

COMMUNICATIVE ACTS IN COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIPS IN
DIVISION II COLLEGIATE WOMEN'S GOLF

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the perceptions female Division II golf players have of their coaches' reactions to their bad golf shots during practice and tournament rounds. Data gathering for this qualitative study included observations and in-depth interviews with players from two different schools within the NCAA West Region. In regard to perceptions that were formed during tournament rounds, nine categories were established (e.g. calm, optimistic, encouraging, emotional masking, evasive, tense, shocked, frustrated, and direct). Four categories were established in regards to perceptions formed during practice (e.g. calm and motivational, irritated and frustrated, technical, and disappointed). This thesis highlights the importance of coaching behaviors on athletes' emotional state and performance.

Keywords: attribution theory, coaching behaviors, golf, phenomenology

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Within the realm of sports, there are many different factors that must be taken into consideration when pursuing success. One such factor is the coach-athlete relationship. In the summer of 1852, the first collegiate sport was birthed upon the waters of Lake Winnepesaukee when Yale challenged its archrival, Harvard, “to test the superiority of the oarsmen of the two colleges” (“Harvard-Yale,” 2014, para. 2). Harvard stood tall and claimed two consecutive victories. With Harvard’s dominance in rowing, Yale took the initiative and hired William Wood to train its crew, hoping this would give the team the boost they needed to beat Harvard. Wood was a professional trainer at the time and worked with the team for 4 weeks prior to the race (Kennedy, 2001). As the newly appointed coach of the Yale rowing team, Wood became “the first professional coach in American college athletics” (Kennedy, 2001, para. 8). Since then, collegiate sports have grown considerably with an impressively diverse list of sports including women’s golf.

The challenges within the relationship between female collegiate athletes and female coaches are the focus of this thesis. As Sagar and Jowett (2012) stated in an article exploring communicative acts within the coach-athlete relationship, “it is important to study athletes’ perceptions of their coaches’ interpersonal behaviors, and the

impact of such behavior on athletes' learning, sport experience, and well-being" (p. 51).

This thesis will attempt to explore how perceptions of certain communicative acts between female golf coaches and their female athletes affect each athlete's performance.

Rationale

There are several reasons why it is important to study specific communicative acts within interpersonal relationships between coaches and their athletes. These reasons are grounded in existing research (Bum & Shin, 2015; Horn, Bloom, Berglund, & Packard, 2011; Sagar, & Jowett, 2012; Wilson, Hawkins, & Joyner, 2015), as well as in my personal experiences as a female collegiate athlete playing golf for a Division II university. There have been several coach-athlete communication-related experiences in my life that I felt necessary to reflect on. From a young age, I learned to play the game of golf with my dad as my right-hand man. He coached me and molded me into the player I am today. Looking back, there were a few things about this time with my dad that stood out to me. I have always been concerned about what people think, and could pick up on body language since I was a child. However, I realized that body language can easily be misinterpreted. When I made mistakes while playing golf, I could clearly tell when my dad was being verbally supportive, but the expression on his face shouted disappointment. Being older now, I recognize that this was a healthy kind of disappointment. It was not a case of him being disappointed in me as his daughter but a case of him sharing my frustration. He knew how hard I was working and simply wanted me to succeed. At the time, however, I did not think about it like that.

Fast forward a few years and I am a college golfer, playing on a scholarship that covered most of my expenses. Suddenly, I had much more to lose. If I fail to perform well, I might be stripped of my scholarship. During my career as a collegiate golfer, there were several occasions when I recall taking notice of my coach's reactions after I hit a bad golf shot. These observations often influenced my performance and attitude. Sometimes it would encourage me to rise above the mistake, and other times, I would become discouraged or even angry, which usually resulted in my falling into a downward spiral of poor shot execution and course management.

I would often ask myself, "Why did Coach react like that?" and that is what led me to this thesis. From my own personal experiences, I have drawn the following conclusions: the way a coach reacts makes a difference, sometimes big, sometimes small, but regardless, it does make a difference in how collegiate players respond. What is it that coaches do that might be more harmful to their players or spur them on to perform better? Having walked in the shoes of a collegiate athlete, I recognize that there will be some personal bias compared to what I might feel the best thing would be for a coach to do. At the same time, after talking to several teammates over the years, I have noticed that some players are motivated or discouraged by different things, including the reaction and body language of their coaches. Most importantly, my goal is to observe and learn more about such interactions between collegiate athletes and their coaches. My thesis will explore whether it is possible to lower the chances of having misinterpreted interpersonal exchanges between coaches and their athletes and to develop a strategy that can be beneficial to both the player and the coach.

