Promoting Performance and Satisfaction Through Quality Golfer-Caddie Relationships

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This study investigated the quality and functions of the golfer-caddie relationship guided by the 3+1Cs model of two-person relationships. An interview schedule was used to generate qualitative data about the quality of the relationship including determinants and outcomes. Twelve independent golfers and caddies participated in the study. One-to-one interviews were conducted and content analysis was used to analyze the obtained data. The qualitative data highlighted that the relationship was a close one and often described as either friendship, marital, working or familial relationship. The relationship was underlined by affective closeness (trust, respect), thoughts of commitment (long-term orientation), behaviors that were complementarity (responsive, receptive), and co-orientated views (similar values). Communication was an active ingredient of the golfer-caddie relationship that kept it current. The findings of the study further supported a link between the quality of the golfer-caddie relationship and performance success.

Keywords: golfer-caddie relationship, closeness, commitment, complementarity, communication, performance

The golfer-caddie relationship has always been at the center of media attention as its subject-matter easily supply splashy headlines, sensational stories, breaking news—all of which can grab an audience’s attention and hold it (see e.g., Carney, 2016; Adler, 2016; Mieczkowski, 2016). The golfer-caddie relationship has been regarded as a key ingredient to performance by many golfers. For example, a journalist from CNN published an article entitled “Inside the mind of a caddy: The bag men behind the world’s top golfers” (Majendie, 2014) where he provided an overview of what the golfer-caddie relationship is like while illustrating the aspects of successful long-term partnerships. The partnership between golfer and caddie was characterized as a marriage such as, understanding how the golfer thinks and feels, what makes them tick, how the caddie is expected to be patient and friendly, managing potential conflict effectively, and even taking different roles including coach and psychologist. In addition to these, emotional (e.g., showing empathy)
and tangible (e.g., sharing information) support were considered important relational aspects that aided the golfer’s performance. The relationship developed was portrayed in such a way that seemed to provide a sound platform from which the golfer and the caddie achieve performance success and experience personal satisfaction. While there is ample anecdotal evidence to highlight the important role of the golfer-caddie relationship, there are only a handful of empirical studies that aim to unravel its content, nature and functions (see e.g., Boardley & Jackson, 2015; Lavallee, Bruce, & Gorely, 2004; Pilgrim, Kremer, & Robertson, in press; Schlereth, 2015).

Familiarity between a golfer and a caddie has been thought to be central in maximizing the functions of the caddie (Bruce, 1999). For example, Steve Williams with both Tiger Woods (considered as the most successful partnership where Woods achieved 13 out 14 major wins with Williams) and Adam Scott, as well as Terry Mundy with Laura Davies and Ian Poulter stood the test of time. Ian Poulter and Terry Mundy are in their 10th year; he said, “We think the same way about the game. He follows the same thought processes as me and has the same work ethic. … We have become good mates. I almost spend more time with him than I do my wife!” (McGarr, 2016, para. 2) Last but not least, both Padraig Harrington and his 10-year caddie Ronan Flood, as well as Fred Couples and his caddie of over 20 years Joe LaCava, are examples of enduring successful golfer-caddie partnerships. Padraig Harrington explained that the relationship with his caddie Ronan Flood was a successful one because they both seem to be “on the same wavelength” (“Quotes from Padraig Harrington and Ronan Flood”, 2014). It doesn’t seem to be coincidental that so many successful golfers have established strong bonds with their caddies. The passage of time allowed familiarity, knowledge and understanding to be developed, promoting stronger connections, as well as mutual trust, respect, openness, assurance and honesty. All of these are relational characteristics of good quality relationships and successful performance partnerships in competitive sport (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003).

The centrality of technical aspects in the successful performance of a golfer, as is for any sport performer, is unquestionable (Bruce, 1999; Pilgrim et al., in press); however, how central is the role of the golfer-caddie relationship in becoming a successful golfer? The above examples of successful golfer-caddie partnerships speak to the potential (and actual) capacity of caddies to help golfers raise their game, and in doing so they become an important dimension to successful performance (see Coate & Toomey, 2014; Swann, Piggott, Crust, Keegan, & Hemmings, 2015). Lavallee et al. (2004) interviewed eight golfers and eight caddies at the Australasian Professional Golfers Association Tour. Interviews revealed that the main roles of a caddie included technical aspects such as carrying the bag, providing information for the shot and psychological aspects, such as assisting the golfer to maintain a good mental state and appropriate levels of focus and attention. In addition, being supportive (e.g., with decision making) and friendly (e.g., by being relaxed and comfortable) were equally important roles. While this study attempted to encapsulate the roles of the caddie, while touching on the importance of relationship issues, it failed to explore in sufficient depth and breadth the content and quality of the relationship, as well as its potential impact on much broader dimensions of performance.

