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Golf league recruitment and retention

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Golf League Recruitment and Retention



Report prepared by:
Melissa J. Davies, Ph.D.
2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Purpose** The purpose of this research was two-fold. First, the research sought to establish the primary information sources utilized by golf league participants prior to joining the league to determine participant recruitment strategies. The second purpose was to explore the relationship between participants' basic psychological need satisfaction and the type of motivation the participant felt toward the golf league. Together, information obtained from this study provides golf associations and golf directors in Canada valuable information that could aid in designing golf leagues, which both attract and retain members. Increased participation can help to provide consistent financial gains for the golf clubs, while also promoting physical activity endeavors across the lifespan.
- Protocol** Data collection took place from January 22nd to March 2nd, 2014 using an online survey protocol. The survey was comprised of scales measuring information source preferences, basic need satisfaction, motivation, as well as several demographic items about the participant and about their golf experience and abilities. All surveys were completed by golf league participants who received the survey from their provincial governing body or golf club directors. A total of 426 usable surveys were collected and analyzed.
- Information Sources** While the specific sources of information used in marketing are constantly evolving, this study targeted the *categories* of information sought out by prospective golf league participants. These sources included: Personal, Social, Public, and Web information.
- Basic Need Satisfaction** Competence, relatedness, and autonomy have each been found to play important role in the psychological well-being of individuals. When these three basic needs are satisfied, the social-psychology literature suggests that people will be more intrinsically motivated to pursue an endeavor. This intrinsic pull toward the activity is favorable for marketers and sport professionals, because it has been linked with enjoyment and more notably, persistence.

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WHY ARE GOLF LEAGUES RELEVANT TO GOLF CLUBS?

Health issues, such as obesity and diabetes, are ongoing concerns across North America, largely due to a combination of poor diet and inadequate physical activity regimes. Physical activity is a crucial element in maintaining weight, reducing anxiety, depression, risk for chronic disease, and premature mortality (Haskell et al., 2007). Despite these physical and psychological health benefits provided through adequate physical activity, 2007–2011 statistics indicated that an average of 85% of Canadian adults failed to meet the recommended 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous aerobic activity on a regular basis each week (Colley, Garriguet, Janssen, Clarke, & Tremblay, 2014).

“85% of Canadian adults failed to meet the recommended 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous aerobic activity on a regular basis each week”

Of particular interest within the adult population is the segment of adults born immediately following World War II, known as the “baby boomers,” who are now reaching the age of retirement. For some of these 9.6 million people in Canada, retirement may present the first opportunity where they have ever had the time and/or the money to pursue leisure activities (Generations in Canada, 2012). Given this age group is one of the largest demographic segments in Canada, sport and recreation managers must be cognizant of the unique social, psychological, and physical needs with which this population approaches the sport industry.

“Sport and recreation managers must be cognizant of the unique social, psychological, and physical needs with which this population of baby boomers approaches the sport industry.”

Financially speaking, golf courses and their leagues stand to gain from better recruiting and sustaining golf participants through increased league, proshop, and food and beverage revenues. League participants who are not currently members of the golf course may also be more inclined to use the league participation as a trial period before being converted to a member or more frequent golfer at the course, which also leads to increased course revenues. Lastly, the increased golf participation can benefit the specific golf clubs, and the golf industry as a whole through improved word-of-mouth marketing from league participants to their respective communication networks.



In 2006, there were 5.95 million Canadians participating in golf, reflecting a national golf participation rate of 21.5%, which was among the highest golf participation rate of any country in the world (Ipsos Reid, 2006). These participants spent a projected \$12.9 billion dollars per year on direct golf-expenditures (Ipsos Reid, 2006). A more recent investigation found only 5.7 million Canadians participating in golf nationwide (Navicom, 2012). While a noticeable decline, these numbers still reflect a large number of Canadian participants, which should garner both researchers' and practitioners' attention.

"Canada has among the highest golf participation rate of any country in the world!" –(Ipsos Reid, 2006)

This report was designed to focus on the information processing used to recruit golf participants to their respective golf league, and secondly, to explore how basic psychological needs can explain player retention to these leagues.

