



Influential Factors that Contribute to Black Golfers' Participation at the Elite-Level

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B - Data Collection
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine various influences that contribute to Black golfers engaging in golf as a physical activity and competing in it as a sport at an elite-level (i.e., college and professional levels). Given that Blacks are underrepresented as golf participants in general and at the elite-level in particular, it is important to gain insights from those who have excelled at golf beyond the recreational levels. Utilizing a basic interpretive qualitative design, semi-structured interviews with 9 Black males and 1 Black female who were collegiate or professional golfers were conducted. Questions regarding how the participants became involved and interested in golf as a recreational and physical activity, and what contributed to their ability to compete beyond these beginning levels were asked. Findings suggest the following five factors contributed greatly to these participants' participation and success in golf: 1) Familial Involvement, 2) Grass Roots Golf Programs, 3) Golf as a Means to College Scholarship, 4) Black Golfers as Role Models, 5) Black Golfer as Unique. Future research directions as well as practical implications for increasing racial minority participation in golf as a physical activity and sport at the elite-levels are also provided.

Keywords: Black Golf Role Models, First Tee Program, HBCU golf, Golf Scholarships

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INTRODUCTION

Research has examined the differences in physical activity and sport participation among different racial and ethnic groups. For example, Saint Onge and Krueger [1] used data from the 1998 National Health Interview Survey to examine socially meaningful dimensions of exercise and physical activity in their comparison of Blacks, Mexican Americans, and Whites. Their findings revealed Blacks tend to engage more in team sport (e.g., basketball, football) and fitness (e.g., running, weight lifting) activities; Mexican Americans gravitate toward team sports; and Whites disproportionately engage in facility-based exercise and physical activity (e.g., golf, tennis) in comparison to their racial minority counterparts. These scholars suggested human capital and cultural capital differences between and among these groups could help explain why these different racial groups tend to engage more in certain physical activities and sports, but not others. That is, human capital might be more useful for understanding whether individuals participate in any leisure time physical activity, whereas cultural capital might be most useful for understanding which activities individuals from these different racial groups undertake.

Golf is a facility-based exercise and physical activity where Whites have historically been and continue to be the overwhelming majority of participants at the grass-roots, recreational levels and the elite, competitive levels (e.g., college programs, professional tours) in the United States (U.S.). As of the most recent U.S. census in 2010, Blacks and other racial minorities are underrepresented as recreational golfers, teaching professionals, and touring professionals relative to their percentage of the U.S. population [2]. Is it, as suggested by Saint Onge and Krueger [1] that this underrepresentation is largely due to a lack of human capital and cultural capital among Blacks and other racial minorities? Are there possibly other factors beyond human capital and cultural capital that might help explain the disparities we see in participation rates between Whites and their Black and other racial minority counterparts?

Scholars and social commentators have offered insight into why this underrepresentation of Black and other racial minorities has existed and persisted in golf. Rosselli and Singer [3] advanced a working multi-level framework that focused on how factors at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels all contribute to our understanding of this complex phenomenon. At the macro-level, they focused on some broader historical, societal, and structural elements that are external to and often beyond the control of individuals. More specifically, they discussed how systemic racism and White racial framing within U.S. society are foundational to the problem of this underrepresentation; and suggested golf industry marketing practices and norms have limited and inhibited Blacks' and Hispanics' participation in golf because they are rooted in systemic racism and the White racial frame. The 2009 Golf Channel [4] documentary, *Uneven Fairways*, provides keen insights into how racism severely limited Blacks' access to professional golf tours and many predominantly White golf courses and country clubs in the U.S. In addition to this culture of exclusion, it also highlights the ill treatment those few talented Black golfers who did break into the White golf establishment had to endure in these almost exclusively White social spaces.

At the meso-level, Rosselli and Singer [3] focused on golf industry organizations and how some of these organizations are steeped in cultures of similarity [5]. As alluded to above, many golf and country clubs throughout the U.S. have historically enacted formal and informal discriminatory policies that excluded Blacks and other minority groups (e.g., women) from membership and/or playing privileges. The leaders and decision-makers within these monocultural organizations [6] are most often White males who have sometimes displayed an explicit prejudicial attitude and blatant discriminatory behavior toward Blacks (e.g., Shoal Creek Golf & Country Club founder [7, 8]). While acknowledging that such overt forms of racism might not be as commonplace in these organizations today, Rosselli and Singer [3]

suggested the presence of more covert forms of racism contributes to access and treatment discrimination Blacks and other racial minorities face today in these golf industry organizations.

