

Comparing the Practices of US Golf against a Global Model for Integrated Development of Mass and High Performance Sport: Perceptions of Coaches

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Aim

Since the early 1900's the United States dominated both men's and women's Professional Golf Association (PGA) tournament results, but the country has become less successful in the past 30 years due to the rise of European and Asian golfers (Topendsports, 2017). Golf's mass participation rates have decreased in the past 30 years coinciding with overall declines in sport involvement in the US (NSGA, 2016). This study examines the current state of golf against an ideal-type global model for high performance sport development that integrates mass participation (De Bosscher, De Knop, Van Bottenburg & Shibli, 2006; Digel, 2005, Ridpath, 2018). Referencing domestic and global practices particularly from healthy nations successful in golf, the study answers the question: what might be implemented as "best practice" in the US to advance performance and participation structures, processes and programs?

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Over 200 sources of literature on sport delivery systems from 28 countries were analyzed to construct a model of high performance golf integrated with mass participation, comprising of the following three levels: Micro level (operations, processes, and methodologies for development of individual athletes); Meso level (infrastructures, personnel, and services enabling sport programs); and Macro level (socio-economic, cultural, legislative, and organizational).

A questionnaire of 54 statements reflecting desired practices was validated by 12 international experts, including executives from sport governing bodies, academics who published on high performance and sport development, and golf coaches and administrators.

Research Design and Data Analysis

The questionnaire was delivered online to 2,000 US golf coaches, and 102 surveys were fully completed for a response rate of 5.1 percent. Survey respondents represented twenty-four states of the country covering each of the four major geographic areas in the US golf governance structure. Survey instructions asked respondents to think about current structures and systems of golf in the US and to indicate how often the elements and practices were evident, from "never" (1) to "always" (5), on a five-point Likert Scale. They were also asked to elaborate on their responses through open written comments. A content analysis of USA Golf website and organizational documentation was also conducted.

Results and Discussion

The key message from the study was that sufficient public resources have not been available for development of US golf, particularly at the mass participation level. Respondent results reflected dissatisfaction with current practices as all of the mean scores for each element were

below average. Throughout all seven elements the coaches' open responses demonstrated a desire for more golf facilities and funding as well as educational support for the sport. Open responses indicated that coach expertise should be higher across all participant ages and levels. Most of the results and coaches' recommendations are consistent with the study by Project Play (2017) which aims to improve the lives of children through sport and recreation while stressing the challenge of costs and commitment. The report indicates that programs need to be revitalized by improving the quality and affordability of sport offerings through new places to play, and at the same time supporting improved coaching education. A shift in focus from elite golfers to less experienced golfers is recommended. All participants should have access to lessons of teaching professionals. Programs and facilities need to be made more affordable and accepting of golfers from all levels. This echoes details from the Project Play (2017) report that challenges schools to open their fields and facilities in evenings, weekends, and summer months, and to overcome the lack of transportation to these facilities. Junior competitions should consider talent level, handicap, and tournament scores to qualify. Progressive practices include New York City's free swimming tournaments among districts for which all desiring youth are prepared at no charge for coaching and facility use. Partnerships with supporting agencies, particularly public funding could be improved. Again, public-private golf partnerships such as the one developed in New York City and outreach programs such as The First Tee should be offered at more locations. Findings from the study suggested working with IMG-type academies in order to allow more financial flexibility and propose programs accepting financial aid recipients. New York City's practice of connecting mass and elite golf through free youth programs could be adopted across different states and countries as well as other sports.

Conclusion and Implications

The study identified exemplary practices, which can be utilized across the country, to provide more affordable facilities and coaching for all, and help reverse negative 30-year trends in performances of US golfers as well as mass golf participation, therefore positively influencing access to the sport and in turn improving the health of the nation. It is debatable, however, whether expectations of a stronger performance of US golfers reaching performance levels from 30 years ago are reasonable considering the commercialization of the game and its increasing world-wide spread and investment.

References

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