

A Global Game With Global Players: Diminishing Contrasts and Increasing Varieties in the Working Lives of Professional Golfers

John Fry, Thomas Davies, Adam G. Smith,
David J. Barron, and Chris Yiannaki
Myerscough College

This paper draws on interviews with 20 touring professional golfers to examine the influence of the global spread of European tournaments on players' approaches to the game. Results indicate that a variety of processes, such as attempts to standardize course set up and typography of host country, have led to a diminishing of contrasts and, at the same time, increasing varieties in the way that golfers approach the game. Players are constrained to develop similar types of play to each other, with a greater emphasis on hitting long accurate shots, while also being required to manage constant varieties of grass types, climates, and altitudes. The theory of diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties is used to help explain the growing homogenization of players' games while also recognizing the variety alongside this, both in terms of playing style, at different levels, and styles of courses, at all levels.

Keywords: professional golf, globalization, playing conditions, diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties, figurational sociology

The world is becoming an increasingly similar place. No matter where you are you can often access similar clothes, food, television programs, and sports. This increasingly "global culture" has been described as the "process of movement away from a world of discrete nation states and their social systems, cultural patterns, political systems, and economies" (Houlihan, 2008, p. 554). Similarly, Robertson (1992, p. 8) refers to both the "compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole". We are experiencing a greater intensity of connections between people and places due to increasing transnational flows of people, ideas, information, commodities and capital (Maguire, 1999). Virtually every aspect of society – such as an individual's living conditions, belief systems, knowledge base and responses – is increasingly affected by connections with other

groups of people, both near and far away (Maguire, 2011a). Along with pop music, the Internet, multinationals and the environmental movement, sport is regarded as a key agent in globalization. Indeed, Dunning (1999, p. 1) argued that no other “activities have served so regularly to as foci of simultaneous common interest and concern to so many people all over the world” as sport. As Maguire (2011b, p. 101) states “the global reach of sport is supported by a range of evidence”.

The appeal of sport generally has increased significantly during the twentieth century, becoming worldwide in reach with the growth of international sporting bodies, competitions, migratory flows of competitors, and globally extensive forms of media representation which has resulted in a global sporting system connecting people throughout the world (Maguire, 1999; Ritzer & Atalay, 2010; Van Bottenburg, 2001). Although the unofficial title of the ‘world game’ is generally given to Association Football, perhaps it should really belong to golf (Stoddart, 2006). The spread of golf has been vast and courses are found everywhere in the world from North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Middle East, Asia, and Australasia. In short, there are very few places in the world that do not have a golf course or people who play golf. For this reason, Stoddart (2006, p. 848) argues that:

Golf represents perhaps the quintessential case study of the inherent relationship between sport, economy, society and environment present in many contemporary national and transnational settings. Yet the ramifications of that relationship remain unexamined by academic analysts and unremarked upon by the golf industry itself. Not only does the golfing subculture itself offer rich ground for sociological investigation but so also does its intricate relationship with the wider social framework that supports it.

As such, golf represents an important case study from which to analyze the lives of professional sportspeople specifically, and other highly skilled migrants more generally.

As sports have become more professionalized and international in scope, it is perhaps unsurprising that athletes have been increasingly likely to migrate from one country to another (Fry & Bloyce, 2015; Maguire & Falcous, 2011; Roderick, 2013; Shin & Nam, 2004; Williams et al., 2013). In a global economy, the movement of workers between countries is not unusual. Sport is, of course, not immune from this with the migration of athletes from one country to another for a variety of reasons including financial compensation, better coaching, equipment, and support services (Thibault, 2009). In golf, there are a number of professional tours that operate across various parts of the world. A complex and shifting set of interdependencies contour the migrant trails of professional golfers. Traditionally, Europe’s most successful golfers have migrated to the United States Professional Golf Association (USPGA) tour not only for higher purses but also for competition against players who tend to be ranked higher in the world rankings, which, if relatively successful, would enable them to gain even more ranking points¹. Entry into the top 50 in the world rankings automatically qualifies players for the four major championships (Masters, US Open, British Open, and USPGA Championship) and the four world golf championship events (Accenture Match Play Championship, Cadillac Championship, Bridgestone Invitational, and HSBC Champions). Player migration to the USPGA tour has left the European Professional Golfers

Association (EPGA) tour under pressure from corporate sponsors to attract players back (Donegan, 2009). As a result, the EPGA tour has been constrained to identify alternative sources of funding, which increasingly comes from countries outside of their traditional remit of Europe.