The Phenomenon of interest is the shared experience female collegiate golfers have when perceiving their coaches' reactions to their bad golf shots during tournaments and practice rounds and how those perceptions influence their attitude and performance. Research concerning women's collegiate golf has been scarce in the field of communication studies, and even though the topic of this thesis is specific, it will create more insight into a seemingly understudied topic.

Coaching and interpersonal communication between athletes and their coaches have been studied by several communication scholars and psychologists including Jowett (2007), Kassing and Infante (1999), Miller, Franken, and Kiefer (2007), and Turman (2005). However, these studies mostly focused on the leadership role of incorporated support, instruction, and guidance (Jowett, 2012). Cote and Gilbert (2009) explored the definition of coaching effectiveness and expertise. They posit that effective coaching is highly dependent on a coach's development of interpersonal knowledge to communicate appropriately. In terms of models that focus on the coach-athlete relationship, the 3Cs model (closeness, commitment, and complementarity) has gained popularity in the last decade (Jowett, 2007). Yet, this model is not focused on specific communicative acts. In fact, "research on the influence of specific interpersonal situations on coach-athlete communicative acts of interaction has been scant, and often not well documented" (Sagar, & Jowett, 2012, p. 150). However, Sagar and Jowett (2012) attempted to bridge this by exploring two communicative acts in coach-athlete interactions. These acts include how athletes perceived their coaches' reaction when they make mistakes during practice or training and when they lose competitions. However, what is important to note

is that Sagar and Jowett (2012) focused on various collegiate sports in their data gathering and analysis, not one specific sport. By studying a smaller group facing similar experiences within the same context, valuable knowledge can be gained to help coaches become more educated on how to carry themselves on the course and consider the non-verbal communication messages they send to their players and how those messages are received. Ultimately, by capturing the essence of this experience, valuable untapped knowledge can be exposed to help improve the effectiveness of coaching and, in turn, improve the performance of collegiate athletes.

As previously mentioned, the findings from this thesis can not only help coaches improve their coaching effectiveness, it can also help players. If coaches portray the kind of interpersonal communication messages and expressions that are positively received by players, the confidence, and ultimately the performance, of the players will improve. Additionally, these findings could also encourage researchers to perform similar studies about other collegiate sports that are usually overlooked (e.g., tennis, bowling, softball). The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover how female athletes perceive their female coaches' reactions to their bad golf shots during tournament rounds and practice.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research involving relationships between coaches and their players has been conducted for several years, suggesting that there is a growing interest in studying the different dynamics within the coach-player relationship (Baker, Côté, & Hawes, 2000; d'Arripe-Longueville, Fournier, & Dubois, 1998; Horn, Bloom, Berglund, & Packard, 2011; Turman, 2007). One theory that seems fitting for studying this dyad from a communication perspective is attribution theory. According to this theory, people ascribe meaning to their observations, similar to the meaning players would ascribe to their coaches' reactions. This literature review will examine previous works focusing on attribution theory, along with research geared toward investigating coaching effectiveness and coaching behaviors and perceptions.

Attribution Theory

It is in every individual's human nature to try to make sense of the behaviors and events that take place around them, as well as the outcomes of each of those actions (Turman, 2007). We are constantly trying to make sense of the world around us, not only in terms of big events but even smaller interactions that occur within our relationships. As we evaluate behaviors, we start to assign attributions to why people act

the way they do. According to Borkowski (2009), “an attribution is a causal explanation for an event or behavior” (p. 147). Sometimes, these actions are ignored and not even noticed, however, certain actions can have a big influence on an individual’s attitude, behavior, and perception. Based on my experience as a college athlete, athletes are constantly interpreting situations and experiences inspired by the coach-athlete relationship. These situations can include the athletes’ performance, how their teammates are performing, and how their coach is evaluating their performance. Athletes take note of their coach’s behaviors because if their coach is not satisfied, that could affect their chances of qualifying to play in future tournaments or maintaining their scholarship. These observations are even more prevalent when athletes know they are making mistakes. Those were the kinds of thoughts that ran through my head as I was assessing my coach’s evaluation of me. Similar to Sagar and Jowett’s (2012) findings about certain communicative acts within the coach-player relationship, this thesis aims to explore specific communicative acts between female collegiate golfers and their coaches.