More recently, Boardley and Jackson (2015) explained that efficacy beliefs may have important implications for the relational functioning of golfers and their
caddies. Interviews with eight elite professional golfers and four of their caddies were conducted, revealing that perceptions of efficacy beliefs for oneself, perceptions of efficacy regarding one’s partner, and perceptions of efficacy regarding the dyad were capable of influencing relationship quality and satisfaction. Similarly, Swann et al. (2016) interviewed full-time golfers and found that caddies can have the capacity to influence the confidence of golfers, as well as other important performance-related aspects, such as golfers’ focus and flow. In another study with age-group (14–21 years old) national and international caliber golfers, Nicholls and his colleagues (2005) explained that caddies can be a key source of support, reassurance and encouragement for the young golfers. However, Pilgrim and colleagues (in press) found that golfers did not always feel confident about the quality of the caddies, as they felt they were not always well-prepared for the job. Nonetheless, they concluded that the caddies’ role was instrumental in decision making and psychological conditioning of the young golfer. This research highlights that golfers and caddies can develop a strong bond or connection that fulfils several important functions; however, it fails to explain in some depth the nature and quality of this relationship, while highlighting its associations with determinants and consequences. The 3+1Cs relationship model may provide a theoretical basis from which the golfer-caddie relationships can be described and explained in a systematic and organized manner. Furthermore, it can offer a medium from which the determinants and consequences of this type of relationship are explored.

The 3+1Cs Relationship Model

Based on key assumptions of Kelley and Thibaut’s (1978) interdependence theory, Jowett and colleagues (e.g., Jowett, 2014; Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016) developed a model to describe the content and quality of a key relationship in sport, namely, the coach-athlete relationship. Accordingly, the coach-athlete relationship is defined as a situation where coaches and athletes’ feelings of closeness, thoughts of commitment, and behaviors of complementarity or co-operation are mutually and causally interdependent or co-oriented (Jowett, 2005, 2007). Closeness refers to the emotional ties developed between a coach and an athlete, and is manifested in their levels of mutual trust, care, liking, appreciation and respect. Commitment refers to a coach’s and an athlete’s desire to stay in a close relationship over a period of time. Complementarity refers to the cooperation between the coach and their athletes, which is manifested in their levels of responsiveness, friendliness, easiness, openness, as well as acceptance of the distinct roles they take within the relationship. Co-orientation provides another quality factor of the relationship and captures relationship members’ levels of similarity and understanding. These constructs make the 3+1Cs relationship model.

The quality of the coach-athlete relationship as defined by the 3+1Cs has been found to be associated with athletes and coaches’ motivation (Adie & Jowett, 2010; Jowett, 2008b), passion for sport/coaching (Jowett, Lafrenière, & Vallerand, 2012; Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, & Carbonneau, 2011; Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, Donahue, & Lorimer, 2008), performance (Jowett & Nezlek, 2012), interpersonal conflict (Jowett, 2009), empathy (Jowett, Yang, & Lorimer 2012; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009), personality (Davis & Jowett, 2010), eating disorders (Shanmugam et al., 2013), physical self-concept (Jowett, 2008a), team cohesion (Jowett & Chaundy,
collective efficacy (Jowett, Yang, & Lorimer, 2012; Hampson & Jowett, 2014), and psychological well-being (Felton & Jowett, 2013). Collectively, this research has highlighted the central role of the coach-athlete relationship for successful coaching and performance.

Applying the 3+1 Cs model onto the golfer-caddie relationship would allow a systematic and organized investigation into the quality and functions of this specific type of sport relationship, as well as its determinants and consequences. The application of the 3+1Cs model could provide a comprehensive system that can accurately describe and explain golfers and caddies’ perceptions and experiences of their relationships with one another. The concept of relationships, as is defined, operationalized and measured through the 3+1Cs model, aims to capture the positive aspects of relational exchanges, and therefore it doesn’t contain any negative aspects such as “power”. While power is a characteristic of almost all types of relationships (e.g., teacher-pupil, coach-athlete, parent-child, employer-employee), we are viewing in this article the notion of power through the lenses of quality relationships. Subsequently, power in good quality relationships is not coercive, intimidating and harassing instead power is viewed as a purposeful, functional and fulfilling force. In good quality relationships, where there is mutual trust, respect, appreciation, commitment and collaboration, its members feel empowered, encouraged, inspired, energized, comforted and reassured (see Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016).