The 1982 Tunisian Open was the first event on the EPGA schedule held outside of Europe and in 1984 the tour became independent of the Professional Golfers Association (PGA). Such a move was borne out of a desire, by some, to develop the game commercially and expand the tour globally. By 2014 more than half of the tour itinerary is staged outside of Europe, and includes events in the USA, South Africa, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Malaysia, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia (EPGA, 2014). The remaining events that are staged within Europe still require players to undertake significant travel. Indeed it could be argued that golfers lead more nomadic lives than most sportspeople, with constantly shifting workplaces and places of residence (Maguire, 2011a). Extensive travel on a weekly basis remains a crucial aspect of any professional golfer's career. A professional based in England, for example, would be obliged to travel overseas to play throughout the majority of the year. Only six events from 51 on the 2014 schedule were staged in England, Scotland, or Wales. Furthermore, two of these events—The BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth and The Open Championship at Royal Liverpool—were not open to the EPGA tour players unless they were in the world's top 50 or qualified through specific events.

Sport labor migration is not without problems. As touring golfers undertake their work in various locations they experience varying degrees of exploitation, dislocation, and cultural adjustment. It has been argued that constant moving between places of different cultures requires certain immigrants to develop new types of flexible personal controls, dispositions, and means of orientation (Maguire, 2011a; Stead & Maguire, 2000). Such individuals are required to adjust and adapt quickly when moving internationally. One aspect of this includes the actual technical changes sport migrants are required to undertake. For example, Maguire (2011b) argues that association football has spread globally but is played in a variety of styles. In other words, if a footballer from England played in a league abroad they would be constrained to adapt the way they play to fit in with the dominant types of play adopted elsewhere. These requirements to change given varieties in working environments are; however, even more acute in golf. Professionals might be expected to cope with variety on an almost weekly basis—that is, they are expected to play in tournaments in which the terrain and environmental conditions, among other things, are different week in and week out throughout the tour. The central research objective of this paper; therefore, is to examine the effect of this global flow of EPGA tournaments on players' approaches to the game. More specifically the paper aims to, firstly, identify the differences in playing conditions players are exposed to and, secondly, the ways and extent to which players attempt to manage these differences. In doing so, this will specifically draw upon the figurational concept of diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties.

Much of the existing research on sports migration tends to be based on secondary sources, such as newspaper analysis and quantitative surveys, and not direct interviews with the athletes themselves and thus, fails to adequately grasp the issues and problems they may face. The views and experiences of professional sportspeople regarding the consequences of globalization are; therefore, a largely neglected and

under-explored area (Maguire & Falcous, 2011; Roderick, 2013; Webster, Lambert, & Beziudenhout, 2008). As Roderick (2013, p.399) has suggested:

To date there has been little discussion by social scientists of the possible latent consequences of such high levels of circulation from a sports work perspective. Globalisation theorists have been preoccupied with examinations of routes and pathways, rather than the effects of such volumes of flows on the social selves of those embedded in this industry.

Undoubtedly a key reason behind the relatively sparse amount of academic literature examining the experiences of professional sportspeople is that many are public figures who acquire varying degrees of celebrity status and they do not willingly or easily grant permission for so called 'unknowns' to interview them for extended periods (Roderick, 2006). As such, qualitative data of this type is rare in golf in particular and academic research into elite sport generally. Professional sportspeople are mostly interviewed by journalists; therefore, as with other celebrities, they often confine themselves to prepared sound bites and generalized comments (Roderick, 2006). They rarely, if ever, grant interviews in which they respond openly to searching questions for a prolonged period of time. As far as can be reasonably ascertained, there is no sociologically orientated academic literature concerning the workplace experiences of male professional golfers, though Douglas and colleagues have examined female golfers' careers from a psychological perspective (see Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2008, 2009).

To fully explore the research objectives pertinent to this study, it is important to engage in empirically grounded theoretical research (Bloyce, 2004; Bryman, 2012). To this end, figurational sociology provided a framework to facilitate the examination of technical aspects of professional golfers' working lives. More specifically, theoretical standpoints on globalization have often adopted a 'broad-brush' approach; however, a figurational standpoint avoids absolutist, monocausal, unidirectional explanations. Globalization processes can be more adequately conceptualized as very long-term processes and involve broad, multifaceted elements (Bloyce & Murphy, 2008). No single causal factor predominates, rather processes are the result of a complex interweaving of intended and unintended sets of actions of groups of people (Maguire, 1999). Studies on migration should be viewed in terms of the wider network which people are inescapably enmeshed. In doing so, this approach emphasizes the unplanned nature of human figurations. That is, the constraining and enabling nature of human relations in line with the fluctuating distribution of power. Even those perceived as the most powerful individuals and groups, such as professional golfers, are strictly limited because of the constraints in which they are located.

