

TEMPLATE FOR WSCG 2022

MATCHING PAR – ADAPTING TO TOUR PROFESSIONAL GOLF

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Introduction

For most professions, career progression follows an orderly, structured process, with entry at the lowest level and gradual upward progression associated with the development of skills, experiences, and knowledge. A reported contributing factor impacting upon successful career development is work readiness. This relates to holding the necessary intellectual abilities, practical abilities, work attitudes and habits that allow for successful career entry and development. Professional sports careers appear to develop unsystematically, however. Moreover, most transitions into professional sports are unsuccessful, leading to short career durations. Explanations for this are limited though, with the importance of work readiness in the making of a professional sports career still to be examined.

Establishing a career as a professional golfer is exceedingly challenging. Attrition rates are alarmingly high, particularly in the preliminary career period. Montague & Milne (2014) claim that more than ninety percent of those that enter professional golf withdraw within three years. Out-with the notional understanding of failing to be competitive, the reasons for this remain unexplored.

This qualitative, interpretive investigation examines the importance of work readiness to successful early career transition in professional golf. It considers the subjective experiences of golfers that transitioned from amateur to professional status. It provides a contextualized athlete perspective of the adaptation process and how athletic and non-athletic factors were considered and managed during transition. Consideration is given also to how work readiness status impacts upon professional golfers' career durations. It draws upon seminal and contemporary work in the areas of career construction, career adaptability, and career transitions in sport.

Methods

An interpretive, narrative inquiry was selected to gain an 'inside view' on lived experiences and to help explore nuance and meanings that participants gained from their tour golf experiences. A series of narrative interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of eight professional golfers that held divergent amateur careers and early professional career transition experiences. Four respondents had constructed successful professional playing careers, having played on the DP World Tour or the erstwhile European Tour continuously for 6 years or more. The other four respondents had withdrawn from competing within three years of entering professional golf. More than 40 hours of interview data was transcribed and analyzed using the Biographic-Narrative Interview Method (BNIM) that enabled exploration and integrative interpretations of psychodynamics and socio-dynamics.

Results and Discussion

Whilst the study did not set out to establish a singular approach towards successful transition into professional golf, results indicated that early career success originated in timing rightly the transition phase in line with the maturity of those in transition. Attainment in elite world level amateur competition for a sustained period is significant, as is the need to hold mastery of a plethora of performance skills required to meet the technical challenges that typical professional golf event venues present. This is important because little opportunity exists outside of competition for novice professionals to work on game improvement during their initial transition into professional golf. Furthermore, holding better understandings of the daily attitudes, behaviors, and routines displayed by successful professional golfers, and how they cope with the continuous and unyielding burdens the game places on them, proves significant in relation to building a successful career. Inevitably, successful career construction in professional golf involves players acknowledging their personality traits, developing their self-concepts, and recognizing and understanding the social contexts they inhabit. Being able to reinforce newly developed insights and learn more about themselves and their capabilities appear important in this regard.

Significance

The dominant themes that emerge from these stories can be used to support professional practice. The findings can be used to better inform players, coaches, service providers, program managers and sports agents on the prerequisites of professional golf and the higher-level demands placed on players as they transition into it from the amateur game. This information can be used to help determine whether players are ready to make a successful entry into professional golf and help practitioners support rookie professional golfers as they adapt to their new competitive environments.

References

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