

A Study of Recreational Golfers Perceptions of the 2008 Ryder Cup

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The Ryder Cup is the premier team competition in golf and is often described as the third biggest sports event in the world (International Business Wales, 2008). Despite this the competition has received scant attention from scholars in sport management and other associated disciplines. Whereas other major international events such as the Olympic Games and the Soccer World Cup have attracted the attention of researchers within the field of sport studies/management (e.g. Preuss, 2004; Tomlinson & Young, 2006) little research has focused on the Ryder Cup. To date, work on brand image and its potential impact on sport sponsorship (Deane, Smith & Adams, 2003) and a critical discourse analysis of media portrayals of the event (Harris & Lyberger, 2008) represent some of the only published work on the Ryder Cup in the field.

The present study examines recreational golfers perceptions of the Ryder Cup in an attempt to learn more about the positioning, perceived significance and identified characteristics of the biggest team competition in golf. A detailed questionnaire was designed in an attempt to learn how important the respondents perceived the tournament to be, and how this compared to their level of interest in other major sporting events/competitions. The research also looks at what golfers thought were the defining characteristics of the competition in order to develop a better understanding of the true positioning of the Ryder Cup. Following minor revisions, as suggested by pretests, the instrument was administered to 200 recreational golfers in the week after the 2008 Ryder Cup match in late September. 92.2% of golfers surveyed identified themselves as White, 65.8% of golfers were male and the average age of golfers was 34.6.

Data was analyzed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) [Version 15.1] and selective random procedures were implemented to ensure heterogeneity of the sample. The golfers were asked to rank a range of sporting events and leagues on a five-point scale to establish interest in a variety of events amongst the identified sample. Survey results highlighted that the Super Bowl was the most popular of all listed leagues and major sporting events closely followed by the National Football League (NFL) hereby reflecting the hegemonic importance of football in the state where the research was undertaken. Compared to the four major golf tournaments contested by individual golfers the Ryder Cup was ranked lowest of all events. The Masters was identified as the most important golf tournament, and the fourth most popular of all sporting leagues and events listed, reflecting the special positioning of this one major in the wider sporting and cultural landscape. Significant differences in their interest in various golfing events were identified when analyzed against the respondents frequency of golf participation. A six-point scale was then used to determine what respondents believed to be the key characteristics of the competition and were asked to rank these on a scale from 0 (Not Associated) to 5 (Highly Associated). Characteristics most associated with the Ryder Cup were 'Competition' (mean=3.91), 'Winning' (mean=3.58) and 'American' (mean=3.45). Those found to be least associated were 'War' (mean=1.02), 'Commercialized' (mean=2.13) and 'Power' (mean=2.27).

A number of interesting differences were identified when comparing the results across age groups, household income, race and sex. An interpretive analysis and tentative exploration of some of the most significant of these will be discussed at the conference.