built character first and golf skills second. He taught kids how to compete, how to practice with purpose,

and how to handle pressure. The state championship wasn't the beginning. It was the result.

“Brad is an amazing professional. He has top notch golf knowledge, but the biggest thing that stands out in my mind about him is his ability to build culture. He's built an amazing culture for Jerome golf. He's teaching the game the right way. He's teaching them how to play with honor, and he's built a brotherhood among the players, and it's really paid off on the course.”

— Jay Schwanke

Athletic Director, Dublin Jerome High School

“Coach Spar helped me understand that the way you approach golf is the way you should approach life: prepare, probably fail, learn, and grow. His lifetime of golf expertise, along with a genuine passion for helping players flourish, taught people like me how to believe in ourselves. He never avoids the tough conversations, but he's exactly the kind of person you want to have them with.”

— Trevor Binau

2x OHSAA Individual State Champion; William and Mary

Putting It All on Paper

As if coaching, consulting, and parenting through the golf world weren't enough, Sparling has also authored two new books that aim to make his expertise accessible to a wider audience.

"Becoming Elite: A Complete Guide to Junior Golf, College Golf, and Life" is the most comprehensive resource ever written for junior golfers, their parents, and the coaches who guide them. Part One covers the foundational elements of success: character, mindset, habits, discipline, communication, and leadership. Part Two dives deep into every dimension of golf performance, from impact and ball flight to practice structure, mental performance, course management, and two of the most detailed chapters ever written on college golf recruiting. It's both a cover to cover roadmap and a reference manual families will return to for years.

His second book, "Start Here: The Top 50 Mistakes in Junior Golf," takes a different approach. It's a targeted, practical guide designed to help families avoid the most common pitfalls that derail young golfers before they ever get a chance to reach their potential. It covers development, practice, tournament play, parent and child communication, and college recruiting. It's the kind of book you hand to a parent who's just getting started and say, "Read this before you do anything else."

"His approach to the game from a technical level is impressive, but even more so is his ability to see his students' character and ability. This enables him to utilize their potential in making them a better golfer and more importantly a better person."

— Liz Janangelo

LPGA Tour Player; NCAA Women's College Player of the Year; NCAA 1st Team All-American

"Working with Coach Spar has been a truly transforming experience. Not only has it strengthened my play and mental game, but I've also grown as a person, on and off the course. Coach Spar's passion and dedication are unmatched and I couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity to learn from such a hardworking and inspiring person."

— Meadow Tian

Ohio Junior Champion, D1 OHSAA State Champion, 3x AJGA Winner, University of Illinois

A Legacy Built on Every Side of the Game

What makes Brad Sparling's story so compelling isn't any single accomplishment. It's the totality of it. He's been a college golfer at Guilford, a golf professional under Ed Ibarguen, an assistant and associate head coach working alongside Hall of Famers Rod Myers and Dan Brooks at Duke, part of two NCAA championship teams, an associate head coach under Jim Brown at Ohio State, a recruiting consultant with a 95% placement rate across 165 players, a father of three Division I golfers including a two time state champion, an All Ohio Academic All American who turned professional, and an Academic All American daughter, a state championship winning high school coach with the number one team in the country, and now a published author.

There is simply no one else in the country who can claim that combination of experiences. And for the families navigating the complex, stressful, and often confusing world of junior golf and college recruiting, that's exactly the kind of person you want in your corner.

When asked to reflect on his career, Sparling doesn't lead with the championships or the placement numbers. He leads with gratitude.

"More than anything, I just feel so fortunate and blessed to do what I love," Sparling says. "To have had the opportunity to work with so many great players, so many wonderful young men and women and their families over the years. If I've been able to make even a small impact in their journey and in their lives, then it's all been worth it. I've been a player, a coach, a mentor, and a parent to three wonderful kids. I don't take any of that for granted. Not for a second."

"Coach Spar has been a great mentor and has helped me develop as a player and person. There is no one better when it comes to developing players to the Division I level and beyond."

— Brady Barnum

D1 OHSAA State Champion, AJGA Winner, University of Georgia

*For more information about Play Golf In College (PGIC)
and Brad Sparling's books, visit **PlayGolfInCollege.com***