Attribution theory is no stranger to the realm of athletic research. Wilson, Hawkins, and Joyner (2015) utilized explanatory style, which is closely related to attribution theory, to investigate optimism between players and coaches in NCAA men’s Division I golf. The study used a mixed-method approach and discovered that coaches had a good understanding of explanatory style and managed to implement techniques of thought/self-talk with players who seemed to have less optimistic views after unsuccessful rounds of golf. This is just one example of how perceptions within certain situations affect the reactions of individuals. This study took into consideration how

coaches perceived their athletes' levels of optimism after an unsatisfactory round of golf and how they chose to address attributions they made regarding why the athletes were less optimistic. My thesis will take a similar approach, but the examples being explored will differ along with the individuals being studied: players and coaches in female Division II golf.

Turman (2007) used attribution theory to study how sex, context, and performance influenced high school basketball coaches' use of regret messages during competition. In his evaluation of the appropriateness of this theory for his study, he noted that the way a coach delivers feedback to athletes, whether it be verbal or non-verbal, can affect the kind of attributions athletes make about the event they just experienced. These attributions or explanations can create a wide array of responses within the athlete, such as feelings of regret as they reflect on what they should have done differently (Turman, 2005). Although, his study did not find a significant difference between how coaches use regret messages on male or female athletes it did show a difference based on sport; football coaches used fewer regret messages related to individual performances compared to those of basketball coaches. One of the reasons for this could be because basketball teams consist of fewer athletes compared to football teams (Turman, 2007). Chelladurai and Kuga (1996) noted that most educators would agree that instructing smaller groups created more opportunity for the educators to have desirable change among the individuals under their care. Therefore, one can assume that as team characteristics change, the types of messages coaches use to influence the performance and mind-set for each athlete's performance will, too (Turman, 2007). This can lead one to question

whether coaches use individual performance regret messages with other smaller sports teams, such as golf teams. Even though Turman's (2007) study is concerned with basketball teams, feelings of regret are common in all sport contexts simply because failure is inevitable and regret is a natural response to it.

Turman (2007) argues that "attribution and regret about unsuccessful or ineffective outcomes is the byproduct of many group experiences, especially sports, where the very nature of competition supports winning as the primary outcome for athletics events at almost all levels" (p. 335). Coaches can help athletes recover from their failures by motivating them to improve on their performance; however, in that same token, coaches can have the opposite effect as well.

Attribution theory, at its core, proposes that people tend to seek out causal reasons that would explain observed behavior (Miller, 2005). For this thesis, the communication problem or observed behavior that will be explored is how female athletes perceive their female coach's reactions to bad golf shots and how they interpret those behaviors. This study also seeks to know how such reactions affects players emotionally and how they affect their actual performance.

Coaching Effectiveness

Any study that explores coaching styles, coach-athlete relationships, or the role of coaches in sport ultimately has one common goal: to gain more insight into finding ways coaches can be most effective at what they do. This goal leads to the following question: what is coaching effectiveness? Coker, Fischman, and Oxendine (2006) posit that effective coaches could be described as "coaches who must have excellent knowledge of

their sport and be innovative strategists, skilled motivators, and effective personal counselors” (p. 17). Cote and Gilbert (2009) also attempted to answer this question as they sought to present a functional definition of coaching effectiveness and expertise. They established three components that helped in the formation of their definition. These components were comprised of coaches’ knowledge, athletes’ outcomes, and coaching contexts.

One can argue that it is common sense that a coach would need to be knowledgeable to be effective, but what is important to highlight is knowledge extends beyond being informed about different techniques and the science behind the motions of the sport. Cote and Gilbert (2009) stated that “it is important for coaches to continuously develop their interpersonal knowledge base so they can communicate appropriately and effectively with their particular athletes and other people” (pp. 310-311). Also, for coaches to take athletes’ different ages and competitive levels into consideration, they need to be more knowledgeable about how to relate to athletes in their social contexts.

After reviewing literature, Cote and Gilbert (2009) proposed an integrative definition of coaching effectiveness: “The consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes’ competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts” (p. 316). Clearly, there are a wide variety of factors that go into being an effective coach; however, for coaches to become more knowledgeable about interpersonal situations, additional research regarding specific contexts in the coach-athlete relationship must be conducted.