Finally, Rosselli and Singer [3] focused on factors at the individual and group levels level factors to discuss how identity development and human and social capital can impact Blacks and other non-white golfers' participation and representation in golf. They asserted one's self-concept or how they see themselves at any given point in time can greatly influence the types of activities they pursue and engage in; and also noted that when thinking about the often-complex process of identity development it is important to consider the role significant others (e.g., family members, teachers, and peers) might play in socializing individuals into various identities and activities such as physical activity and sport participation. As suggested above, Blacks have a rich (and often untold) history of participation in golf. However, Black youth are oftentimes socialized into physical activities and sports other than golf.

Related to identity development, an individual's human capital and social capital can certainly determine whether or not they participate in golf, particularly at the elite and professional level. If Blacks lack the human capital (e.g., experience, education, training, motivation, potential, and skills) and/or social capital (e.g., network of social relationships, particularly with powerful and influential people) required to be successful in pursuing golf at the recreational or professional levels, the likelihood of them participating in golf at any level is greatly diminished. While the Black golfers in our current study might have lacked social capital often required to pursue playing careers on Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) Tour and Ladies Professional Golfers' Association (LPGA) Tour, they did possess the self-concept, cultural capital, and human capital necessary to compete and be successful at these highest levels of competitive golf (see Authors, in review). Like their predecessors from past decades, we are convinced these Black golfers (and some of their other Black peers) have the potential, a vested interest, and earnest desire to compete with their White peers at the highest levels of golf.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine some of some influential factors that contributed to a small group of Black male and female professional golfers' participation in and pursuit of golf at the elite levels. Despite some of the various macro- (e.g., systemic racism), meso- (e.g., organizational cultures of similarity), micro-level (e.g., social capital) factors Rosselli and Singer [3] discussed as explanations for Blacks' underrepresentation in golf, what was/is it about the Black golfers in our study that allowed them to move beyond participation in golf as a mere physical activity to participation at the college level and serious pursuit of professional careers? What factors helped them overcome some of the barriers associated with Blacks' participation in golf at the elite levels? This study is important because it attempted to empower these elite-level golfers (i.e., golfers who have played at the collegiate and/or professional level, and carry a golf handicap of scratch or better) to share their stories of persistence in the face of the many challenges Blacks face in their pursuit of golf at the elite levels. In addition, such narratives potentially provide golf industry powerbrokers and other stakeholders who are genuinely concerned about the issue of diversity, equity, and inclusion in golf with important insight they could use to help Blacks and other racial minorities in their pursuit of golf as a physical activity and competitive sport.

METHODS

This study utilized a basic interpretive qualitative design [9]. We took an inductive approach to understanding how the participants make sense of their experiences in pursuing golf from their early life into adulthood. The first author took the lead in data collection, serving as the medium or instrument through which the data are presented below.

Recruitment of Participants

The participants for this study were recruited through a snowball sampling procedure, in which the lead researcher, through a social networking site, contacted a Black male pursuing a professional golf career and asked for his help with the current study. The purpose of the research was explained, and voluntary participation was asked of the participant. Once the participant agreed to help with the study, the lead researcher met with the first participant and spent several hours building rapport through playing golf and conversing about a myriad of topics (e.g., sports, family, music, etc.). After the initial building of rapport, an interview was conducted, after which, the first participant provided names and contact information for several other elite Black golfers to help with the study. These individuals were contacted through a social networking site and asked for their participation.

The participants for this study included 9 self-identifying Black males and 1 self-identifying Black female. It is important to note that the participants self-identified as Black (one identified as either Black or African American). The average age of the participants was 23.7 years old, and the average golf handicap was +2.53 (better side of scratch). Finally, each participant was asked if they would like to provide a pseudonym or use their first name for the study. Each participant elected to utilize their first name. For more information about each participant, refer to Table 1 below.