In contrast, poor quality relationships (whatever their type) are usually plagued by unresolved conflict, struggles, misunderstandings and disagreements, preventing its members from feeling empowered; and instead they feel discouraged, uninspired, dejected and depressed (Wachsmuth, Jowett, & Harwood, 2017). Although our study did not overtly explore negative relational aspects, poor quality relationships or relationships that lack quality may indicate weaknesses that constrain relationship members to effectively operate within the golfer-caddie relationship. While there is some recent research that highlights that golfers and caddies can develop a strong bond or connection that fulfils several important functions (Boardley & Jackson, 2015; Pilgrim et al., in press; Swann et al., 2016), it fails to explain in a systematic way the content and quality, as well as functions of this relationship. Thus, exploring what a quality golfer-caddie relationship is should be a priority for the sport of golf and golfers’ performance development, as well as for caddies who work or aspire to work in a high performance environment. Employing an established relationship model (see Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016), the current study aims to address the dearth of research, provide scientific answers to important practical questions and pave the way for more organized research in this important area of golf performance.

Method

Participants

Six professional/semiprofessional golfers and six caddies participated in the study. Golfers and caddies were not working together. Golfers’ age ranged from 19 to 47 years old (M = 27.33, SD = 10.67), while caddies’ age ranged from 20 to 72 years old (M = 38.50, SD = 19.87). Golfers’ relationship with their caddie ranged from a one-off single partnership lasting a tournament up to 7 years. Caddies’
relationship with their current golfer ranged from two weeks to two years. The average length of the golfers playing competitive golf was 13.5 years ($SD = 11.20$), and the average length of the caddies being a caddie was 12.45 years ($SD= 25.30$). The highest competition that the golfers and caddies participated in was The Open Championship. There were 10 partnerships that both golfers and caddies originated from the same country and 2 partnerships where its members originated from different countries. Only two partnerships were of the same gender (male-male); the remaining twelve partnerships were of different gender (female-male). The golfers interviewed indicated that they were currently working with an older caddie. In contrast, caddies interviewed reported that three of them worked with an older golfer and three with a younger golfer.

**Procedure**

Golf organizations were contacted, including the Professional Golfers Association and The Caddie Association, to generate interest in the study and help recruit participants. Participants who expressed an interest in the study were initially briefed highlighting the aims of the study and criteria for participation. The aims of the study were explained to all prospective participants. The main criterion for participation for golfers was that they played golf at a high level of performance and had or currently have a caddie in their team; and for caddies was that they worked or currently work for a golfer whose level of performance is of a high standard (i.e., professional/semiprofessional). The interviews were audio-taped with the permission of the participants. Participants were reassured that the content of the interviews would be kept confidential and the interview recordings would be used for the purpose of transcription. It was also clarified that the information supplied would not be attributed to them personally. All twelve participants were interviewed separately in one-to-one interviews, either by telephone or face-to-face; and interviews were conducted in English. The duration of the interviews ranged from twenty minutes to one hour for each participant. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim immediately following their completion. The golfers and caddies who participated in the study were independent from one another, in that they did not have an existing performance relationship with each other. The study obtained the approval of the Ethics Committee of the researchers’ University before data collection.

**Instrument**

An interview schedule was developed to examine the content and functions of the golfer-caddie relationship (see Appendix for interview schedule). The questions aimed to assess the quality of the relationship (4Cs), important determinants (e.g., personality, communication, empathy), and consequences (e.g., performance, confidence, motivation, wellbeing). The aim of the interview schedule was to permit participants to reveal as adequately as possible the complexity of relationship experiences and performance-related aspects of the relationship established. During the interview, participants had an opportunity to answer 10 main questions (e.g., How would you describe your relationship with your caddie? In what ways does this golfer-caddie relationship contribute to your performance and success?). Probes
and follow-up questions were used as appropriate and necessary. Their purpose was to enable participants to express their views as completely and coherently as possible and thus reveal an in-depth understanding of their subjective relational and performance experiences. An interview schedule for golfer and a corresponding interview schedule for caddie were used, and a copy of each is available upon request by the first author. At the end of the interview, participants had the chance to elaborate or clarify anything they considered relevant.

**Data Analysis**

Content analysis was conducted. According to Smith (2000), content analysis aims to organize the obtained information in a coding system. Content analysis was used to reduce a large body of qualitative information to a smaller and more manageable form of representation through the use of codes or categories. The coding system employed considered three elements (a) coding unit defined, (b) categories of classification, and (c) rules for applying the system. The coding unit reflected a theme. A theme was subsequently defined as a single expressed idea (e.g., themes of performance). A theme was expressed in a phrase or one or more sentences. The theme formed the coding unit when each theme is identified and then classified. There were 4 main themes: Relationship Development, Relationship Quality, Relationship Maintenance, Relationship and Performance link. The Relationship Development category dealt with issues surrounding the manner to which golfer and caddie started working together (e.g., how/why did they get together). The Relationship Quality category contained information about the content and substance of the partnership (e.g., what are its main ingredients or relational properties). The Relationship Maintenance category aimed to highlight issues pertaining to the ways the relationship was kept up to date, in-check, healthy, harmonious and stable. The Relationship and Performance-related aspects category included information that indicated how the relationship was linked to performance, motivation, confidence and other such aspects. As part of the content analysis, qualitative information was transformed into quantitative information by recording category frequencies. Thus, the presence or absence of specified information was recorded. The data were coded into the main categories and subcategories by both researchers. Both investigators were familiar with the coding system and its coding rules; they discussed the coding decisions, especially where there was disagreement. There were no unresolved discrepancies, demonstrating the objectivity of the system used (see Smith, 2000).

