CASE STUDY / 2017

SHADOWMATCHING A GOLF TEAM TO THE TROPHY

INTRODUCTION

It's interesting to note that a recent focus of industrial psychology has been on maximizing the potential of work teams and assembling these teams in a more productive and efficient manner. Although not historically commonplace in industrial psychology, teams and teamwork have been studied in sport psychology for quite some time. Improving teamwork is one of the most important tasks sport psychologists are often given.

With this in mind, Shadowmatch provides a great solution to the field of sports. When presented with the opportunity to get involved in the psychological testing of an under-19 golf team, we jumped at the chance to show how team success is as relevant in sport as it is in business.

CHALLENGE
This golf team, under the guidance of its manager, had the goal of becoming national champions. After having seen the Shadowmatch system, the manager and the executive committee of the golf foundation felt that Shadowmatch would be the secret weapon that would differentiate them from some stiff competition. At the end of the process, if Shadowmatch was successful, the team hoped to be National Under-19 Golf Champions.

WHY SHADOWMATCH?

Shadowmatch has proven its worth as a solution that assesses individuals in terms of their habits, and then interprets how to best use and develop these habits to the benefit of the individual and the organization. Long gone are the days when individuals worked alone and isolated. It is crucial for employees to be compatible to ensure the smooth-running success of the operation. As a solution, Shadowmatch measures parameters such as team inclination vs. individual inclination, along with attitude scales that indicate the propensity of employees to act as contributing members of a team. Shadowmatch is adept at contributing to the success of highly functioning teams.

IMPLEMENTATION

The team involved in the testing was an interesting mix of age groups, experience levels, and personalities. The team comprised nine players, eight of whom would play per day. These players would compete against eleven other teams over five days for the title of

National Junior Champions. This was an extremely important tournament on the road to becoming professional golfers.

Five players from this team had competed internationally. However, all the other players from the pool of possible selections had not yet played international junior golf, and this presented the team manager with an interesting challenge. Excluding the obvious factors of skill level and form, how do you match five players of immense experience with four players of very limited experience and still have them work well as a team?

Shadowmatch was used to compare these players of differing experience levels in an equitable way. In sport, this is often referred to as "getting the mix right between youth and experience." By incorporating Shadowmatch into the team selection process, the manager did in fact get this mix right—not only in an intuitive way, but also by using science with valid and reliable results.

This group of golfers comprised nine members who were all teenagers between the ages of 16 to 19. Subjects from this age group are generally apprehensive about being analyzed or tested, which created a level of difficulty in the testing. To mitigate this, each player was given their Shadowmatch code and allowed to perform the assessment at home over the Internet.

Once the assessments were complete, each player received their two-page report. Indirectly, this report helped to create an early positive self-regard within each player. Their strengths were highlighted, putting them (and their parents) in a positive frame of mind toward the test and, more importantly, toward the sport psychology process that was to follow.

After studying the results of the testing, the following patterns proved to be the top five habits of golfers in this group: responsiveness (the ability to react quickly), simplification, self-confidence, resilience, and discipline.

In many conversations with the team's manager as well as the Shadowmatch team, it was interesting to note that one of the most important qualities of these golfers was thinking habits (otherwise known as golf course management skills).

Critical Habits

Surprisingly, the habits of responsiveness and the ability to simplify are two of the important abilities of the most successful golfers of all time. Why? Upon close study of this team and successful golfers of the last three years, it was easy to see how responsiveness could be a critical skill for success on the golf course.

Responsiveness is the ability of a person to think on their feet and to react quickly. This needs to happen on the golf course, where conditions can change in a matter of minutes. The ability to successfully adjust and respond to a changing environment over a 6-hour golf tournament is therefore a large key to success.

And, if they possess the skill of being able to simplify, successful golfers avoid the propensity to suffer from what is jokingly referred to in golfing circles as "analysis-paralysis." Simply put, when a golfer has too many conflicting ideas in his or her head about strategy, they might never come to the conclusion of actually hitting the ball. In being able to simplify a problem or challenge, these successful junior golfers are better able to get positive results. They tend not to over-think the information presented to them by yardage books, caddies, sensory input, and their experience. They have developed the positive habits of thinking and reacting quickly due to time constraints, and they do this by only working with what they perceive the essence of the problem to be (in other words, simplifying).

Here's an example: When faced with very long putts, this group universally focused on only two factors—the pace of the putt, and getting it as close to the hole as possible. On a 30-yard putt, there are many factors to consider when aiming the ball to the hole. Players could think about slope, speed of the green, pin placement, input from the caddy, type of putting stroke needed, power on the stroke, visualization techniques, and a myriad of other potential data. However, these players had learned to cope by using the habit of simplifying their process and focusing on only two potential aspects.