Data Collection and Analysis

Upon obtaining permission from each participant to conduct and record the interview, semi-structured interviews, which ranged from 1 to 1.5 hours in length, were conducted with each participant by the lead researcher. At the beginning of each interview, the lead researcher spent 5-10 minutes building rapport by mentioning the previous golfers that had been interviewed and asking if/how the current participant knew them. This served to establish a community/network feel between the researcher and participants. Broadly speaking, the interview questions focused on how they became involved in golf, and the barriers they faced to progress in the game. Follow-up questions that built upon emergent themes were asked during the interviews [10]. Each interview was transcribed verbatim by the lead researcher so that the transcripts could be analyzed and interpreted.

The interview transcriptions were analyzed through a multi-step inductive process [11]. First, multiple in-depth readings of each interview were conducted by the lead researcher, with notes being taken as to general overarching themes. Next, line by line coding was conducted to analyze in further detail the interview transcriptions. As themes began to emerge, overarching main-categories were created, with sub-categories under each main-category [12, 13]. This process continued until no new themes emerged [14].

Compliance with Ethical Standards

In order to abide by the ethical standards placed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a proposal of the research was sent for approval and was subsequently approved by the IRB. The participants were informed of the nature of the study, were asked if the interviews could be audio recorded, and the lead researcher verbally informed the participants that their identities and any identifying information would be kept confidential, with only the researchers having access to the information.

Table 1 - Participant Demographics

Name	Race	Age	Golf experience	Golf handicap
Will	Black male	28	No college	Scratch
Trey	Black male	22	4yrs college - HBCU	+1.3
Shanequa	Black female	20	4yrs college - HBCU	+4
Reginald	Black male	25	4yrs college - HBCU	+3
Michael	Black male	23	4yrs college - HBCU	+2
Maurice	Black male	23	4yrs college - HBCU	+1
Jeremy	Black male	25	4yrs college - HBCU	+4
Clay	Black or African American	22	4yrs college - HBCU	+4
Christian	Black male	23	4yrs college - HBCU	+3
Doug	Black male	26	4yrs college	+3

To ensure reliability and trustworthiness of the data analysis process, the researchers: (1) used multiple perspectives to analyze the data, (2) utilized double coding, and (3) and engaged in the process of member checking [14, 12]. The use of multiple perspectives (i.e., the two researchers) helped ensure consistency in how the data were being interpreted. Boyatzis [12] states that consistency is created when different people reading the information see the similar themes within the information. This creates interrater reliability and bolsters the trustworthiness of the findings. Through the use of double coding, in which the two researchers read and analyzed the transcripts separately, reliability was established. The independent findings were discussed until agreement was reached as to the meaning of the analysis. Finally, follow-up communication with participants allowed us to check with them to see if our interpretations of their words were accurate. This member checking ensured that the findings/themes we generated were consistent with the participants' intended messages.

Below in Table 2, we provide brief examples of the types of data that were coded into each theme; and then share some major narratives from our participants in the findings section.

Table 2 - Themes and Representative Quotes

Participant	Main Theme: Familial Involvement in Golf	Data
	Sub Theme: <i>Familial introduction to golf</i>	
Trey	Family member (dad) introduced him to golf	But um, my dad, he was the one that really got me involved.
Shanequa	Dad introduced her to golf	Um my dad introduced, or introduced me to the game, um probably about 10 years ago, so probably when I was about the age of 9 or 10.
	Sub Theme: <i>Familial competition in golf</i>	
Reginald	Competitive aspect with family member	But my uncle had been playing for a couple years, and he, I think he shot 37, but I think that's the part that really got me, was because me and him were so competitive, uh, with one another, even though our big, uh, age difference. But we were just competitive. And I really wanted to beat him, even though it was my first time, I didn't feel like, you know, there was no reason I shouldn't beat him.