**Results**

The transcribed qualitative data were categorized into 4 main categories: Relationship Development, Relationship Quality, Relationship Maintenance, and Relationship-Performance Link.

**Relationship Development**

From the golfers interviewed, the majority of them (67%; 4) felt that they had to quickly develop and adapt to a new relationship within a couple of weeks for a major sporting event. However, it appeared that it takes different amounts of
time for different golfers to adapt to a new golfer-caddie relationship, learn each other’s ways and adjust to it. While only one caddie had to strike a professional partnership with his/her golfer straight away, the other four (67%) caddies had a little longer time (up to a week) to develop a relationship before a major sporting event. Apart from one caddie, all the others felt that a week is sufficient to get to know the golfer, his/her idiosyncrasies, personality, likes, dislikes, preferences, and to start building a level of trust. Despite this rather brief encounter, all of the golfers and almost all the caddies (83%; 5) acknowledged that the best players tended to have longer relationships with their caddie. Most of the golfers (67%; 4) explained that longer relationships reflect the development of strong relational ties and understanding (e.g., thinking alike, being on the same wavelength, reading each other thoughts), both of which are important on the golf course. For example a golfer said, “Last year I took a caddie which is just local where I was playing…this is good from a technical point of view because they know the course really well, but they don’t know me really well. It is important to find a caddie that knows you and understands you….I prefer to have someone familiar…..My regular caddie is a friend but also a good golfer, he would give me some good technical advice and I trust him….I’d love to have a long relationship with my caddie. It’s like a marriage, a happy marriage.” (G1) It was argued by some of the participants (3 golfers and 2 caddies) that these successful relationships may stand the test of time either because of personality matching (e.g., “these players have found the right person”) or because “they have all the ingredients necessary for a successful partnership much like one finds in a happy marriage”.

One caddie said that caddying experience can accelerate/promote the time needed to develop a professional relationship that works. Maybe the fact that over half of the caddies were former golfers themselves (recognized the demands, pressure points) may also contribute to the development of an effective relationship, even when time was not on their side. In addition, 2 of the caddies of the golfers interviewed were family members. This familial ties help establish quickly and positive relationships. The other 4 golfers met their caddies through friends.

**Relationship Quality**

All participants, apart from one, experienced a “very good” golfer-caddie relationship. Only one golfer described the relationship with his/her caddie as “about average”. There was a general sense of care and honesty. The relationship contained such main relational properties as closeness (i.e., trust, liking, appreciation and respect), commitment (i.e., long-term orientations toward each other), complementarity (i.e., responsiveness, friendliness, easiness, openness as well as acceptance of the distinct roles each takes within the relationship), and co-orientation (i.e., similarity, shared knowledge and understanding). For example, one of the caddies illustrated how complementarity manifested itself on the golf course, “We are going out on the golf course; we discuss what’s going on or is likely to happen. I know her golf game and what’s best and sometimes I think I make better decisions….she sometimes accept that but other times doesn’t, but we never fall out. She doesn’t blame me, because at the end of the day, it’s her decision.” (C5). Here is how another caddie explained the level of closeness experienced, “We are friends, I like her – I don’t work for people I don’t like. ..We trust each other, she knows I am reliable, and
I know she always tries her best, doesn’t always play well but at least she tries well.” (C2). A golfer similarly said, “Yes, it has to be a dependable partnership. You need to trust them to give you a correct number, because we don’t usually do it ourselves. Essentially, we are trusting someone else to get the yardage correct…. We are very similar in many ways, from how we view the world to how we view a certain type of shots…Our roles are set at the beginning; this would help to know whether they want to work for you, but also it would help ensure that we are clear who does what” (G6). And another said “you’ve got to be working well together. You are out here some days for 8 or 9 hours, so it’s long time especially if you don’t get on well with each other…. you are out there on the golf course for 5 hours, you’ve got to have the trust, to be able to understand, respect…The relationship is based on trust, dependability, reliability…and accepting mistakes” (G5). And another said “it’s important to have someone who is like-minded, and believing in you. My aspirations are very high. I want to be an elite, international player. I am only at the beginning of my success. Generally people who caddie for me want to be part of my success. If I do well, they do well; if I don’t do well, they don’t do well. So I want to do well and they want to do well.” (G1)

The golfer who described his relationship as average explained that there was lack of commitment and a lack of a sense of permanency. Moreover, a caddie’s with his/her golfer was not characterized by co-orientation as it seemed to lack a common goal (the caddie had higher performance goals than the golfer). Half of the golfers (50%) interviewed thought that the most important ingredient to an ideal relationship is mutual knowledge and understanding, and half of the caddies (50%) thought that trust was the most important ingredient to an ideal relationship.