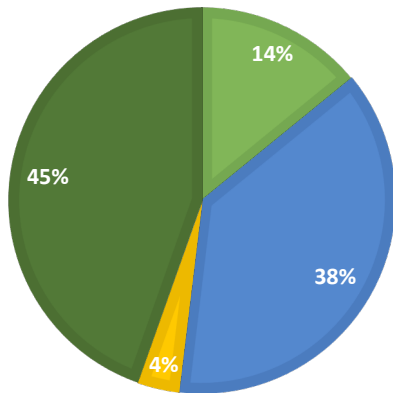
The primary research questions of interest to golf practitioners were:

1. What are the information source preferences in adult golfers when making a decision to pursue a recreational golf league?
2. How does basic need satisfaction (autonomy, relatedness, competence) relate with persistence in the league?

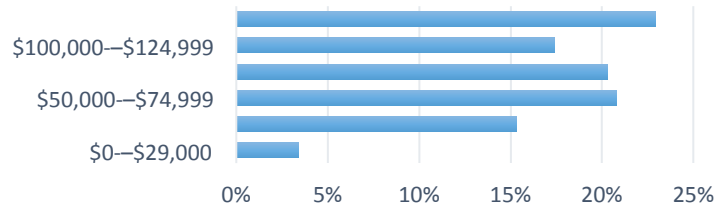
WHO PARTICIPATED?

PROVINCE REPRESENTATION

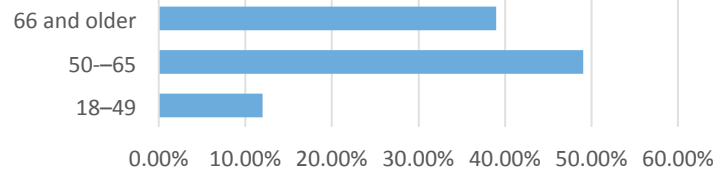
■ Alberta
 ■ British Columbia
 ■ Ontario
 ■ Saskatchewan



ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

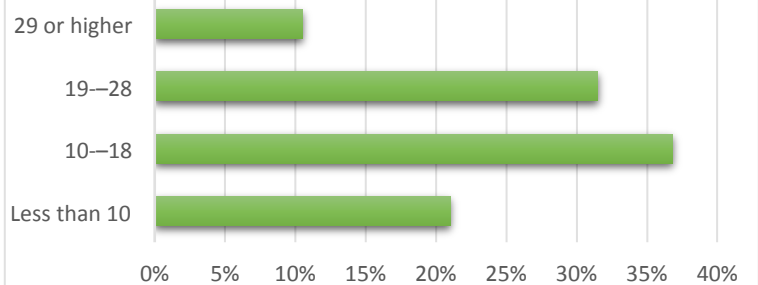


AGE



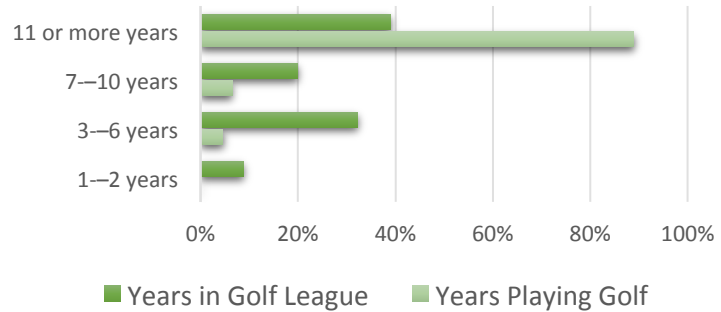
61.1%

HANDICAP INDEX



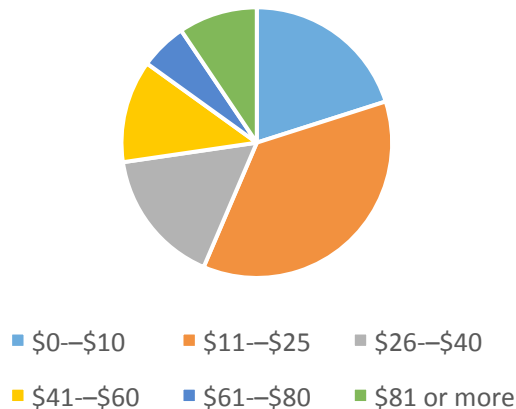
38.9%

GOLF EXPERIENCE



REVENUES

LEAGUE NIGHT SPENDING
(FOOD, BEVERAGE,
PROSHOP)



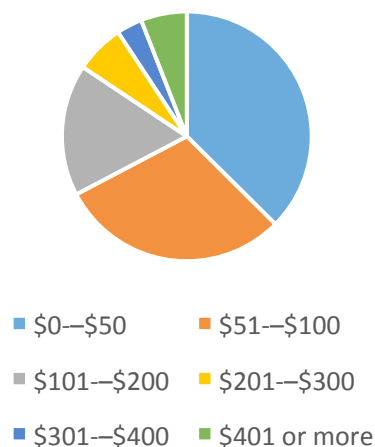
Participants were asked to report “on average” how much they spent per league night on food, beverage, and proshop items.