The critiques regarding homogeneity and heterogeneity in globalization processes, we argue, have been more adequately explained by Maguire's (1999) usage of Elias's concept of 'diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties'. Such notions enable the researcher to steer between the excesses of the homogeneity thesis and the simplicities of the voluntarist position that assumes individuals freely choose and cultures freely contribute, in equal measure, to global cultural diversity (Maguire, 1999). Rather, as contrasts between cultures have diminished there has also been an increase in varieties of habitus. The spread of sports has resulted in

diminishing contrasts by placing pressure on other sports; however, their diffusion has also led them to be played in different ways. Some ideological notions of globalization equate the term with 'homogenization'; however, local meanings and patterning of sport are influenced by globalization processes in quite complex ways. More specifically, it appears that while the contrasts between cultures may have diminished substantially, there has also been an increase in the variety of cultures (Maguire, 1999). It is to an overview of the methods that we shall now turn to justify a suitable academic foundation to more adequately answer the key research question under scrutiny here: how has the global flow of EPGA tournaments affected professionals' approaches to the game?

Method

The primary data informing the discursive analysis in this argument is taken from a set of semistructured interviews with 20 male professional golfers, that were carried out as part of a broader research project investigating the experiences of professional golfers on tour. Players were aged between 22 and 56 years and selected on their ability to provide insight into tournament golf across the three tiers of the EPGA tour, in addition to three players who had operated 'above' this. In other words, the sample included a group of players above the EPGA tour whose world ranking meant they had a greater ability to pick and choose events and played what arguably could be termed a 'world tour' consisting of a combination of EPGA, USPGA, and other tournaments sanctioned by various worldwide organizations. This said, even the players in this elite band had a significant amount of experience playing EPGA tour events at various stages of their careers. Players were selected; therefore, on their ability to provide an insight across the entire spectrum of touring professional golf. Each player has taken a unique and often complex route to his current situation and virtually all players have experience of playing more than one tour.

The first interviewees were recruited from personal contacts which stemmed from the researchers' employment at the International Institute for Golf Education (IIGE). There are, unsurprisingly, numerous problems associated with access to professional sportspeople for research purposes (Elliott & Weedon, 2011; Roderick, 2006; Stead & Maguire, 2000). However, the researchers' employment helped ensure the industry links required to access to a readymade network of player managers who represented golf professionals suitable for initial interviews. Players who were interviewed first were then asked to recommend others who they thought would also be happy to undertake an interview. This facilitated a snowball sample consisting of players who responded favorably and fitted the required sampling characteristics explained earlier. In other words, the purposive sampling frame resulted in a sample that was, in one sense, also a convenience snowball sample insofar as it consisted of those golfers who responded to the interview requests (Green, 2000). Interviewees were either contacted directly through e-mail, or through their management team, and asked to be involved in the project. Interviews were conducted between April 2012 and July 2013 and took place in a private area of a golf club selected by the participant or at the researchers' institution. A suitable quiet location was available for interviewing at each venue. Furthermore, allowing the participant to select a venue of their choice helped make them feel at

ease with the overall process. Interviews were recorded and participants told that the process could be stopped at any time, for any reason. Participants were given a guarantee that all results would remain confidential. As a result, players are referred to as golfer A, B, C etc. and potentially identifiable material, such as exact years on respective tours, have been removed.

Interviews were used to attempt to “generate data which gives authentic insights into people’s experiences” (Miller & Glassner, 2001, p. 126). In this case, semi-structured interviews were adopted primarily so interviewees could elaborate without the rigidity of structured interviewing. This methodology allowed us to investigate the ways in which professional golfers viewed their social world (Bryman, 2012). The interviews were designed to encourage players to discuss their views about the reality of playing an international schedule of golf tournaments. In particular, they aimed to identify the differences in playing conditions players are exposed to and the ways and extent to which players attempt to manage these differences. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, common themes identified, and analyzed from a figurational sociological standpoint. Nvivo computer package was used to code interview transcripts and organize themes. The main themes of the analysis are: diminishing contrasts between courses and players’ ‘core’ games; increasing varieties between courses; and players’ ability to manage such varieties. We will begin by analyzing diminishing contrasts in worldwide golf and the role of a player’s ‘core’ game.

Diminishing Contrasts and a Player’s “Core” Game

The spread of EPGA tournaments worldwide is the result of a long and complex process which has led to a diminishing of contrasts between golf courses while, at the same time, also an increase in variety between. Some features of courses are increasingly similar regardless of where in the world they are located while other features show evidence of increasing differences. This is a result, in part, of the EPGA tournament committee attempts to standardize courses on the schedule by setting criterion pertaining to: length of grass on the ‘fairway’ and ‘rough’ areas; width of fairways; hole distances; and ball speed on greens. Indeed, it is clear that the EPGA play a key role in golf course set up. More specifically, and to draw upon the figurational concept of a ‘quest for excitement’, it is argued that the EPGA have imposed criteria on how a course should be set up to increase the skill level of top players and help make the sport a greater source of excitement for spectators. The EPGA; therefore, play an active role in the diminishing of contrasts between courses worldwide even despite the fact that the resultant course is outside of their complete control. The figurational approach eschews the notion that the spread or diffusion of styles of behavior – in this case the styles of golf courses and ways and means to approach playing them – depends solely on the activities of established groups, such as the EPGA tournament committee. As Maguire (1999, p. 215) states “monocausal and unidirectional analyses simply do not capture what can be observed in the study of local-global processes”. Indeed, the key point to highlight here is that the style of any course is not a sole consequence of either the intentions of the EPGA, environmental and climatic reasons, or any other factors for that matter, but rather an unintended outcome of all parties involved. The styles of courses which make up the schedule on the EPGA tour, therefore, are evidence