All of the golfers (100%) thought that golfer-caddie relationships can be compared with friendship and family relations, in that its members like to spend time together and get along with one another, have similar interests and common goals. For example, a golfer said, “he’s like a friend ” (G2) and “you have to be friends, if you don’t like each other, you cannot work together…you need to like one another and be friendly otherwise it would be too hard to tell [him/her] what you like and what you don’t like…” (G4)

Some of caddies responded that they were genuinely good friends. For example a caddie stated, “….we have the same sense of humour. I went to her wedding and her daughter’s christening, so we are good friends as well.” (C2) However, one caddie viewed the partnership with his/her golfer as an employer-employee relationship. One golfer pointed out that the golfer and the caddie should be “friends” only on the golf course (i.e., relationship boundaries), not off the course; while one caddie thought it was friendship off the golf course but it was professional relationship on the golf course. When participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with the relationship quality using a rating scale from 1 nonsatisfactory to 4 moderately satisfactory to 10 extremely satisfactory, the average satisfaction for all participants (100%) was 8 ranging from 6 to 10.

**Relationship Maintenance**

Like all relationships people develop, the golfer-caddie relationship is not immune to conflict (disagreements, misunderstandings, arguments). The majority of the golfers (67%; 4) and all of the caddies (100%; 6) explained that disagreements and
arguments usually revolved around golf strategies (e.g., club selection and decisions for shots). However, most of the golfers (83%; 5) and caddies (83%; 5) did not deal with conflict frequently. One caddie explained that conflict or arguments are better dealt off the course as they can affect performance.

All of the golfers and caddies interviewed treated communication in the golfer-caddie relationship as vital, not only for managing and dealing potential conflict, but also for strengthening the relationship ties as well as effectiveness and success of the relationship. They talked with their caddies about everything including golf and nongolf related topics. Most of the golfers stressed the importance of nongolf related topics, as this would take their mind off golf between shots when in the golf course. All the golfers had open and honest communication with their caddie, and it was important for a caddie to be empathic and understanding of the golfers they work with while they are patient, tolerant, open and flexible. It was also important for the golfer to know the caddie and to be appreciative of their point of view. For example a golfer explained, “When you come off the course, sometimes you might say I didn’t like what you did on this, I didn’t like what you said. It’s a constant learning process. Again, that goes back to the communication, you’ve got to communicate with each other. You try to make it better for the next time that you go out….Communication is one of the biggest factors of a successful relationship” (G5).

Correspondingly, the caddies thought that communication that was open and honest and concerned both golf and nongolf matters helped develop better and more functional working relationships. All of the caddies interviewed explained that they had open and honest communication with their golfers. Communication helped the caddies ensure that their relationship with their golfers remained. They highlighted that good communication skills, working hard and showing their commitment, their desire to co-operate and respect, as well as a communicated level of appreciation from their golfers enhanced the present and facilitated the future status of the relationship.

**Relationship—Performance Link**

Most of the golfers (83%; 5 golfers) thought that the golfer-caddie relationship contributed to their performance and success in that their caddie was central in energizing, motivating and supporting them. All 6 (100%) golfers highlighted that a caddie’s role included keeping the player calm, relaxed, focused, happy and confident, while 2 golfers explained that caddies can help manage the players’ pressure, and another 2 felt that technical support was an important component of what caddies can offer. However, one of them stressed the point that it is important that caddies appreciate when it is the right time/place to offer their emotional, mental and/or technical support and help the golfer to be focused. The relationship-performance link was most evident when 4 of the golfers explained that employing a caddie became important to them when they started setting higher performance goals and reaching professional status. For example, a golfer said, “My goals these days are to become an international golfer. You know for me, it’s not just me playing golf, I have a team around me, my team is my coach, my caddie, my psychologist, my wife and family who support me. When I started setting my goals higher it became apparent that I needed a caddie” (G1). Golfers explained that they sought out a
caddie who can “take away the burdens and by doing so, I can focus on shots (2 golfers), “keep me calm and happy (2 golfers), and echo their thoughts and feelings (1 golfer), as well as “get technical support” (1 golfer).

All 6 (100%) caddies thought it was important to energize, motivate and calm the golfer, instill the golfer with confidence, comfort and encourage the golfer if/when needed. The majority of the caddies described that poor attitude on the part of the caddie (e.g., being negative, making the golfer angry, argumentative) could lead to an apparent deterioration of golfers’ performance. A good, trusting, harmonious and stable partnership was described as beneficial for golfers as it can fill them with confidence, a sense of purpose, direction and determination all of which are likely to enhance the golfer’s performance. For example, a caddie stated, “If you’ve got a good relationship with the golfer, you’ve got the opportunity to learn. I am quite open to learning new thing…. It’s got to be in a safe environment. Sometimes learning involves trying different things, taking calculated risks, making decisions you never made before”. One caddie took a different view when he/she responded that “it is possible for the caddie to help the golfer make money even in the absence of a good quality relationship”.