Coaching Behaviors and Perceptions

Studying coaching behavior is not new or unfamiliar to the discipline of sport psychology and human behavior research. Many studies have attempted to bridge this gap by considering how coaching behavior is linked to anxiety and self-confidence (Bum & Shin, 2015; Kenow & Williams, 1992), self-talk (Zourbanos et al., 2010), and leadership styles (Bum & Shin, 2015; Horn et al., 2011). Most research regarding coaching behaviors have used quantitative methods. This is because several models and instruments have been developed and improved over the years to help researchers attain more knowledge about how coaching behavior affects athletes. By gaining knowledge about this area of research, coaches can ultimately learn how to be more effective in their fields of practice.

The reason it is important to explore coaching behavior and the perceptions athletes have of the behavior is because the way a person perceives another person's behavior can have a greater impact than the behavior itself (Shaver, 1975). Smith, Smoll, and Hunt (1977) created the Coaching Behavioral Assessment System, also known as the CBAS to measure coaching behaviors. Many researchers have used this assessment system for their own exploration of coaching behaviors (e.g., Lemonidis et al., 2014; Meeûs, Serpa, & De Cuyper, 2010; Vaez Mousavi, & Shojaei, 2005).

Similar to the CBAS is an instrument called the Perceived Behavioral Scale (PBS) that was developed by Smith, Smoll, and Curits (1978). This instrument similarly assesses athletes' perceptions of the different kinds of behavior coaches portray (Zourbanos et al., 2010). Years later, the CBAS by Smith and Smoll (1989) was used to

help create the “model of leadership behaviors in sport” (Kenow & Williams, 1992, p. 344). This model “provides a foundation for examining coaching behaviors and the factors influencing athletes’ perceptions and evaluations of their behaviors” (Kenow & Williams, 1992, p. 344).

According to Kenow and Williams’ (1992) model of leadership behaviors in sport, a coach would portray a particular behavior, then an athlete would perceive and recall this behavior; and then depending on how they perceived and recalled the behavior, the athlete reacts to the coach’s behavior they evaluated. Different variables are included in the model: coaching variables (e.g., coaching goals, behavioral intentions, inferred player motives, sex), athlete variables (e.g., age, sex, perceived coaching norms, general self-esteem, competitive trait anxiety), and situational factors (e.g., the nature of the sport, the different outcomes in practice and games, the skill of the competition).

Kenow and Williams (1992) used Smith and Smoll’s (1989) model of leadership behaviors in sport to test competitive trait anxiety in two separate studies on a female collegiate basketball team. After conducting both studies, it appeared evident that anxiety was a major variable in how athletes perceived their game behavior. Kenow and Williams (1993, 1999) continued their pursuit of expanding the research concerning coaching behaviors, and similar to Smoll and Smith’s (1989), they used the CBAS to develop the Coaching Behavioral Questionnaire (CBQ). This instrument was “a more comprehensive instrument for the assessment of several aspects of coaching behavior” (Zourbanos et al. 2010, p. 767).

Zourbanos et al. (2010) used the model of leadership behaviors, along with other instruments such as the PBS and the CBQ, in a three-part study they conducted concerning how coaching behavior affected athletes' self-talk. The athletes who participated in the study came from different sporting disciplines such as basketball, gymnastics, swimming, soccer, track and field, volleyball, and tennis. The findings in their second study indicated that when coaches portrayed supportive behavior, athletes perceived it in a positive manner, which led to positive self-talk, and the complete opposite results were found when coaches portrayed unsupportive behavior. Results from their third study revealed various coaching behaviors had an impact on players' self-talk.

In a related study, Bum and Shin (2015) explored how leadership styles, anxiety, and performance were related among Korean junior golfers. For their research, they utilized the Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MML) and drew from the Multidimensional Anxiety Theory (MAT). After analyzing the data, the researchers revealed that anxiety among golfers decreased when coaches applied training/instruction and social support in their coaching. Also, a player's self-confidence before tournaments increased when coaches gave positive feedback and allowed for proper training and instruction leading up to the tournament. A leadership style that was negatively associated with this sporting context was autocratic behavior. Bum and Shin (2015) also helped reveal more knowledge about sport and, like this thesis, focused on one sport.

Up until this point, most research focusing on coaching behavior has been conducted by utilizing quantitative methods. However, Sagar and Jowett (2012) approached their study of coaching behavior by using qualitative methods. Their study

explored how players from various sporting disciplines perceived their coaches' communitive acts and how they responded to these coaching behaviors when they made mistakes during training or lost competitions. Their findings reinforced what has been found in previous research: coaching behavior in these distinct situations had "a vital role in promoting athletes' motivation, physical self-concept, skill development, and ultimately their sporting success" (p. 170). An aspect about their research that added to the value of the study was the fact that they asked athletes to give recommendations on how they would prefer their coaches to behave when losing competitions or making mistakes in training. The study utilized open-ended questionnaires to interview 324 participants. Sagar and Jowett (2012) recommended that future research consider performing in-depth interviews with the coaches to get their perspective on these scenarios.

