National Image Enhancement Through Global Sport Participation

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Korean women golfers have won over 90 times during the past 13 years, since Se Ri Pak achieved her first win in the LPGA Tour in 1998. In response to the Korean women golfers’ success on the green, most major media outlets have investigated and reported on what they believe are the reasons for the success of Korean players: hard work, work ethic, parental involvement, and the support from corporate sponsors. Where there have been considerable attempts by the sport media to investigate this phenomenon, only a few studies (Bae, 2007; Shin & Nam; 2004; Yoo & Park, 2008) have examined the success factors of them. For instance, Shin and Nam (2004) – in published comprehensive review of the literature on Korean culture – addressed several success factors such as work ethic, devotion to the game, mental toughness, Korean culture, and family structure. A few years later, Yoo and Park (2008) proposed a conceptual framework to illustrate the antecedents and consequences of the success factors and their relationships. However, there has been a lack of empirical research on the topic with a sufficient sample size. None of the previous studies empirically investigated the reasons for the success of the Korean women players. Thus, there has been a need for analyzing the factors accurately through quantitative research methods.

The accomplishments of the Korean women golfers can also have a positive influence on the national brand image of South Korea. For decades, sport has been used as a platform to enhance a country’s national brand. Hosting an international sport event has become one of the most attractive strategies because it can generate valuable opportunities to establish favorable images. Jun and Lee (2007) contend that sport can not only create desirable and favorable imagery to people around the world but it can also demonstrate a nation’s accomplishments and potential. More importantly, Rein and Shields (2007) posit that sport could be a useful tool for improving a country’s image, especially for emerging, transitional, negatively viewed and newly industrialized nations. South Korea – a nation that has achieved economic success in a short period of time – could be viewed as such a country. Due to the serious competition in the globalized marketplace, South Korea recognized a need to enhance its national image. Specifically, the country officially launched the “Presidential Council on Nation Branding” to improve the nation’s image in 2009. With such a concentrated effort at image enhancement, it is worthwhile to examine how the success of Korean women golfers on the LPGA Tour has enhanced South Korea’s national image. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to investigate the contributing factors to the success of Korean women golfers on the LPGA Tour. The secondary purpose was to explore the effects of the contributing factors on the nation brand of the country.

Data were collected from 210 Korean golfers, including golf participants such as golf journalists, professional male and female golfers, managers and staff members of Korean golf organizers (e.g., KLPGA, KPGA, Korea Golf Association [KGA], Korea Golf Course Business Association [KGCBA]), and professional managers in the golf industry. In order to identify the success factors of Korean players, the researchers used several research methods including interviews with Korean professional golfers and golf industry people, a review of reputable and credible secondary sources, and an analysis of the previous academic literature. Based on the research methods noted above, the researchers identified nine factors that primarily contributed to the success of the golf participants: personal motivation (goal setting), mental strength, hard work, parental support, economic growth and the golf boom in Korea, the role of media, the influence of role models, support from government and golf associations, and corporate sponsors. The two items related to economic growth (i.e., economic growth and the golf boom in Korea) were deleted because they had low reliability estimates. Overall, 23 items pertaining to the nine success factors were subject to an exploratory factor analysis using SPSS 16.0. A seven-factor solution emerged, explaining 70.2% of the total variance in the data. The seven constraint factors were comprised of motivation (.72), mental strength (.74), hard work (.53), parental support (.64), role models (.83), support from government and golf associations (.74), and media/corporate sponsor support (.84). The factor related to the role of media was merged with the corporate sponsor support factor. However, because the media factor is theoretically different from support of corporate sponsors, these two factors were divided into two separate subscales.

Descriptive results showed that mental strength was found to be the most important success factors (M = 6.44). The second important factor was role models (M = 6.06), followed by personal motivation (M = 5.57), hard work (M = 5.51), and parental support (M = 5.47). Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the effects of the success factors on the future success of Korean golfers. The eight factors jointly explained a significant amount of the variance in future success (R-square change = .27). The significant predictor included role models (β = .28, p < .001). Additional multiple regression analyses followed to investigate the effects of the success factors on the national brand of South Korea. The model was significant and...
the eight factors explained 36% of the variance. The significant predictors included mental strength ($\beta = .31, p < .001$), support from government and golf associations ($\beta = .20, p < .05$), role models ($\beta = .19, p < .05$), and parental support ($\beta = .12, p < .05$).

Regarding demographic differences on the success factors, an independent T-test revealed gender differences relating to mental strength ($t (204) = 2.954, p < .001$) and parental support ($t (204) = 2.504, p < .05$), suggesting that males had higher scores on the two factors than females. The analyses of variance (ANOVA) indicated differences on mental strength in income ($F (6, 209) = 2.321, p < .05$) and education ($F (5, 208) = 2.302, p < .05$), and job types ($F (7, 208) = 2.201, p < .05$).

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on sport development and the role of sport in enhancing a country’s nation brand. The results of this study will help sport managers working for sport governing bodies understand how to know to develop sport at the national and international levels by presenting the primary factors that contributed to the success of one country’s sport professionals in an international sport organization (i.e., Korean golfers on the LPGA Tour). Also, the results of this study can provide sport practitioners who work for national sport organizations with insight into how to enhance their national brand through sport.