The relationship-performance link was most evident when all caddies (100%) interviewed responded that all top level performance golfers require a caddie in their team because caddies can provide practical assistance (e.g., carrying the bag and giving yardage information), technical assistance (e.g., helping with decisions for shots when needed by the golfer) and emotional and mental support. A caddie stated “When the golfer really wants to do well, win, that’s when the caddie can be a real benefit, because that’s when the golfer becomes more stressed and have pressure on….The relationship contributes 25%-30%. When the golfer is stressed, the caddie is very important, that’s when they [caddies] earn their money” (C1). And another caddie explained “The relationship can contribute quite a lot to one’s performance. If you are with the wrong person, it can destroy you. If you are with the right person, it can make you better. The percentage can vary, every performance day depends on how she feels.” (C5)

The majority of golfers and caddies (67%) felt that performance accomplishments can promote the relational bonds between golfers and caddies—strengthen the relationship and its longevity. Most of the caddies (67%; 4) and most of the golfers (67%; 4) thought that the relationship could be different in higher levels of competition (e.g., golfer-caddie relationships are generally better, caddies are more professional and give golfers better technical support). For example a golfer said, “In bigger events, a lot of those players have their long-term caddies; they’ve been working with them for at least 6 months. Whereas here a lot of the golfers have caddies for a week or two weeks, so the relationship is much shorter. If you’ve been together longer, you know each other better and may perform better as a result” (G3). Interestingly, two golfers clarified that golfer-caddie relationships are important regardless of one’s level of competition/performance—especially if the goal is to improve one’s game and do their best in events. Finally, two caddies stressed the point that the role and significance of a caddie in a team is likely to depend on the golfer, and thus striking a relationship based on mutual understanding—knowing, understanding each other—can help develop a relationship that meets the needs and expectations of golfers. Here is what a golfer said, “When people caddie for me, they know that I like to make the decisions, so they don’t…kind of…once I
decided what I am going to do, they let me do it, and if it works, good, if it doesn’t work, then it’s fine, it’s accepted, ‘cause in golf, nothing is perfect, some days are good, and some days are bad. My caddies, they quickly understand. I am the boss and I make the decisions.” (G1).

**Discussion**

The present study aimed to explore the views of golfers and caddies about the content and functions of the golfer-caddie relationship, its determinants (communication) and outcomes (performance). The reports of the twelve interviewed participants (6 golfers and 6 caddies) focused on what the golfer-caddie relationship is like (quality and content) and highlighted that while this relationship formed “at work”, it contained elements that can readily be captured in friendship and familial relations. The relationship was underlined by such properties as mutual trust, respect, appreciation, interpersonal liking, emotional caring and support (closeness), a desire to maintain a strong and close bond, a sense of reliance and dependence that is long-term (commitment), as well as co-operation and collaboration, where being responsive to each other’s efforts, comfortable in each other’s presence as well assuming and fulfilling their separate roles efficiently and effectively formed the main characteristics of complementarity. The reports also highlighted that golfers and caddies valued shared knowledge and understanding; for example, having common goals, pulling toward the same direction and generally viewing the world in a similar light (co-orientation). Collectively, the reports and narratives used indicated that both caddies and golfers had generally good quality relationships, and that these relationships were satisfying, rewarding and purposeful.

These findings highlighted that the 3+1Cs model provides a comprehensive system that can accurately organize the data while making sense of golfers and caddies’ perceptions and experiences about their relationships with one another. Thus the model of the 3+1Cs appears to be a sound medium to represent and explain the content and quality of the golfer-caddie relationship. The constructs comprising the 3+1Cs model, and their relational properties therein (e.g., trust, respect, reliance, loyalty, admiration, appreciation, assurance, co-operation, collaboration), are also consistent with other studies that have examined the role and functions of caddies and the golfer-caddie relationship (e.g., Bruce, 1999; Lavalette et al., 2004; Pilgrim et al., in press; Schlereth, 2015). Nonetheless, the 3+1Cs model captured the positive aspects of relationship and so negative aspects were not directly explored. Future research should continue exploring the positive relational aspects and their associations with golfers and caddies’ performance and wellbeing outcomes but also negative relational aspects such as power issues and struggles as well as conflict, disagreements and misunderstandings (see Wachsmuth et al., 2017). Both positive and negative aspects of relationships would supply a holistic perspective of the complex interpersonal dynamics that take place within the golfer-caddie relationship.