Michael	Competition with family member (dad) as motivation to improve	Um, well, like you, (my dad is) overly competitive, so losing is definitely not something that I'm not accustomed to and want to do. So uh, my dad definitely never took it easy on me, uh, he always told me if you ever whenever you get to the point to where you can beat me you can beat anybody, and he was he was telling, he was being honest
<i>Sub Theme: Familial support in golf</i>		
Jeremy	Mother was very supportive of golf Cost was not an issue because of support	So she was just very supportive of golf, you know, "yeah, he's playing golf." She's like, "you can play all the golf you want". She didn't care about the cost of clubs and stuff, she was like, "I'd rather you play golf than be out there injuring yourself in football".
Maurice	Large parental support in golf (even though they didn't play golf)	Yeah. Well, the way I always thought about it was I invested a lot of time in golf, a lot of time and a lot of money, um, my parents, you know, were huge supporters of me and my golf career.
Main Theme: Grass Roots Golf Programs		
Trey	First Tee provided an avenue to make golf affordable for those who didn't have the extra finances to join a course Credits First Tee for making golf affordable	Um, as far as being able to afford playing golf, you have to understand that golf is very expensive, but um, as far as related to my success, probably the biggest thing that had an impact on me was the First Tee. Um, I joined the First Tee in 2001 and that made golf available to anyone who wanted to play the sport.
Reginald	First Tee program provided opportunity to practice for free (avoid financial barrier) First Tee allowed him opportunity to play all day	So, what we did is we did some research, and uh, a few people started telling us about the First Tee program. So uh, I went to the First Tee Program in Memphis. Of course I didn't have to have the best clubs, and I was able to play for free, and could just basically stay there all day.
Main Theme: Golf as a Means to College Scholarship		
Michael	Saw golf as a way to get to college/help parents out financially	Um, the fact that golf could get me to college and it would help my parents out financially. Um, I didn't go to a big enough school to where I got a full scholarship, but the scholarship I did get at least paid for at least half of my school.

Jeremy	College scholarship was a large influence to pursue golf	Um, the biggest influence, I guess would be, uh, well in high school, was the college scholarship. I feel like that's what I had the best chance to secure a future in, and get a college scholarship. So that was definitely, a college scholarship was definitely the motivation, uh, for me coming out of high school.
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Main Theme: Black Golfers as Role Models

Christian	Grandfather and his (Black) friends were main role models in golf	Yeah, basically what I knew about golf was, you know my grandfather and his buddies, um, Fletcher, or Mister Springfield we called him, Tony, um, Eddie, I mean those names don't really ring a bell to you, uh, but those were the only guys that I knew about golf.
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Main Theme: Black Golfer as Unique

Clay	Enjoyed being "different" (minority golfer) and the curiosity/interest that came with it	But I guess I chose golf because I mean, it seems like I always, not to brag or anything, but I like the fact that people thought that that was different. And a lot of times I tell people I play golf and they were like, "What? You play golf?" And you know I was proud of that because not that many people played golf, or even knew someone who played golf.
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RESULTS

Familial Involvement in Golf

Each of the participants described the influence of their family's involvement with their introduction to, competition in, and support for their pursuit of golf.

Familial introduction to golf

Eight of the nine participants were introduced to the game of golf through a family member. This family member was often a father (6 out of 10), but other times it was an uncle (1 out of 10) or a grandfather (1 out of 10). In part, it was this familial introduction that led to golf being something more than just a pastime. By having a family member involved in golf, the participants were able to use golf as a bond building and memory forming instrument. Shanequa describes the impact of golf on her relationship with her father:

My dad would be one of the few that I actually looked up to because he first introduced me to the game, and he actually played with me, he didn't just introduce it and, not participate in it with me, so it actually grew me and my dad so much closer than I ever thought that we could be close enough. But my dad was definitely a big thing when it came, for me starting golf.

Christian describes the influence of his grandfather on his introduction to and passion for golf:

So basically for my first Christmas my grandfather gave me a set of golf clubs and I would play around with that. Um, so I went out to the golf course with my grandfather whenever I was still in

diapers. And that was his way of babysitting me. And ever since then I just kind of got hooked on the game, I've been playing it and I developed a passion for it.

These participants describe the importance of having a family member introduce them to golf. Had it not been for this introduction, it is questionable whether they would have ever become involved in golf, as all of them were involved in other sports as children and adolescents as well.

Family competition in golf

In addition to the introduction to golf by a family member, competing against family members was another important aspect of these participants' early experiences in golf. For some, beating their fathers in golf was a milestone in their career. Michael describes this accomplishment:

(My dad is) overly competitive, so losing is definitely not something that I'm not accustomed to and want to do. So uh, my dad definitely never took it easy on me, uh, he always told me if you ever whenever you get to the point to where you can beat me you can beat anybody, and he was he was telling, he was being honest about that.

Trey also describes the competitive aspect of golf with his father:

Well first and foremost, obviously the first guy I ever played golf with was my dad. And you know I wanted to beat him. So, you know he's obviously a role model. Um, it would have to be him, you know (beating him), that's almost a milestone in my golf career.