Results from the written portion of this study would suggest that these funds will fluctuate in large part based upon the league structure. For example, if the league operates at the same time every week in a shotgun or more condensed set of tee-times, league participants are more likely to finish play around a similar time. This often means that participants will gather in the clubhouse to socialize with other league members, who haven’t yet left the course after finishing play.

This socialization often includes food and beverage purchases in a more consistent fashion than green-fee play alone.

Some leagues on the other hand are structured in a way that schedules participants to play within a designated window (e.g., every Wednesday between 8-11am). This does not necessarily promote the same socialization opportunities post-round, because one group may come in to eat after their round, while the next group might not get in for another 30-60 minutes.

LEAGUE ENROLLMENT FEES



Clubs often structure their league fees differently. Some clubs include green fees in their enrollment fees, while other semi-private or private clubs may only charge an administrative fee, or a fee to support league prizes.

Leagues can offer newer golfers, or those who are not currently members the opportunity to engage with the club as a form of trial membership before committing to a membership or even continued green-fee play at that course. In cities where there are an abundance of courses to choose from, having strong golf leagues can be a great marketing tool to recruit golfers.

RECRUITMENT

MARKETING COMMUNICATION

Commitment to a league involves both an extended time commitment (e.g., weekly meetings) and a financial commitment (e.g., league fees, green fees). These commitments can be perceived as risks by prospective golfers, particularly if they are new to the sport, and less sure about their interest in the commitments.

Participants were asked to rate their likelihood of using any of the below sources of information prior to making their decision to join their golf league. The rating scale ranged from 1 = *definitely would not* to 7 = *definitely would*.

$M = 3.82$

$M = 5.29$

$M = 3.70$

$M = 4.89$

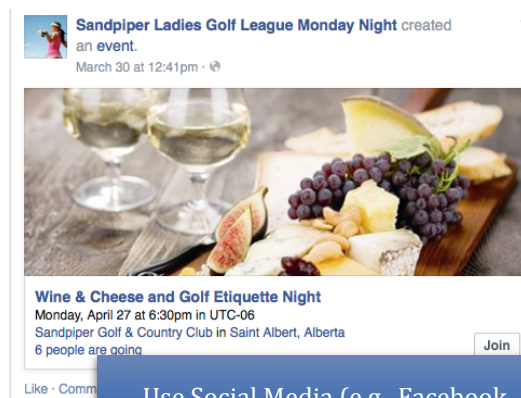
Public	Personal	Web	Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pay attention to local newsletters from the community regarding the activity.• Pay attention to newspaper ads about the activity.• Pay attention to radio ads about the activity.• Read a report about golf (or golf leagues) written by a knowledgeable third party (e.g., health and fitness consultant, or golf professional)• Ask the opinion of an employee of the club offering the activity.• Look to a website from a neutral source to read about the activity.• Read available information such as printed brochures, pamphlets, or other information provided by the host club.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rely on past personal experience with the activity.• Think about my previous involvement with this activity.• Try to recall relevant events which I can associate with this activity, such as other recreational activities or my experiences with golf.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pay attention to what others have said about the activity on social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or blogs.• Pay attention to ads from the host club's Facebook, Twitter, or other social media accounts.• Look to information provided by the host club's official website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask the opinion of a friend or relative.• Pay attention to what previous participants of the activity had to say.• Speak with other members of the club such as previous league members, league directors, or other golfers from that club

Increased risk perceived by prospective golf league members means that participants will likely seek information from a more trusted sources. Participants from this study supported this idea, by reporting having used information from their own **previous involvement** with the activity (Personal) or through **word-of-mouth** communications with trusted sources (Social) to inform their decision to join the golf league.