Communication was viewed by the participants as an active ingredient that maintains the relationship valid and current. Open channels of communication enabled both members of the relationship to adjust their ways and make themselves more easily understood. Communication allowed them to take the other person’s perspective and start viewing the world in ways that perhaps it was not viewed
before. It provided them with a better understanding of expectations, demands and opportunities. The participants of this study highlighted that “getting to know one another”, “reading the other as an open book”, “viewing the world in similar ways”, “understanding the same things”, and “being on the same wavelength” were key aspects of their relationship. Communication is essentially a process that connected two different people with different personalities, likes and dislikes, and preferences. It enabled them to develop shared knowledge and understanding and created the dyad’s common ground. This is an important element in successful relationships and is consistent with studies conducted within the context of the coach-athlete relationship (see e.g., Rhind & Jowett, 2011, 2012).

One issue that seems important to discuss is the emphasis that was placed by participants of this study on the longevity of the relationship; an issue that seems to be also highlighted anecdotally (e.g., McGarr, 2016) and empirically (e.g., Bruce, 1999) in the relevant literature. It would appear that both caddies and golfers felt that the length of good quality relationships can aid their purpose, which is to enhance performance, help the golfer reach their potential and bring about success. What is paradoxical with this belief, however, is that in practical terms this was not occurring within the relationships of the participants examined. Most of the participants (83%) interviewed had short-term relationships despite the fact that all of the golfers and caddies (100%) interviewed operated at high levels of performance. What is also paradoxical with this belief is that most of the participants felt that communication was a vital factor in developing knowledge and understanding (co-orientation) yet their short term relationships could have hampered the development of shared knowledge and understanding at an optimal level. Pilgrim et al. (in press) found that caddies were thought by golfers to be less well-prepared for the demands of the job. This may render relationship longevity impractical. Moreover, there may be other factors that constrain the development of long-term quality golfer-caddie relationships, such as financial factors.

From a practical viewpoint, golfers and caddies need to be aware that good quality and successful relationships take a great deal of time, effort and energy to be developed. It is not coincidental that the majority of successful golfers enjoy strong and enduring ties with their caddies (see e.g., Padraig Harrington and his 10 years caddie Ronan Flood; Fred Couples and his 20 years caddie Joe LaCava). This finding is consistent with coach-athlete relationship research as it has shown that developing strong ties that last over time associate with higher level of perceived competence, confidence and satisfaction with performance (Jowett, 2008a, 2009; Jowett & Nezlek, 2012). From an empirical point of view, future research should consider the temporal patterning of the nature and quality of the golfer-caddie relationship. Mapping the developmental trajectory of the golfer-caddie relationship may supply information about why and how “familiarity” is positive (e.g., how long does it take to reach optimal closeness and commitment as well as shared knowledge and understanding; what does it take to develop longer-term good quality relationships that are successful?) and when “familiarity” is negative if at all (e.g., could golfers and caddies may become overfamiliar and how does this impact quality relationships, interactions and performance outcomes?).

The link between the golfer-caddie relationship quality and performance success was evidenced across all interviews conducted. Generally, all of the participants expressed that at the highest level of performance where the pressure for
success is potentially at its highest, the golfer-caddie relationship is stronger, better, longer and more professional. Nonetheless, they all also agreed that the relationship, while stronger and better at the highest level of performance, it can be central regardless of one’s level of performance. It was explained that the relationship would seem critical for everyone who cares to raise their standard of play. Caddies are thought instrumental in the services they offer; while a participant stipulated that caddies can make a difference of up to 30% or more in one’s performance game, all of the participants explained that caddies’ contribution to performance success may vary depending on many parameters including the situation (e.g., type of competition, weather conditions) and the golfer (e.g., technical, psychological, physical state). This is significant as it highlights that caddies’ contribution may be central especially at certain times, for example, when the golfer feels less in control or more vulnerable. It is these certain times that caddies may need to be perceptive and sensitive as they can make the most difference in a player’s game. The association between the golfer-caddie relationship and golfers’ performance has been evidenced in a handful of recent studies (Boardley & Jackson, 2015; Pilgrim et al., in press; Schlereth, 2015). These findings also echo the experiences of Padraig Harrington as described what happened in The Open Championship, “He (Ronan) won me The Open in 2007 (Carnoustie). On the Sunday I hit my tee shot in the water on 18 and was despondent, I then hit my third shot into the water again and felt like I’d lost. I had to walk about 150 yards for my next shot and Ronan was talking to me….In that moment of time I do believe Ronan made the difference – with any other caddie I would have thought I had lost The Open but my caddie believed in me.”

Although, there is growing evidence that underlines the significant role two-person relationships play in sport (e.g., Jowett & Wylleman, 2006; Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016), the golfer-caddie relationship research is still extremely limited. This study aimed to uncover further knowledge and understanding in a phenomenon that until recently was unexplored. The results of this study help clarify and extend the complexity and challenges associated with the golfer-caddie relationship quality and its functions. Further research is needed and is currently on-going. The generated knowledge should be incorporated in golfer and caddie educational programs and good practice guides by emphasizing the way in which the golfer-caddie relationship can be improved, enhanced and if needed repaired.