Competition with a family member is something that provides an avenue for both goal setting and skill development in golf for these participants. It presents golf as a challenging and worthwhile endeavor, rather than simply a recreational pastime.

Familial support in golf

While not every member of these participants' families was actively involved in either the introduction to or playing of golf, every participant described the powerful level of support that their immediate family members had in their involvement in and pursuit of golf. For example, Jeremy describes his mother's support for his involvement with golf in favor of other sports:

So she (mother) was just very supportive of golf, you know, "yeah, he's playing golf." She's like, "you can play all the golf you want." She didn't care about the cost of clubs and stuff, she was like, "I'd rather you play golf than be out there injuring yourself in football."

For many of these participants and their families, it was the realization that their skills and bodies were not suited for high-level success in other sports (e.g., basketball, football, etc.) that encouraged the specific focus on developing their skill in golf. As another example, Maurice described his realization that he had a better chance of succeeding in golf than football:

I loved the game (football), but uh, you know I, actually I got hurt, I got hurt twice, two times, two separate seasons playing football, uh in high school, and it was kind of just a sign for me, that maybe this wasn't what I was supposed to be doing, you know, and then, you know, of course nowadays, you know, I played quarterback, and nowadays the guys are, you know, 6'4", 6'3," uh, you know, everyone wants a taller quarterback. Uh, I just realized it would be better off for me to pursue golf.

For the participants in our study, it cannot be understated how important the involvement of their families—whether it be in the introduction to, competition in, or support for golf—was in influential these Black golfers to participate in and pursue golf at the elite levels. The support system that was fostered around golf provided an environment where golf was viewed as an acceptable, positive, and worthwhile physical activity and competitive sport.

Grass Roots Golf Programs

After their initial introduction to the game, 7 out of the 10 participants were involved in some form of golf-specific program as a youth. Whether it was the First Tee organization, or some smaller local program, the participants spoke very highly of these organizations and their

ability to provide affordable access to golf as youth. Clay describes the organization he was a part of and how it provided opportunities for competition and skill development:

Basically, it was, I would say about 10 older gentlemen and about 30 kids aged from 8 to about 15...and all the guys in the organization were Black. Not that they tried to discriminate against anybody but that's just the kids that came out. But everybody in the organization was African American... and I was one of the younger kids in the program at the time, and there were a lot of people in there that were older who were a lot better than me at the time. So I always had somebody to kind of look up to and try to strive up to beat, and so I guess that's what kept me going for so long.

Another participant discussed the impact the popular First Tee Program had on his skill development. He acknowledged this program's larger focus on teaching youth life-skills through golf; but he focused specifically on the program's impact on the development of multiple skilled Black golfers.

According to Reginald:

The First Tee of Memphis at that time was a very productive program. It wasn't, it wasn't like the typical First Tee where everything is so life skill based, but it was more golf based. And we really produced a lot of golfers, and we had a lot of good golfers in my age group.

Other participants spoke about the role the First Tee played in helping to defray the costs associated with playing golf enough to really improve one's skills. According to Trey:

I joined the First Tee in 2001 and that made golf available to anyone who wanted to play the sport. Um, it basically was not expensive, I think it was maybe \$40 a month or a quarter, whatever, you know for a membership for the First Tee. And um, that made golf a whole lot easier for me, cause I was at the golf course all day long, I played golf all day long instead of just going to like a regular public course, and you pay, you know, \$7 for range balls, maybe \$20 to go walk. Um, the First Tee really made that possible for me to get involved with the game. Um, even for parents who there was no way they could afford to join even a public course, it made it possible for them. I know a couple of guys that were in that situation, and um, they give the First Tee a lot of credit for their success as well.

For many of the participants in our study, organizations like the two described above provided affordable access to golf and helped improve their skills as aspiring golfers. Without these organizations, these participants might have pursued other sporting options that were more cost effective, and perhaps missed out on realizing their full potential in golf.

Golf as a Means to a College Scholarship

Another influential factor that contributed to these participants' continued progression and skill development in golf was the potential of receiving a college golf scholarship. The incentive of utilizing golf as a means to help pay for a college education was enticing, and the ability to help their families financially motivated them to continue their progression in golf as youth. Clay describes how a college golf scholarship helped his parents financially:

I think I was probably equal with both of them (golf and band), because I was an all-state tuba player and an all-state golfer, so, you know I had the opportunity to go to school on a golf scholarship and a music scholarship. But the music scholarship didn't pay nearly as much as golf did, and I wanted to make it easy on my parents as possible, and so I went to school on a golf scholarship.