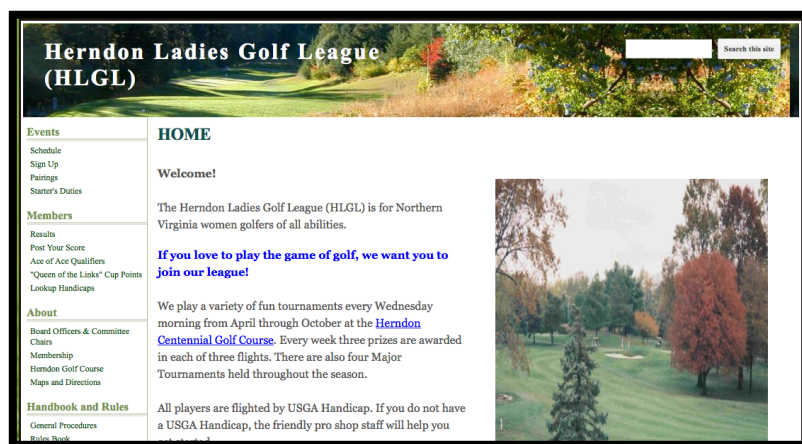
If prospective participants are relying on **word-of-mouth** and their own **involvement** in order to make a decision about pursuing league play, it's crucial that the information is both **accurate** and **positive**.



Generate a Facebook Page or League-Specific web page to provide accurate and up-to-date league information



Use Social Media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) to coordinate league events



Word-of-Mouth

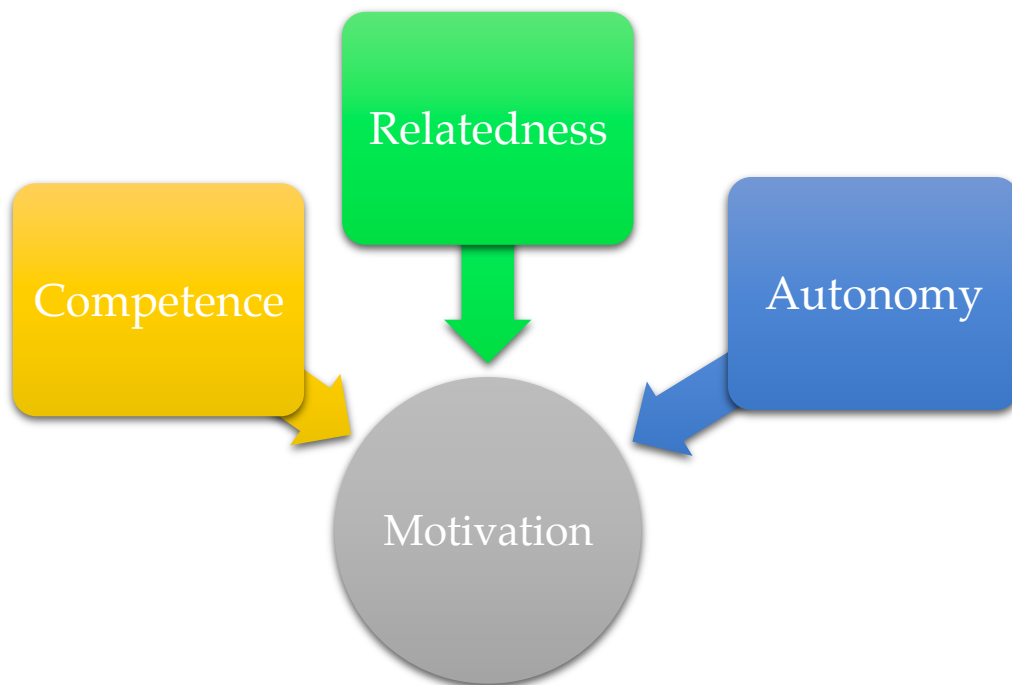
- Provide clear information about league operations so that prospective participants can clearly evaluate their likelihood of enjoying the experience.
 - Who to contact, league rules, league expectations
- Ensure league participants are satisfied with their experience so that they may share positive experiences to prospective league members.
 - Member satisfaction surveys
 - Open forum or understand chain of communication for members to express concerns and compliments.

Personal Involvement

- Participants will use their previous experiences with golf and golf leagues to evaluate their decisions to pursue future golf-related activities.
- Golfers are using information gathered in relation to previous involvement with golf and or a golf league to decide whether they should participate again.
 - New golfers may not have this personal involvement to draw upon. Consider allowing for trial participation, or a pre-season orientation, or lessons to build confidence and positive associations with the club and/or golf.

BASIC PSYCHOLOGICAL NEED SATISFACTION AND MOTIVATION

Self-determination theory suggests that humans have innate psychological needs (i.e., Competence, Relatedness, Autonomy), which must be satisfied in order to be intrinsically motivated to pursue an endeavor. Intrinsic motivation is desirable, because it has been linked with favorable behaviors such as increased frequency of participation, sustained participation, and even qualities like enjoyment and fun during participation. It is therefore prudent for golf professionals to understand the connections between their participants' basic need satisfaction and motivation in order to promote sustained participation from league members.