Whereas responsiveness and simplification are course-directed habits, the other three critical traits of this group proved to be more internally directed.

Self-confidence is a universally valuable skill that any person who is trying to perform in any environment at any level must have in order to succeed. In this particular group, the trait of self-confidence resulted in a team dynamic that was self-assured without being arrogant, and a belief that no matter how tough the situation, the team could rise above the challenge.

This indeed proved to be the case when the team lost one of its games on the second day of the tournament. Instead of the team disintegrating or a developing a negative vibe, all the players pulled together with a sense of confidence and made a promise to one another to not lose one more game—something they in fact achieved quite easily.

This tournament also tapped into the players' common trait of resilience, a trait that is not only imperative in a tournament environment, but in golf in general, where players are inherently faced with more disappointment than success. Tiger Woods, the world's number one player, wins only roughly every four tournaments he enters—a very poor success rate if one takes into account that golf is his livelihood. From a young age, players learn the ability to bounce back after disappointment on the course. This is needed if one is to play top amateur golf or even just return for a next round after the disappointment of a bad round.

The last trait this group shared was discipline. If one looks at the sport of golf from the outside, one is struck by the utter discipline needed to compete at a top level. This does not only include discipline to practice the various important skills of the game, but also the mental discipline needed to put together a successful round after having played badly the day before. Discipline is a bedrock rule of the game. Players will often mark their own scorecards, and if a player is not disciplined or honest in his scoring, he can be a liability to the game and to the team.

Conceptual Ability and Attitude Scale

When tested for conceptual ability, this group of junior golfers achieved an average combined score of six out of ten. This is a high score for their age group, and it is thought that this is due to the nature of the game of golf. When these players engage in a game of golf, their conceptual ability is consistently tested and developed to a higher degree. In golf, various forms of information are given to a golfer on the course before he plays each shot. These include how long the hole is, how far the player is from the green, which club will allow the player to hit the best shot, what external influences (such as wind) are present, and how they will affect the shot.

The player needs to take all of these factors into account before selecting a club and playing each shot. This sort of conceptual ability asks the player to look at the available data, re- work it using their own frame of reference, and then solve the problem to the best of their ability. Players with a higher conceptual ability are generally more successful on the course, because it allows them to make more informed decisions and to better execute their preferred solution.

On the attitude scale, players tested predominantly involved and unaggressive in their approach to their world and relationships. All of the players interacted predominantly in this way, so there were very few altercations during the week of the tournament and in the weeks leading up to the competition.

This made the sports psychologist's job much easier and also made the interaction of the manager with the players a lot less strained, allowing the players to cope more successfully with disappointments and to work together when challenged.

Teambuilding

In the lead-up to the tournament, time was spent analyzing the combined benchmark of the team. This was done to show the team its strongest traits, but also areas where they did not display such strong traits. This made them aware of how they looked as a team. At this stage, no individual results were made available in order to ensure that players did not face criticism from teammates if they differed from the benchmark, and that players who were a good fit to the benchmark did not look down on the other teammates. This was done purely as a teambuilding exercise, where all the players were made aware of strong team habits and areas where they did not display strong habit patterns.

A lot of hard work was put into the testing and the development phase of this team's existence, but the question remained: What would the players do in the heat of battle? Well, they did exactly what Shadowmatch had predicted, and everything went according to plan.

VALUE

Statistics on this tournament indicate that the team involved won 92.5 out of a possible 132 points against eleven other teams over five days of competition. That equates to a win ratio of 70% in one of the toughest tournaments on the golfing calendar. The team had six of its players chosen for national squads at the end of the tournament, and lost to only one other team by the slim margin of one point. Statistics, however, do not tell the whole story.

What really differentiated this team from the rest was how they dealt with disappointments and challenges throughout the week. This became very apparent when the team lost on the second day. This loss was only by one point, but it could have been the end of the tournament. However, true to the predicted habits on Shadowmatch, the team did two things that ultimately ensured their success: they pulled together as a team, and they kept their involvementun-aggressive.

Shadowmatch determined the golfers in the team were predominantly team-inclined, and this shone through on the day they lost. The evening after the loss, the team and their captain set the target of not losing one more game. They achieved this with distinction. At

no stage did any of the players become problematic in their behavior, and it was extremely interesting to see how, after the loss, the team seemed to gel even more and went on to perform to their true potential.

CONCLUSION

Shadowmatch has been used in many industrial settings that include many different teams and groups. In addition, it has now proven successful in mainstream sport, helping a team of aspiring young golfers win the national championship they had been striving for.

In looking to the future in the golfing industry, it would not be surprising to see more teams use this solution to select players, and to match their teams to the trophy—something that is becoming more and more important in the world of golf and sport.