Jeremy also describes how the potential of a college golf scholarship was a motivating factor for him in high school:

I decided to pick golf. I feel like that's what I had the best chance to secure a future in, and get a college scholarship. So that was definitely, a college scholarship was definitely the motivation, uh, for me coming out of high school, I had a good opportunity to achieve that with golf.

Eight out of the 10 participants went to college on golf scholarships. Seven of the 10 went to a Historically Black College and University (HBCU); 1 went to a private college; 1 went to a Predominantly White Institution of Higher Education; and 1 did not attend college. The fact that the majority of our participants were on golf scholarships at HBCUs is noteworthy. In particular, one of our participants described how HBCUs serve as bastions of opportunities for Black golfers seeking scholarships. According to Clay:

I don't know how many Historically Black Colleges and Universities there are, but I mean, there's scholarships out there... I mean you can shoot, you can shoot over 100 and get a scholarship to play there (HBCU schools with less developed golf programs).

Although one might wonder if Clay is engaging in a bit of hyperbole by suggesting that you can "shoot over 100 and get a scholarship" to an HBCU, his narrative speaks to the understanding that opportunities are available at HBCUs for Black golfers who demonstrated any kind of potential and ability to play the game.

The motivation of obtaining a college golf scholarship was a large influence for these participants in their continued pursuit of skill development in golf. The potential of a scholarship helped make continued improvement in golf as a worthwhile endeavor, and something that had real tangible value to them.

Black Golfers as Role Models

Another highly influential factor that contributed to these participants' involvement and progression in golf was the influence of fellow Black golfers as role models. By having someone to look up to as a role model, these participants were able to have a similar other that allowed golf to be relatable to them. Aside from Tiger Woods, which 8 of the 10 participants listed as a role model in golf, 8 of the 10 participants listed another Black golfer as a role model. Clay describes the influence of one fellow Black golfer on his golf career:

So he was around 18-19 when I first started. And uh, you know, he was a young guy and he played golf, he was very talented in golf. And you know he just seemed like he had it all together, he, his golf game, he went to school on a golf scholarship, and you know, he was well spoken, well mannered, you know nice guy. And I was like, "wow" like, you know, that's the kind of guy, I think I kind of looked up to him a lot, because of the way he carried himself and because of his game and his golfing ability.

Jeremy describes how having two older role models helped him refine his game:

And so I was playing a lot of golf with, um, they (Jerwood and Boomer) were actually cousins, they wanted to play college golf as well, and one was going pro. So I stuck with those two guys and played a lot of golf with them. That's probably where I got the most learning was playing with those two guys and getting that experience.

The positive influence of a Black golf-specific role model is a theme that every participant mentioned as the largest factor in getting the Black community to see golf as a legitimate recreational and professional option. The magnitude of this impact was demonstrated in their own experience, and has to be replicated on a larger scale if Black involvement in golf is going to increase on a substantial level. An example that was indicative of every participant's response to the question, "What is it going to take to get the Black community more involved with golf?" was Maurice, who said:

I mean there has to be, you have to see more Black faces out there playing and competing at a high level. By turning the TV on and seeing another Black person doing well besides Tiger, you can say well, "Hold on, Tiger isn't an exception, more of us can do it, you know I can do it". I mean that's going to be the biggest thing is to boost African American participation in the game.

Black Golfer as Unique

These participants were often the only Black golfers at the tournaments they played in (prior to attending HBCU schools). When asked what it was like to be the only Black golfers in most settings, the participants shared a sense of pride in being unique. The fact that there were so few of them competing in tournaments was a motivation to continue to improve and show that they were just as skilled as their White counterparts. Jeremy describes what it was like being the only Black golfer in most tournaments:

I was the only Black guy at a lot of tournaments. So I got kind of used to that. You know I actually enjoyed being the only Black person out there. Everybody knew who I was, and they knew I was a pretty solid golfer.

Reginald also describes the sense of pride he took, knowing that he was one of only a few Black golfers to be competing in golf at a high level:

Yeah, so not only were we the only three Black guys on our high school golf team, when we went to the state tournament we were the only three Black guys in the state tournament. So, you know, we kind of took pride in it.