Basic Psychological Needs Across Years in Golf League

	Autonomy	Relatedness	Competence
Years in League	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
1-2 years (n = 37)	5.07 (.89)	5.40 (.83)	5.19 (.88)
3-6 years (n = 135)	5.58 (.77)	5.84 (.75)	5.23 (.78)
7-10 years (n = 84)	5.62 (.73)	5.96 (.68)	5.31 (.89)
11 or more years (n = 163)	5.57 (.89)	5.96 (.82)	5.32 (.91)

Survey asked participants to rate their level of agreement with phrases related with each of the three basic needs. The scale ranged from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*. Participants basic need satisfaction was compared across levels of experience within the golf league.

Participants who had participated in the league for 1-2 years had *significantly lower* autonomy and relatedness need satisfaction levels when compared to those who had been in the league for 3 or more years.

Basic Psychological Needs Across Years in Golf League

	Autonomy	Relatedness	Competence
Handicap Index	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Less than 10 (n = 88)	5.48 (.83)	5.79 (.87)	5.63 (.79)
10-18 (n = 154)	5.61 (.78)	5.89 (.67)	5.24 (.75)
19-28 (n = 132)	5.58 (.82)	5.91 (.84)	5.18 (.93)
29 or higher (n = 154)	5.38 (1.01)	5.82 (.84)	5.00 (.96)

Basic need satisfaction was then compared across skill level, using golfers handicap index. Participants with handicap indexes less than 10 had *significantly higher* competence need satisfaction than golfers with higher handicap indexes.

At the completion of the survey, participants in this study were asked an open-ended question with the hopes of supplementing the quantitative data related with basic need satisfaction and motivation. Participants were asked:

“Why do you participate your golf league?”

Competence

Competition! It is a good way to gauge my performance against others and to help me to become a better player.

I enjoy the game that I can easily tell if I'm improving. Golf is a challenging game, which requires dedication in order to improve your handicap

We learn the Rules of Golf, we establish a course handicap and Handicap Factor, we learn how to manage our own handicaps using the RCGA Handicap system and we take pride in our home course!

Challenge to improve at something in a measurable way

Relatedness

I like having a place to play. There, at the club, I have a sense of belonging to something, a feeling that I do not get from other groups and social interactions. All week I look forward to playing, usually there is a league competition or simply the groups playing against each other, but it is always by the rules.

Love to golf, and in this senior league you get to play with everyone during the season once or twice (fellowship).

For enjoyment of golfing with men of my age and ability

When I started 5 years ago, my reason was to make sure I played at least one game every week. I have stayed with this particular group because I feel very comfortable with everyone and they are a great bunch of women

Autonomy

Its well organized and don't have to get a group together get to golf with new players

Being in a league forces you to get out and play on a regular basis and links you up with like-minded people.

I like the structure in having a regular competitive round that varies the format occasionally.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Competence

“Consider a balance between over-challenged and bored”

Competence expectations are based on an individual's **past experiences** and his or her own views that people can generate a desired consequence (Ferrer-Caja & Weiss, 2000). Other terms related to the need for competence include feelings of capability, self-efficacy, and self-worth in the activity (Ferrand, Nassarre, Hautier, & Bonnefoy, 2012).

How to promote competence among golf league members:

Pair golfers of similar playing abilities so that comparisons of ability are made on a relative playing field, rather than having weaker players qualifying their abilities in relation to the better players. Consider a balance between over-challenged and bored (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Provide the opportunity for players to increase competence

- Lesson packages included with league play. If golfers have more tools to improve their abilities objectively, they may be more likely to also feel better about their play.
- Effective goal setting. If golfers understand what a reasonable score or benchmarks are for their respective playing abilities, they may be more satisfied with their abilities.

Relatedness

Deci and Ryan (2000) explain the need for relatedness as being the importance of relationships with other people, feeling understood, joining in meaningful conversation, and having fun with others.

How to promote relatedness among league members:

Give new members the opportunity to meet other league members.

- Pre-league meeting/social
- New member lesson cohort
- Integrate a rules component or a detailed description of the league playing formats to help golfers feel like they **understand** and **belong** to the league.