of the inability of any particular group to retain total control over the golfer figuration. Rather a long term multicausal process has occurred involving a number of competing processes in a complex power geometry including, among others: the EPGA tournament committee; professional golfers themselves; green keepers, and typography of the host country, which means the resultant golf course is outside the complete control of any one group. The main focus of this paper is not to provide a detailed explanation as to the reasons which contribute to an increasing variety of types of courses on the EPGA tour; however, but rather to analyze how players approach navigating these varieties.

At the same time as changes in styles of golf courses there has been an interdependent process whereby professional golfers have adapted their approaches to playing the game. Players interviewed for this study frequently spoke about how they changed central facets of their game to play anywhere. Virtually all interviewees felt that aspects of their game were 'universal' no matter where the course was – that is, players have had to develop a universal game, on the one hand, and, on the other, have to adapt to subtle differences offered worldwide. There is evidence of a homogenization of playing styles which are required to be robust and adaptable, particularly at the highest levels. Concentrating firstly on the diminishing of contrasts between players' games, Golfer B, who has experience playing on EPGA tour, summed this up as:

To play well all around the world is [to have] no destructive shots. If you can get it in play and putt well then that's the key ... the way the rough is you have to get it in play ... then you're just hitting 3, 4, 5 and 6 irons all day long.

Similarly, Golfer K, an experienced EPGA tour player, explained "long off the tee with no spin and good with your irons gets you around most places". Referred to by some interviewees as their 'core game', there is a greater emphasis placed on hitting longer, more accurate shots and the ability to consistently hole putts on increasingly complex greens. This is a result, in part, of attempts by the EPGA tournament committee to standardize course setup across all the events on the schedule. Golf courses can be set up in a variety of ways – for example, some may have wider fairways and shorter rough where the ball can be hit wayward with little penalty. Alternatively, courses can be set up with increased emphasis on playing shorter more accurate shots rather than long hitting. Courses on the main EPGA tour tend to be set up to a greater level of difficulty higher up the hierarchy of tours, and interviewees identified the main differences as: longer distance holes, narrower fairways, deeper rough, and more complex greens. This was clearly articulated by Golfer J, an EPGA tour player, who compared courses on EPGA tour to those on lower tours:

The golf courses are set out really different ... they are nowhere near as tight and not quite as long [on lower tours]. They are a bit of a watered down version ... the courses are that bit tougher and that much harder [on EPGA tour] ... on main tour the fairways are more penal if you hit it off-line.

The differences between how courses are set up at different levels of competition, identified by players in this study, indicates a greater variety between styles of play required on the main tour when compared with tours lower down the golfing

hierarchy—which are, ironically, aiming to prepare players for the higher levels of competition. More specifically, the courses on lower tours are not as difficult which, when combined with a very top heavy prize breakdown, fostered an ‘aggressive’ approach to their style of play. As Golfer B said, “you’ve got to go for it”, and there was general agreement that there is less focus on consistency and accuracy of shots and scoring than would be required at a higher level, where making the cut is considered of greater importance (Fry, Bloyce, & Pritchard, 2014). Golfer J continued to suggest that varieties in styles of play are:

One of the main reasons why you see so many of the lads doing really well on Challenge Tour but not quite so well on main tour ... a lot of ‘fringe’ players get on tour [then] lose [their] card, go back to Challenge Tour, get a top 10 and get back on [main] tour again. They just seem to do that their whole career ... it’s because the courses are that bit tougher and that much harder.

This example neatly highlights the complexity of the golfing figuration and the failure of any one party to have direct control of the overall outcome. In other words, tours that are in fact supposed to be a developmental opportunity that aims to provide a route to a higher level actually foster an increasing variety in style of play, which differs from those required on the higher tours for where the players are meant to be preparing.

The experiences outlined here by professional golfers, such as pressures to hit the ball further, indicate the effect of cultural factors on the physiology and technological aspects of golf performance. Nevertheless, although there was clearly an overwhelming view that to be successful golfers ‘needed to have a ‘core’ game, there was also a sense among interviewees that they were also constrained to have to adapt aspects of their game to suit the subtle varieties offered by courses on an international schedule of events. As Golfer Q suggested, “you can play anywhere if your game is adaptable”. Indeed some players did identify subtle varieties between courses in the United Kingdom (UK), such as differences between traditional ‘links’ and ‘parkland’ style courses. For example, Golfer H identified the importance of considering the “weather and ground conditions which would dictate how you had to play. Whether you had the links course on windy days or parkland courses all soft and wet”. Furthermore, there is also evidence that some UK courses have been influenced by courses in other countries, such as those on ‘American style’ golf complexes (Kirsch, 2009). This said, evidence from this study with professional golfers suggest that varieties in courses are even more acute further afield, which is particularly compounded given the EPGA tour continue to encompass more and more countries and, as such, this paper will maintain a focus on events outside of Europe. We will now examine the variations that were deemed to be required to pursue a relatively successful life as a touring professional.