Even though there is a shared desire to see an increase in Black participation in golf on a large scale, for these participants growing up in golf, being a minority actually helped them to stay motivated and driven to excel in golf.

DISCUSSION

In this study we sought to explore some influential factors that contributed to Black golfers' participation in and pursuit of golf at the elite level. Findings from our exploratory study revealed these golfers were heavily influenced by their family's involvement in their golf pursuits, grass roots golf programs such as the First Tee, the lure of a college scholarship to play golf, other Black golfers who served as role models, and the pride they took in being unique as one of only a few Black elite level golfers. Below, we provide some brief insight into our findings by situating them within the context of relevant literature.

Our findings speak directly to the important role familial involvement, grass roots golf programs, and Black golf role models all play in helping to foster the human capital and cultural capital often required to participate in golf as both a recreational, physical activity and elite-level competitive sport. As mentioned earlier, Saint Onge and Krueger [1] suggested Blacks and other racial minorities often lack such capital, and this explains why they tend to participate in sports and physical activities (e.g., football, basketball) other than golf. Research has highlighted the role of family and significant others in contributing to children's socialization and participation in different sports and physical activities. For example, Fredricks and Eccles [15] drew from the expectancy-value model to demonstrate how important familial involvement is in helping to nurture the development of children in their sport and physical activity endeavors. In the case of the participants in our study, this familial involvement served not only as their entrée into golf, but it also led to our participants' involvement in the First Tee and other grass roots golf programs. Such programs allowed our participants to acquire the human capital (i.e., skills) and cultural capital (i.e., knowledge of golf industry norms) necessary to move from recreational to elite golfers.

Our participants' familial support and their participation in these grass roots programs contributed to their self-concept and identity development. They began to see themselves as golfers at a fairly young age, and this helped influence their interest and personal investments in becoming elite golfers. Rosselli and Singer [3] discussed how Blacks and other racial minorities who have high perceived competence in physical activities such as golf are more likely to participate. This was the case for our participants, who took great pride and viewed themselves as unique because of their golfing skills and abilities. They were motivated by their unique status as elite Black golfers, and by the success of other Black golfers they viewed as role models.

In some of our research on challenges Black golfers face in their pursuit of professional playing careers we found that they were viewed as illegitimate golfers by many within the White golf establishment (see Authors, in review). Research has also shown that people often view the prototypical golfer as being a White person [16]. However, the narratives of our participants in this current study served as a challenge to these assertions. As mentioned above, these Black golfers had a strong self-concept and really embraced being Black golfers. In alignment with literature on critical race theory (CRT) in the sport context [17], our participants offered important counter-narratives to the dominant narrative that views Blacks as lacking the human capital and cultural capital necessary to be successful in golf at the elite levels.

Finally, our findings also shed light on the importance of social capital and the challenges Black golfers often face in securing access to equitable and equal opportunities in the golf industry. One of the influential factors in our participants' pursuit of golf at the elite level was the possibilities for golf scholarships. As mentioned earlier, most all of our participants attended HBCUs on golf scholarships. On the one hand, this is a positive thing for the individual golfers and the institutions. HBCUs came into existence because of the racism against Black people in U.S. society; and they have a long tradition and rich history of providing educational and sport participation opportunities for many of the best and brightest people in the Black community [18, 19]. In this regard, the ability of some HBCUs to offer scholarships to Black golfers who have aspirations to play collegiate golf and pursue professional playing careers is promising.

But on the other hand, Black golfers' almost sole reliance on HBCUs to provide scholarship opportunities might limit and inhibit their ability to pursue professional playing careers. It also speaks to the access discrimination Blacks have faced in being denied opportunities to attend and participate in sports such as golf at historically White colleges and universities (HWCUs). In the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, Blacks in the revenue-generating sports of football and basketball have been heavily recruited and granted scholarships to HWCUs by the important networks of powerful stakeholders (e.g., coaches, boosters, alumni) at these institutions. This social capital has been lacking for Black golfers who might be interested in attending these HWCUs on golf scholarships (see Authors, in review).