References


Quotes from Padraig Harrington and Ronan Flood. (2014). *Interview at Royal Liverpool 10/06/14*. UK: IMG.


Appendix

Interview Schedule

For Golfers

1. Preliminary questions to develop rapport (age, gender, nationality, past experience, performance level)
2. What is the role of the caddie in the world of golf?
3. How important is a caddie in a golfer’s team?
4. When did you start thinking of the possibility of adding a caddie to your team?
5. What were your own motivations and reasons for employing a caddie?
6. How did you meet your current or most recent caddie?
7. How would you describe your relationship with your caddie? (prompts used as appropriate)
8. Do you feel you have similar opinions with your caddie on how you view golf and the world?
9. How did your relationship with your caddie develop and evolve?
10. What are you looking for in a caddie? (e.g., personality, knowledge)
11. What is an ideal caddie?
12. What is an ideal (successful and effective) golfer-caddie relationship?
13. Can you rate your relationship with your caddie from not ideal at all 1 to very ideal 10?
14. How much does this golfer-caddie relationship contribute to your performance and success?
15. Putting success aside, what is the caddie’s role in energising, motivating and calming the golfer, instilling golfer with confidence, and comforting and encouraging the golfer?
16. What aspects of the golfer-caddie relationship are likely to affect your performance (positive and negatively)? (prompts used as appropriate)
17. Do you think the golfer-caddie relationship is likely to be different in different levels of competition or different types of tour and in which way?
18. How do you think caddies care for their golfer’s success and wellbeing?
19. How important is communication in the golfer-caddie relationship?
20. What topics are commonly discussed between you? (prompts used as appropriate)
21. What do you do to ensure that your relationship with your caddie is in check, strong, effective, and successful?
22. People compare the golfer-caddie relationship to friendship, what is your view?
23. How long does it take for a caddie/golfer to adapt properly to a new relationship and learn each other’s idiosyncrasies?
24. How do you deal with conflict, disagreements and arguments with your caddie?
25. What areas are you likely to disagree with your caddie? (prompts used as appropriate)
26. The best players tend to have a longer relationship with their caddie. What are your thoughts on this and why?
27. What aspects are likely to influence the quality of the golfer-caddie relationship? (golfers/caddies personality, knowledge, communication, ability to relate)
28. Finally, would you like to add anything that we perhaps did not touch upon in the interview, and is there anything you’d like to elaborate more?

For Caddies

1. Preliminary questions to develop rapport (age, gender, nationality, past & present experiences, performance level)
2. What is the role of the caddie in the world of golf?
3. How important is a caddie in a golfer’s team?
4. What are your motivations as a caddie?
5. How did you meet your current or most recent golfer?
6. How would you describe your relationship with your golfer? (prompts used as appropriate)
7. Do you feel you have similar opinions with your golfer on how you view golf and the world?
8. How did your relationship with your golfer develop and evolve?
9. What do you think golfers look for in a caddie? (e.g., personality, knowledge
10. What is an ideal caddie for a golfer?
11. What is an ideal golfer for a caddie?
12. What is an ideal (successful and effective) golfer-caddie relationship?
13. Can you rate your relationship with your golfer from not ideal at all 1 to very ideal 10?
14. How much does this golfer-caddie relationship contribute to your golfer’s performance and success?
15. Putting Success aside, what is the caddie’s role in energising, motivating and calming the golfer, instilling with confidence, and comforting and encouraging the golfer?
16. What aspects of the golfer-caddie relationship are likely to affect your golfer’s performance (positive and negatively)?
17. How does your relationship with your golfer help you to be a better caddie? How does your relationship with your golfer help your golfer to be a successful golfer?
18. Do you think the golfer-caddie relationship is likely to be different in different levels of competition or different types of tour and in which way?
19. How important is communication in the golfer-caddie relationship?
20. What topics are you likely to talk about frequently? (prompts used as appropriate)

21. What do you do to ensure that your relationship with your golfer is in check, strong, effective, and successful?

22. People compare the golfer-caddie relationship to a friendship, what is your view?

23. How long does it take for a caddie/golfer to adapt properly to a new relationship and learn each other’s idiosyncrasies?

24. How do you deal with conflict, disagreements and arguments with your golfer?

25. What areas are you likely to disagree with your golfers? (prompts used as appropriate)

26. The best players tend to have a longer relationship with their caddie. What are your thoughts on this and why?

27. What aspects are likely to influence the quality of the golfer-caddie relationship?

28. Would you like to add anything that we perhaps did not touch upon in the interview, and is there anything you’d like to elaborate more?