

**Professional Black Golfers: Where are They? What Challenges do They Face? Where do We Go from Here?**

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**Diversity**

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Historically, the game of golf has been a sector within the sport industry where elite, White males have been the most powerful and privileged, and have held the overwhelming majority of the positions as casual golfers, high-level amateur and professional golfers, and as employees in sport organizations within this industry segment. Women and racial minorities have been excluded and denied access to many of the same opportunities as this dominant group (Henderson, 2005). For example, as of 2010, Blacks are underrepresented as golf participants, professional golfers, and golf professionals relative to their percentage of the U.S. population (National Golf Foundation, 2010). While many would argue that the relatively high cost of participation is the major deterrent for Blacks, who relative to their White and Asian counterparts earn less income (Cunningham, 2011), it is important to explore other possible explanations. Other previously explored reasons for this underrepresentation have included, but are not limited to: lack of discretionary income, cultural preferences for other leisure activities, and access discrimination (Cunningham, 2011; Hibbler & Shinew, 2002; Eitzen & Sage, 2009; Mitchelson & Lazaro, 2004). While participation rates among Blacks in golf are low, there are currently Black golfers who are pursuing professional careers in golf. With the current lack of professional Black golfers on the game's highest level, (PGA and LPGA Tours), it is important for scholars to explore the possible explanations for this phenomenon, as well as bring attention to any barriers related to prejudice and discrimination that still exist in the game. As one of several participants in this study has stated, "there are too many good Black players out there for nobody to make it, something is going on".

This study employs a critical race theory (CRT) framework to examine the barriers faced by high-level Black golfers in their pursuit of professional golf careers. In this study, high-level golfers are those who are currently pursuing professional golf careers and have a current handicap of 4 or less, which, according to Wang (2011), is considered excellent by professionals around the world, and necessary to become a PGA or LPGA Professional. These golfers have predominantly played 4 years of collegiate golf (mostly at HBCU schools) and are currently playing on mini-tours, such as the Hooters Tour or the Adams Tour.

CRT focuses on the endemic nature of racism in the examination of the existing power structures in American society, including sport (Hylton, 2009; Singer, 2005). This framework interrogates White privilege and White supremacy and how the social and legal construction of "race" and the racial classification system that emerged from it has historically subordinated non-White racial groups in the U.S. Moreover, given CRT's emphasis on the experiential knowledge of marginalized groups, this study utilizes the insights and experiences of high-level Black golfers who are currently pursuing professional golf careers to examine the barriers that contribute to so few Black golfers on the PGA and LPGA Tours.

We are utilizing a basic, interpretive qualitative research design (Merriam, 2002) to understand our participants' perspectives on the absence of Black golfers in the professional ranks, the challenges associated with breaking into these ranks, and some potential strategies for addressing this diversity issue. The participants for this study were accessed through a snowball sampling procedure, in which the primary investigator contacted a Black male who is currently pursuing a professional career in golf. After spending time building rapport, the participant was asked for help in recruiting other high-level Black golfers who are also pursuing professional careers. The 5 participants (to this point) are all Black males, averaging 22.5 years of age. The participants were sent a message through a social networking site asking for their participation in this study. They were asked to contact the primary researcher if they were interested in learning more about the study. An initial phone conversation was conducted in which the primary researcher allowed the participants to ask questions about the study, and the researcher clarified things and addressed any concerns the participants might have. An interview was then scheduled at the participants' convenience, and a consent form was signed by the participant prior to the interview.

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The interview protocol had several broad questions that asked participants to describe the barriers faced by Black golfers pursuing professional careers, the perceived instances of discrimination and racism, and the reasons for the current lack of Blacks on the PGA and LPGA Tours. The interviews were recorded and transcribed at the consent of the participants. Based on our general inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006) we were able to develop some preliminary themes. Our findings thus far have revealed the following as barriers: high cost associated with professional tournaments (sub-PGA level), lack of competition and resources during collegiate golf careers at HBCU schools, difficulty in attaining sponsorships, and high amount of mental anxiety and stress associated with lack of resources. As we continue this study, we will focus on the challenges and barriers associated with Black golfers' pursuit of professional careers, and seek out strategies for addressing this diversity matter. We will also discuss the research and practical implications this study has for sport management scholars and practitioners.