Varieties in Grass Types

Results from this study indicate that players are exposed to a variety of grass types because of the pressures to play an international schedule of events. As Golfer R, a former official world golf ranking top 10 player and major winner, said:

If you are a professional golfer it is likely that you spend time on almost every type of turf and if you haven't then you will have spent time on every kind of turf quite quickly ... what happens is you have favourite grasses and grasses that you don't really care for ... There is some turf that players just don't like.

Varieties in grass are the result of differences in climate between countries and, generally, the larger the difference in climate the larger the variety in grass also (Raturi, Islam, Carroll, & Hill, 2005). Grasses are typically grouped by 'cold season' and 'warm season' climates. Cold season grasses tend to be fine in texture with smaller width and size of grass blade, whereas warm season grasses are more coarse with larger blades (Raturi et al., 2005). Although some interviewees identified small varieties in grass between events staged in Europe, virtually all interviewees identified significant differences at events in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Australia and North America. During the 2013 season there were 26 EPGA tournaments held across these areas and players are often required to move from playing in one continent to another in quick succession (EPGA, 2014). Professional golfers; therefore, are required to adapt to different playing conditions quickly. Indeed in some cases this may be another burden on golfers who already lead highly pressurized nomadic lives. To make the cut, and therefore make a living out of the game, players at all levels are being constrained to play in a variety of conditions.

Due to the network of relationships in which golfers are enmeshed, professionals are constrained to adapt their game depending on the location of an event to combat the different ways the ball will move. Referring to playing events in India, for example, Golfer P, a Challenge tour player stated:

The grass was different, it was really firm and if you went in the semi-rough by a foot then you couldn't keep it [the ball] on the green. It [the ball] would just go miles or nowhere.

In a similar vein to tennis – which is played on grass, clay, and hard court surfaces – grasses worldwide have a variety of characteristics and require different types of play to be adopted. In tennis there are, more-or-less, 'seasons' that relate to the specific surfaces, such as a 'clay court season' where a disproportionate number of tournaments will be held on clay courts. Similarly, there are groups of golf tournaments scheduled in certain parts of the world; however, this only applies to a limited number of events and a player might be expected to play on different types of courses week in week out for the majority of the itinerary. This is likely to have a significant impact on the day-to-day aspects of golfers' working lives. In this respect, there was agreement among the interviewees that grass type impacts on players' games in two main ways: firstly, it makes it more difficult to achieve an effective connection between the ball and the club at impact position and, secondly, the ball moves differently when it hits the ground after the shot has been executed. It is clear from the results of this study that differences in grass type impacted on players' approaches to the game mainly with shots played on and around the putting green. Golfer K, an EPGA tour player, rather explicitly compares the greens in South Africa, Asia, and India to "Shredded Wheat", adding "the thing it ... gets you on is short game when you play the different grasses, definitely short game

and chipping around the greens, with the different grasses it reacts so much different". It is to an explanation of varieties in grass on the green and how this effects players' technique development and shot selection that this paper will now turn.

Historically, 'greens' in warm arid countries were not the color green but brown (Leithead, 2004). They were made from an oil and sand based compound with no blades of grass. Professional tournament golf is no longer played on 'browns'; however, there is still a wide variety of grass types on greens from one country to another. In particular, it is the 'grain' of the grass on the green that can affect how the ball will move (Lodge, 2011). As Golfer D, who has experience playing a cross section of EPGA tours, said the "only problem [with the EPGA tour] is you play on very grainy greens and ... they are so very different ... you have to change the way you chip and putt to be able to suit that". The grain, also known as 'nap', refers to the direction the grass grows and is more pronounced at courses outside of Europe, particularly those with warmer climates (Lodge, 2011). Golfer G, who has experience playing events in Asia, explained:

You need to experiment with the grain. Watching people is quite funny ... people from England going over to Asia for the first time chipping into the grain like they do back home in the UK and it [the ball] just stops! They don't understand just the basics of the grain.

Virtually all participants in this study stated that the grain alters the way the ball will move. More specifically, when executing a chip or putt shot with the direction of the grain pointing toward the player, referred to by interviewees as 'into the grain', the general consensus was that the ball will stop quicker as a result of increased friction. The opposite is true with a shot where the direction of the grain is pointing away from the player, referred to as 'down the grain', and as a result the ball will roll further.