Regardless of the research method, it is evident that there is a significant link between coaching behaviors and how perceptions of these behaviors can have a variety of effects on athletes. However, this simple interaction can be broken down into multiple facets that must be studied, in depth, to gain insight that would contribute to valuable knowledge to help coaches in the pursuit of being the most effective coaches they can be. Some of these facets that have been researched include how coaching behavior is related to anxiety, leadership styles, self-confidence, and self-talk. Yet, there is still a plethora of other sport-specific situations that need to be studied by looking at how athletes create perceptions of coaching behaviors within those situations. Therefore, I propose the following research questions to expand on the knowledge of coaching behaviors:

RQ 1: How do athletes perceive their coaches' reactions when they hit bad golf shots during tournament rounds?

RQ 2: How do athletes perceive their coaches' reactions when they hit bad golf shots during practice/training?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Phenomenological research is concerned with lived experiences. It aims to create a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences (Van Manen, 1990). Creswell (2013) discussed two types of phenomenological research methods: hermeneutical phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is when research is more concerned with lived experiences and interpreting the “texts” of life. It was found to be the best fit for this thesis because, unlike transcendental phenomenology, it focuses more on the interpretations of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). This thesis will use the guidelines provided by Van Manen (1990) for hermeneutic phenomenology. According to Van Manen (1990), hermeneutic phenomenological research can be viewed as a dynamic interplay among six research activities. These activities are:

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it, rather than as we conceptualize it;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5)

maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and
(6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30 - 31)

The phenomena that was identified for this thesis are how female Division II golfers perceive their female coaches' reactions after they hit bad golf shots during tournament rounds and practice. The reason I selected these phenomena is because I had personally experienced this as a collegiate golfer and wanted to explore the experience in more depth. After interviewing 14 participants who have experienced similar phenomena, the findings were examined for themes. Once themes were established, I interpreted the results and discussed each phenomenon.

Participants

Research has shown that the number of participants to use for phenomenological studies can be between 5 and 25 people (Polkinghorne, 1989). According to Marshall (1996), "an appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question" (p. 523). For example, Godfrey (2016) used a sample of 14 high school football players for his phenomenological study on aggression in high-school football players. For this thesis, 14 Division II female golfers were recruited by means of snowball sampling within the NCAA West Region. These 14 participants were part of two different teams, and each participant was required to be 18 years of age or older. This group of participants was culturally diverse as some of them were international students. In qualitative research, saturation is the point where there are no new themes emerging from the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). For this thesis, saturation was reached after 13 interviews.

Procedure

The methods of data collection included observations and semi-structured in-depth interviews. According to Creswell (2013), “Observations is one of the key tools for collecting data in qualitative research” (p. 166). Observations were utilized for this thesis because they were well suited to help answer the research questions at hand. This method created an opportunity to see the coach-player interaction in person and to witness coaches’ reactions to players’ bad shots first hand.

Interviews served as the main form of data collection for this thesis. Once the study was approved by the university’s Internal Review Board, the process of recruiting participants started. Participants were informed of the study’s objectives (exploring how athletes perceive their coaches’ reactions after they hit bad golf shots, and how those perceptions affected their performance). Each participant was reminded prior to the data gathering process that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could choose to leave the study at any point at no cost to them which none of the participants chose to do. To protect participants’ identities, each athlete was assigned a pseudonym and may also be referred to by generic title. No incentives were offered for participation.

Observations

For this thesis, I served as a participant as observer. The goal for the study was to observe each participant at least once. This proved to be more difficult than expected. Observations were conducted during a tournament in which both teams and all 14 participants were competing. Before starting the observation process, each participant

signed a consent form, agreeing to be observed during practice and tournament rounds, as well as being interviewed. Some of the participants competed as individuals during the tournament and were not competing as part of the team. Coaches only followed the players who were participating as a part of the team and, therefore, there were no notes to be taken regarding how some individual players perceived their coach's reaction after a bad golf shot.

Observation protocol was composed of dual-column pages that allowed for descriptive notes (summarizing the flow of activities) to be taken on one side and reflective notes (reflection on activities to assist in later theme development) on the opposite side. After the observations were completed, each participant was contacted and scheduled for an in-depth interview.

