

A proposed conceptual framework of factors contributing to the success of Korean women golfers on the LPGA Tour: A sport development perspective

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Abstract 285

Recently, Korean women golfers have achieved significant success on the LPGA Tour. Since Se Ri Pak, who appeared in 1998 as a rookie, won the 1998 U.S. Women's Open, Korean women players have won 64 times during the past 10 years. The number of Korean players who are eligible to compete on the LPGA Tour has increased to 45 this year. In the 2007 US Women's Open, 1251 players from 38 countries participated in qualifying rounds. Among 67 players (13 countries) who passed the final cut, there were 28 Korean female golfers. Out of the final 67 players, Korean players held eight of the top ten spots (Ladies Professional Golf Association, 2007).

Due to the Koreans' success on the green, the major sport media in American (i.e., TV, golf magazines, and newspapers, and internet websites) have paid attention to the success factors of Korean women golfers. Despite the considerable attention from sport media, there has been a dearth of academic literature on this subject. Only a few studies (e.g., Shin & Nam, 2004) have explored the success factors of Korean players from a sociological perspective of sport. The secondary sources and academic literature have indicated several contributing factors to their success that include Korean women golfers' hard work, their work ethic, parental support, and the influences of corporate sponsors (e.g., Emerson & Lee, 1998; Mario, 2007; Shin & Nam, 2004). However, these sources have showed insistent results related to the success factors. In addition, there is no comprehensive framework that explains the causal relationships among these contributing factors and the process of how Korean players can achieve this level of success. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify the contributing factors to the success of Korean women golfers. The second purpose is to propose a conceptual framework that explains the antecedents and consequences of the success and their relationships. By presenting this framework, the researchers attempt to provide a picture of how a country can effectively develop and implement a strategy of golf development. Given an accelerated growth in the demand for golf and a significant potential for the development of golf tourism, a growing number of Asian and central and eastern European countries are in the process of developing the sport at a governmental level (Robinson, 2007; Yasuda, 2007).

In order to identify the success factors of Korean players, the authors employed several research methods, including an extensive review of secondary sources and of the academic literature, interviews with Korean female golfers, and expert review. First, the authors attempted to identify factors contributing to their success, based on reputable and credible secondary sources (e.g., LPGA.Com, Golf World, the New York Times, and ESPN.Com) as well as the literature. Second, one of the authors, who has been a golf journalist in Korean for thirteen years, interviewed with more than 20 Korean women golfers who are currently playing on the LPGA tour. The review of the literature, followed by the interviews identified 11 contributing factors: motivation (goal setting), work ethic, mental strength, focus, hard work, parental influence, economic growth and golf boom in South Korea, the role of media, the influence of role models, governmental support, and corporate sponsors. Third, 15 experts (10 Korean golf journalists, 3 staff members in the Korea Ladies Professional Golf Association and 2 staff members in the Korea Professional Golfers' Association) were contacted and asked to offer their opinions regarding the success factors via email and to assess the relative importance of the factors. In addition to those 11 factors, some of the experts indicated dexterous hand skills and a sense of rivalry as one of the success factors. The top six success factors that they reported included parental support (n=10), hard work and training (n=9), the influence of role models (e.g., Se Ri Pak) (n=8), mental strength (n=6), corporate sponsorship (n=5), and the role of media (n=5).

Based on these research methods, the researchers proposed a conceptual framework that is divided into five phases. The first part presents the antecedents that consist of individual characteristics of the Korean women athletes, along with social and external influences. Individual characteristics include motivation, work ethic, hard work, and mental strength, while the social and external antecedents include parental support, corporate sponsorships, and Korean culture (Mario, 2007; Shin & Nam, 2004). There are reciprocal relationships between these two antecedents. These antecedents, moderated by the situational factors, are proposed to influence a role model (e.g., Se Ri Pak). The moderators, which include the role of sport media, corporate sponsors' marketing activities, and economic growth in South Korea, may affect the relationship between the antecedents and the first mediator, a role model. Then, the framework proposes that the influence of a role model leads to the second mediators that include the significant increase in the number of women golfers and their level of motivation, the increase in the number of corporate sponsorships, and governmental support (e.g., Fitzchlarance & Hickey, 1998; Kelley, 2007; Shaffer, 2006). In the next step, these second mediators are proposed to influence the success of Korean women golfers. The last phase of the framework proposes that the success of those women golfers can result in the consequences which is enhanced image of

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and the development of golf in South Korea. The golf development can be explained in terms of the improved Korean LPGA tour status, the significant growth of golf industry, and the vast increase in the number of junior golfers.

This framework may provide insight into the processes of how Korean golfers have had such a huge success on the LPGA tour. In addition, as indicated earlier, a large number of countries are trying to develop golf in order to meet the demand and to obtain benefits associated with the golf industry. This framework may provide sport practitioners in those countries with new perspectives on how to develop the sport at a national level. From a theoretical perspective, this framework will contribute to Krotee and Walters (1995) theoretical framework of sport delivery and infrastructure of the National Sport Development Index, by suggesting the significant role of the private sector agencies in an overall sport development strategy.