Given that a 'putt' shot maintains contact with the ground for the majority of the duration of the shot, the grain can have an even greater influence on the outcome than a chip shot which involves the ball traveling partway through the air and partway on the ground. Interviewees for this study identified that when executing a putt the direction of the grain will influence the path of the ball and importance was placed on selecting the correct direction, known as 'line' to hit the ball. As Golfer K stated "putting out there on the grasses is line reading, it's all about line reading". For example, if the direction of the grain is pointing from right to left or left to right it can influence the path of the ball in the same direction. Furthermore, this may have implications for the training environments adopted by aspiring players and coaches, which may in fact limit the varieties of experiences players are exposed to and thus affect their ability to adapt. The amount of influence the grain will have depends on the type of grass, which is greater in warmer climates given the blade thickness, and can make it difficult for players to predict where the ball will stop in the ultimate aim of getting it close to, or in, the hole. Golfer C, an experienced EPGA tour player, described the impact of grain on shot direction:

It [the grain] can take over. A putt into the grain going down hill would actually be slow. And the grain could enable the ball to break a different way. A left to right putt could go right to left because of the grain.

Golfer C is referring to cases where grain direction can have a greater influence on the direction of the ball than the slope of the ground.

Variety in grain is one of the largest factors players are constrained to consider during an international schedule of events; however, some players also identified differences in thickness of grass. Akin to considerations with grain, grass thickness has an impact on the type of shot required. This point is summed up by Golfer G who said “around the greens in Asia the rough is really thick and completely different grass”. Thick grass can wrap around the club head causing inconsistencies in connection with the ball during the execution of the shot. The thicker the grass the greater likelihood it will have an impact on the golf shot. To combat effects of thick grass on the intended shot, some interviewees identified the need to hit the ball with greater force. As Golfer G suggested “you have to be very aggressive with it. I think it’s a lot more hit it in the air”. Similarly, Golfer P suggested “you might play a few shots differently out of the rough and round the greens, you might play it a bit more like a bunker shot around the greens”. Golfers G and P are referring to a process whereby hitting the ball with greater force reduces the likelihood the club head will be moved by thick grass. However, an unintended outcome of using greater force is increased shot distance, so a club with a higher degree of loft is required to transfer increased force into height of shot rather than distance. As a result interviewees favored a type of shot where the ball travels higher in the air and stops quicker, over the same distance, rather than a shot which travels lower and rolls once it lands on the green. Indeed it could be argued that players who engage in training programs aimed at producing more efficient force production could be at a greater advantage given the growing international schedule of events.

It is clear from the data that variety in grass thickness mostly affects shorter shots played around the green; however, some players also identified how they must consider grass type when hitting longer shots too. Some courses were described by interviewees as ‘lush’ with thick heavy grass, others as ‘long, hard, running courses’, and there are, of course, numerous playing surfaces in between. When asked about the impact of playing courses with a variety of different grasses, players referred to how their approach to the game changed to consider club selection and type of shot. Golfer H, an EPGA tour player for 13 years, suggested:

The ground conditions dictate how the ball will run and you need to adapt to that to judge the distances. You can go from one week where it is very soft and the ball will land and stop very quickly to the next where ... it would run. Sometimes it’s club selection. You could change the clubs you take.

On courses with thick grass interviewees generally favored using woods, as opposed to irons, on longer shots. The result of opting to use a wood is the ball travels higher and further in the air thus reducing the amount of contact with the thick grass and the impact this has on reducing the distance the ball runs. The opposite is true when referring to hard running, courses where interviewees favored irons and low shots so the ball would roll longer distances on the ground. All of these different varieties of ways in which a golfer’s game needs to be adapted, and often on a weekly basis, does affect their ability to make a living given the often small margins between success and failure in professional golf. Indeed, making a living from professional golf is particularly difficult outside the highest levels given the

top-heavy nature of prize money breakdown that means unless players finish highly many are actually playing at a financial loss (Fry, Bloyce, & Pritchard, 2014). Thus the ability to cope with the issues that accompany an increasingly global itinerary becomes of even greater importance just to make a living let alone being successful. While this involves considerations regarding equipment and types of shot required, some players also identified technical changes they made in regard to their golf swing. We will, now, examine the technical changes that players identified.

The Technical Aspects of an “International” Golf Game

Given the variability and inconsistency of grass type worldwide, virtually all interviewees in this study identified the increased importance of consistency regarding the point where the club hits the ball when a shot is executed – known as the ‘strike’. Some interviewees explained how they decided to make technical changes to their golf swing in an attempt to increase the consistency of their strike given international differences in grass type. It is worth quoting Golfer J at length regarding this point:

Over the years I’ve changed bits and bobs with my golf swing to make it a bit more what you would call ‘international’. I used to compress it a lot and get on top of it and squeeze it a little bit but when you get into different grasses you tend to start hitting a few ‘flyers’ from the fairways. A lot of the fairways when you go to Asia are quite long grass but flat along the deck, quite thick bladed stuff. If you start trapping it you tend to get the club to move through [the ground] differently ... You have got to shallow it out because ... you are going to get more of the ball and less of the turf and a better strike. Your spin rate is going to be a lot more consistent.