As previously mentioned, Rosselli and Singer [3] discussed how micro-level factors such as social capital (or lack thereof) coalesce with macro-level factors (e.g., systemic racism and the White racial framing in U.S. society) and meso-level factors (e.g., organizational cultures of similarity) to create barriers for Black golfers' access to opportunities within golf industry organizations such as college programs at HWCUs or on professional tours such as the PGA and LPGA Tours. Our bringing these multi-level factors back into the discussion is not to suggest that Black golfers should necessarily pick HWCUs over HBCUs if given the option, or that their affiliation with these HBCU golf programs make it impossible to successfully pursue professional playing careers. However, Black golfers in previous research we have conducted acknowledged that the social capital that can be generated via participation in golf at HWCUs and the resources (e.g., playing and practice facilities, program budgets) that are often available to golfers in these programs provides benefits and advantages that golfers at HBCUs seldom enjoy (Authors, in review). Despite these disadvantages, the Black golfers in our study did not allow such disparities discourage them from their pursuit of professional playing careers.

The findings from our study suggest there are some important avenues worth pursuing in future research. For example, scholars could build on this current research and focus on the following: a) further examine influential factors that contribute to Black and other racial minority golfers' pursuit of golf as both a recreational physical activity and elite competitive sport, and the challenges associated with breaking into the golf industry at these various levels b) illuminate the "success stories" of those Black male golfers (e.g., Harold Varner III, Joseph Bramlett) and Black female golfers (e.g., Mariah Stackhouse, Sadena Parks, Ginger Howard, Cheyenne Woods) who actually made it to the pinnacle of professional golf in the U.S. (i.e., earned their PGA and LPGA Tour cards, respectively) in recent years, c) examine Blacks' and other racial minorities' general attitudes toward golf as a physical activity and competitive sport. The qualitative and quantitative data that emerges from such research could be used to further examine and potentially build upon the multilevel factors Rosselli and Singer [3] advanced in their conceptual article on the underrepresentation of Blacks and other racial minorities as recreational and professional golfers in the U.S.

In addition to the research implications mentioned above, there are some practical implications for golf industry organizations and groups that are genuinely interested in diversity,

equity, and inclusion in golf, and frankly, the long-term growth and survival of this sport and physical activity [20] should consider. For example, local golf and country clubs throughout the U.S. should invest in building and maintaining strong caddie programs, especially since this has historically served as one of the primary mechanisms by which Blacks and other racial groups (including Whites) have been socialized into the sport. Although many Blacks who pick up the game via caddying might never pursue the game beyond the recreational level or perhaps disengage from golf altogether, there have been some (e.g., the late great, Charlie Sifford) who have used the caddie experience to catapult themselves to professional playing careers. Governing bodies such as the Western Golf Association (WGA) should continue their important work and collaboration with golf and country clubs to preserve and increase caddie programs and the diversity within them (e.g., WGA Caddie Academy Program for underprivileged and racial minority girls). Caddie programs are important not only because they introduce young people to the game of golf and help them build their social capital, but also because it is a form of physical activity that has potential long-term health and fitness benefits for those who do it. Since physical activity has been demonstrated to improve the quality of life amongst its participants [21], and golf is a lifetime physical activity, all should be encouraged and welcomed to play, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.

Other practical considerations could include industry organizations (e.g., PGA of America, United States Golf Association (USGA)) partnering with the PGA Tour and LPGA Tour on diversity initiatives designed to create (more) programs and opportunities for Blacks and other underrepresented racial groups to develop into recreational and professional golfers. The grassroots First Tee Program has certainly been an important starting point for introducing and getting young people involved in golf, including the participants in our current study. However, these powerful golf industry organizations mentioned above should work with the First Tee Program and other grassroots programs (particularly those in the Black community) to create and increase opportunities for Blacks and other underrepresented groups. This most certainly should involve the devotion of financial and other resources to programs that help these groups break through the many barriers that have historically existed, and continue to persist today.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our current study was exploratory in nature, as we attempted to begin understanding what factors contributed to a small group of Black golfers' pursuit of professional playing careers, even in the face of the myriad of challenges associated with their ambitions. We encourage scholars and practitioners alike to engage in strategic collaborations to address the underrepresentation of Blacks and other racial minorities in golf as both a recreational physical activity and competitive sport. With the declining participation in golf [20] and the demographic shift in the U.S. where it is projected that within the next few decades, the U.S. will be a majority-minority society [22], the future survival of golf might very well depend on increasing the number of non-White participants at all levels.

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