“Leaders/veterans/course administrators should direct attention to new members in an **authentic and personable way.**”

Autonomy

Put simply, autonomy refers to regulation by the self (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Autonomy is important in relation to sport motivation because people are more likely to pursue an endeavor (e.g., sport activity), when they are acting out of their own decision-making (Weiss & Amorose, 2008). Meanwhile, external factors such as pressures from others, guilt, deadlines, competition, and supervision can all negatively impact the need satisfaction of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

People have varying perspectives on the degree of autonomy desired for recreational opportunities. On the one hand, when golfers are told the rules they must abide by, despite a lack of understanding for these rules, a gap in both autonomy and competence need satisfaction may emerge. On the other hand, many golfers report enjoying the control the club places on their league operations, most notably, by organizing the scheduling of when the league will take place and who each member will play on the given league night.

How to promote autonomy satisfaction among league members:

- Pre-season rules clinics/orientation meetings can help golfers feel a sense of control in the league if they are on the same page as other golfers with respect to league operations.
- Include league members in the decisions surrounding league formats and league rules. Participants reported appreciating the leagues directing play, but in order to keep members satisfied and motivated to pursue the leagues, there should be a general consensus on the format of play and other league rules, so that golfers feel like they have the opportunity to provide feedback.

Quotes provided by participants in this study (see page 12) support the idea that golfers pursue leagues, because the organizers hold them accountable to show up and participate on a designated and consistent day.

“Pressures from others, guilt, deadlines, competition, and supervision can all negatively impact the need satisfaction of autonomy”

I have found over the years that I get out and play golf more often when I am in a league rather than thinking a group of us will just go out and play. The latter just does not happen too often. When I am committed to a league, I go each week and then groups of us set other dates during the week to get together again.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

DATE, TIME, COST

Minimize barriers for people of all ages. Younger adults may have different priorities while they attempt to establish careers, relationships, and/or raise children. Directors should also be cognizant of the possible disposable income differences, which can exist across the lifespan.

- Schedule consistent day and time each week to allow golfers to schedule their lives to allow for golf league participation. Using a shotgun start (starting the entire league at the same time of day) can be helpful to promote consistency and camaraderie among members by ensuring that everyone arrives at the course for the same start time.
- Design a system for substitution for leagues with team play to allow flexibility for those who may not be able to commit to the full duration of the season.
- Try a variety of formats to find out what your league prefers. This includes both the format of league play (e.g., gross score vs. scramble) as well as exploring the use of teams over strictly individual play.
- Cost was rated as one of the highest barriers to participation in golf across Canada (Navicom, 2012). Participants in the present study had relatively high incomes, which may suggest that the number of players earning less than \$50,000 annually are either not joining leagues, or did not complete this survey.
- Understanding that golf leagues can serve as a marketing tool to attract additional green fees or course memberships outside of the leagues can help golf directors set a price point for their leagues which can both cover costs, but also attract the largest demographic as possible.
- Consider flexible payment models to include people of all price-points. This could include a pay-per-play model, whereby participants can pay only for the league nights they intend to play. This could be especially helpful for new league membership, who want to try the activity before committing to an entire season.

CONCLUSION

There are a multitude of reasons that may impact the choices adults make toward sport and physical activity endeavors. Work and family commitments, disposable income, proximity to facilities, awareness of opportunities, physical health and abilities, and sport interests are among the many considerations adults face when choosing to pursue an activity in their leisure time. Many of these considerations are apt to change across the lifetime, when priorities and interests shift.



In the past 17 years I have learned both the play golf but to also enjoy the camaraderie that comes from spending time with other women who, like me, are passionate about the game and the friendships it brings. I love the friendly competition, the time spent with other active women, and the healthful benefits of walking 18 holes 4 times a week. Who could ask for more from a recreational activity?

For Canada, considerable attention should be placed on the leisure activities pursued by one of the nation's largest demographics: **the baby boomers**. This generation has the potential to pursue new sport activities, or to increase the frequency or extent of the consumption of the activities they presently pursue, due to the life shift that comes with retirement.

In this sample, it was evident that participants had played golf for many years, but years participated in specific golf leagues were generally much fewer. Golf league directors should capitalize on this large demographic of people who are both currently involved in golf and those who have yet to consume, by offering organized leagues for adults to join and increase golf consumption.



Melissa J. Davies, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor-Sport Management

Melissa grew up playing junior golf in Alberta, Canada. She then went on to play collegiate golf in Pennsylvania, before spending a season as the assistant golf coach for her college team, which competed during the 2010 NCAA Division II National Golf Championship. Melissa then went on to pursue her Doctorate in Sport Management from University of Northern Colorado, and is now an Assistant Professor at University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. This study was conducted as part of Melissa's dissertation research. Her research interests include the marketing and management implications surrounding the social psychology of sport and exercise, as well as consumer behavior and brand management in sport.

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