Golfer J is referring to a process whereby because he is constrained to ply his trade on an international scale, he has changed his swing technique to reduce the amount of contact the club makes with the ground during the execution of a shot and thus attempting to limit the extent to which varieties in grass will impact on the shot played. It is also likely that players in other sports, such as tennis, are required to make technical changes to their equipment given the different surfaces which they are playing on. In golf, the grooves across the club face enable spin to be imparted on the ball and achieve greater consistency; however, if grass gets caught between the grooves and the ball this will reduce the amount of control a player will have on the direction of the shot. This is referred to by Golfer J in the above quote as a ‘flyer’. Similarly, Golfer P identified changes to his technique as a result of different grasses:

In India the grasses were thick but dry. So if you got it [the grass] in between the ball and the clubface it [the ball] did what it wanted. You didn’t really have control but over here [in the UK] you knew what it was going to do ... I ended up playing more of like a chip and run rather than trying to fly it on to the green ... because it was so hard and bouncy.

Golfer P identified that the thick grass limited his ability to control the ball and thus opted to hit a short shot and allow to roll onto the green rather than hit it fully

to the green. Golfer P is a Challenge tour player and this quote is also representative of the fact that lower ranked players are often required to play in a greater variety of places—and thus, this actually impacts on their ability to be consistent—so further stacks the odds against them being able to climb up the ranks. This, in turn, makes their whole lives on tour even more of a gamble, as it were. Furthermore, making such changes is likely not to be an easy process given the well-rehearsed nature of a golf swing.

There are also differences in ground type below the grass itself and Golfer J has attempted to develop a technique which aims to reduce the distance the club penetrates into the ground thus reducing the impact of varieties in grass *and* ground types. In turn, Golfer J, among others, argued that this actually increases their likelihood of being successful on tour as their game is likely to be better suited to playing in a variety of conditions worldwide. Golfer J explained that he made technical swing changes regarding short chip shots played around the green to make his game more “international”:

With chipping I’ve been working really hard on getting the first and second bounce closer together ... [the green] is so variable, particularly with different grains, it becomes really difficult. You’ve just got to be able to be as consistent in the pace the ball goes on the green with the same amount of spin then you’ve got a better chance when you move to different places that the ball reacts similar.

Golfer J is referring to the process of reducing the amount of spin imparted on the ball in an attempt to increase the likelihood that the shot will move similarly even despite the variability of greens. This neatly illustrates the complexity of the network of relations that professional golfers are enmeshed as they are increasingly constrained to consider how grass types impact on their approaches to the game. Interviewees also identified the interdependent factors of climate and altitude, which will form discussions in the remainder of this paper.

Varieties in Climate and Altitude

Virtually all players interviewed for this study discussed the extent to which they were constrained to consider climate and altitude in their approaches to the game. As Golfer C said, “you have to cope with that climate stuff, and that climate stuff is difficult”. Varieties in temperature, for example, are a key factor players are constrained to consider with interviewees noting that playing golf became more difficult in countries which were much hotter, or colder, than where they were used to playing. Varieties in temperature can impact on the distance a golf ball will travel on execution of a shot. As Golfer M explained, in Marrakech, Morocco, the ball can travel 15 yards further depending on what time of the day it is:

With it being in the desert it was very cold early on but ... by the time it’s warmed up the ball can travel a good 15 yards further so you have to adjust during your round.

Golfer M is specifically referring to the nontraditional environments which tournament golf is beginning to be played on. The first golf courses were built on land which ‘links’ mainland Scotland with the sea (Collinson & Hoskin, 1994;

Stirk, 1987). This land was unsuitable for farming or building but ideal for hitting a golf ball around the natural contours such as sand dunes (Collinson & Hoskin, 1994). From there golf has spread globally and the land is now being changed to accommodate golf courses (Stoddart, 2006). An example of this is the fact that tournament golf is now staged in the desert which has no natural grass, yet accommodates a sport which is played on grass. The increasing variety of climates means professional golfers have to undertake their work in environments where playing golf becomes problematic and brings with it its own set of issues, such as different distances the ball will travel. Similarly, Golfer J explained that in certain parts of the world the ball will travel longer distances through the air and in others less so. He suggested that players “go to America and bomb it on ... you hit it, it stays in the air ages and carries miles” and, alternatively, “other places like Holland if it’s a cold day it [the ball] just goes nowhere”.

The distance a ball travels also varies dependent on the altitude of the course in question, which is yet more variance that a golfer must consider in pursuing their career. Due to the effects of air pressure and density, the ball travels longer distances at high altitudes and shorter distances at low altitudes. Golfer G described the effect of high altitude when playing in South Africa:

I played in the Johannesburg Open and ... the ball goes further when the air is thinner ... [You need to] work out how far the ball will go. It’s not the same clubbing.

This quote is representative of the general viewpoint of the constraints players are faced with in their everyday working lives. Players interviewed for this study engaged in a variety of methods to combat the effect of altitude on their game. A common technique, explained by Golfer G, is to “use metres as if they were yards and it converts pretty much as easy as that” given that the ball will travel approximately 10% further through the air in South Africa, for example, and the difference between meters and yards is approximately 10% also. In some places the ball will travel even greater distances and in others places considerably less, thus players are constrained to attempt to judge the effects of altitude on their game in the often short amount of time they have during practice time leading up to an event.

Players interviewed for this study also commented on changes they made to their swing technique given the varieties in climate and altitude. The most common method was to change their shot trajectory. For example, some interviewees suggested that lower air density at high altitudes meant hitting a higher shot would result in the ball traveling further. As Golfer B stated “it’s unbelievable the way you can play at altitude ... Just strike it and get it a bit higher and it will go”. To maximize the distance a ball travels at altitude interviewees favored hitting a high shot and the opposite was true when playing on ‘links’ style courses at sea level. Similarly, Golfer P explained that trajectory control was not only important on long shots but also short shots:

I tried to hit it [the ball] a bit lower because if you hit it in the air it stayed in the air ... especially with wedges ... Anything from 80-150 yards you had to knock it down otherwise you were straight over the green.

It is clear from the interviewees of this study that players are constrained to adapt their approaches to the game given differences in altitude experienced if they are to even hope to enjoy a successful life on tour.

Conclusion

According to Maguire (1999), globalization is an unevenly distributed process where the contrasts between cultures worldwide has diminished while, at the same time, seeing an increase in the varieties available. Similarly, this paper has argued that the global flow of golf, and EPGA tournaments in particular, is best understood as a balance and blend between diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties. The 1982 Tunisian Open was the first non-European event and in 2013 more than half of the EPGA itinerary was staged outside Europe (EPGA, 2014). Indeed, the EPGA tournament committee has attempted to standardize courses worldwide; however, a number of competing processes, such as the host country's weather and climate, means that the condition of the courses is outside of the EPGA's complete control. The main focus of this paper; however, has not been on explanations for the variety of courses on the EPGA tour but rather on the effects of this on players' approaches to the game. Indeed for a professional, the golf course itself represents nothing more than their workplace and this paper has highlighted that the golfers are required to cope with the pressures of a workplace that is constantly in flux. A golfer's livelihood depends on their ability to be successful on tour, a central part of which is their ability to make sense of their changing workplace. In summary, it is argued that:

- The growing complexity of professional golf means players are required to develop a game that is both robust and adaptable to many different courses across an increasing number of countries to be successful. The golfers' workplace is becoming more complex and challenging as a result of global and commercial processes and this is leading to a homogenization of a 'standard' core game among the world's best golfers. More specifically, there is a process toward diminishing contrasts between players' approaches to golf whereby they are constrained to develop similar games to each other, with more emphasis on hitting long, accurate shots and good putting while, at the same time, a combined process toward increasing variety of game whereby players are required to manage differences in playing conditions from one week to the next.
- Players are required to manage differences in grass type, climate, and altitude by making changes in their technique, types of shots they play, course management, and preparation. Players must also learn to cope and adapt quickly to maintain their status on tour and are constrained to make sense of the increasingly global schedule and varieties in workplace in which they find themselves. The result of a number of unintended outcomes of the personal decisions and actions of players, in addition to actions of others in the golfing figuration, have led to a number of approaches to coping with a variety of conditions. The result is players are constrained to develop a 'global game'

which can cope with the increasing variety of courses played to be successful as a touring professional. As players are exposed to such varieties, increasing importance has been placed on their ability to manage differences in playing conditions.

- While it is argued that there is a greater homogenization of playing styles, on the one hand, there is also evidence of a greater variety between players too. For example, the EPGA tour do not encourage the same type and style of play lower down the hierarchy of tours which are, ultimately, aiming to prepare the players for the higher level of competition. As such, there is not strictly a homogenization of playing styles but rather some subtle and some less subtle differences across the variety of levels of the game.

The theory of diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties; therefore, has helped to explain the growing homogenization of players' games while also recognizing that there is variety alongside this, both in terms of playing style, at different levels, and styles of courses, at all levels. Indeed, viewing professional golf through a sociological lens and highlighting the importance of a 'global game' is of upmost importance to those hoping to have sustained and consistent success on the major golf tours. Both the players themselves and those who advise them should note the common experiences of golfers highlighted in this paper. Overall, the key point is that the work of highly skilled transient migrants is fundamentally the same wherever they are; however, working in alien environments means that it is likely they will have to adapt how they approach the technical aspects of their work.

Note

1. The Official Golf World Ranking is a rolling two-year system whereby points are awarded according to the players' finishing positions related to the strength of the field in the competitions in which they play. Furthermore, different competitions reward different amounts of points.

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