Interviews

A study conducted by Sagar and Jowett (2012) was used as a springboard for this thesis. Their survey questions were updated to better fit the goals of this thesis. Due to the nature of qualitative research, questions were open-ended and semi-structured. Each question was framed in a manner that would help gain more insight into the research questions at hand. There were two sections to the interview process. The first section focused on tournaments, and the second section was related to practice. Athletes were asked questions regarding how they perceived their coaches' reactions to their bad shots either during tournament rounds or during practice (see appendix A for a general overview of the kind of questions athletes were asked).

Interviews took place either face-to-face in an enclosed office or via online video calling (Skype or Facetime). Video-calling was used because some participants were not available to meet for interviews in person. Interviews lasted between 18 and 40 minutes. With consent, they were voice recorded, transcribed, and stored on a password-protected computer for security.

Data Analysis

Each interview was transcribed verbatim. Van Manen (1990) explained that one can generally use one of three approaches to “isolate thematic aspects of a phenomenon” (p. 92). One of these approaches is referred to as the highlighting approach. This is when one rereads the text several times and looks for statements or phrases that seem essential to revealing more about the experience being described (Van Manen, 1990). Creswell (2015) explained how writers can present their findings in stages, “multiple themes that can be combined into larger themes or perspectives” (p. 54). Using the guidelines provided by Van Manen (1990) and Creswell (2015), I started data analysis by carefully reading through each transcript and my observation notes. Highlighters were used to identify statements and phrases that revealed more about the phenomena being discussed. Notes were made next to each highlighted phrase regarding what theme it could be identified with. In total, 26 themes emerged and were divided into categories and subcategories. Repetitive statements were removed, each category contained examples of phrases and statements that helped shape it. Once all the results were reported, I discuss how the common experiences of the participants shaped the essence of the phenomenon. Similar findings from previous research were also cited.

Validation

To increase trustworthiness and credibility, several steps were taken. First, previous research was analyzed to find gaps in the field of coach-athlete communication and women's Division II golf. As it turns out, there was a significant gap and this thesis helps to fill it. Second, I clarified researcher bias in the introduction of this thesis so that readers can clearly understand my position as a researcher and the biases and assumptions that I might hold. I shared my past experiences as a collegiate golfer as well as prejudices that would have an influence on the way I interpret and approach this study. Third, after transcribing each interview, I sent each participant their transcription and asked them to review it. The participants who responded assured me that everything was accurate. Third, member checking was used during the interview process. Several participants clearly shared how they perceived their coach (e.g., calm, shocked, and encouraging.) However, some participants gave examples of how their coaches would respond but did not share how they necessarily perceived those actions. In those cases, I presented participants with the perception I deemed most fitting to their description and they either confirmed it or clarified their perception during the interview. Finally, I compiled an audit trail, which can be found in Appendix B.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

As mentioned in the previous chapter, data collection included observations and in-depth interviews. Observation notes and transcribed interviews were analyzed, and noteworthy findings and statements were highlighted. Noteworthy statements included any comments that provided more insight into how the participant experienced the perception of a coach's reaction after hitting a bad shot during tournament and practice rounds. Next, these statements and findings were organized into clusters of meaning. This is when the statements are grouped into themes. Overlapping and repetitive statements are removed (Creswell, 2013).

This results section is divided into five subsections: players' definitions of a bad golf shot; perceptions of coaches' reactions when athletes hit bad shots during tournament rounds; perceptions of coaches' reactions when athletes hit bad shots during practice; observations; and athletes' recommendations on how coaches should respond to bad golf shots. Each subsection consists of categories that were formed using similar themes that emerged after analyzing the data.

Players Definitions of a Bad Golf Shot

Defining a bad golf shot can be very difficult. Players tend to have different expectations and standards by which they hold themselves accountable, which is reasonable. Therefore, in order to find one definition that is applicable to every player, it would have to be broad. Instead, each player was asked to define what she considered a bad golf shot and what she thought her coach would consider a bad golf shot. By allowing players to reflect on their own definition, along with their coaches', it would give the results more accuracy. After analyzing the interviews, two categories were revealed: definitions based on results and definitions based on shot quality.

Definitions based on results. The two main themes that formed related to definitions based on results were: off target and can't recover. In both cases, coaches and players were concerned with the result of the shot and not necessarily the mechanics of the shot itself. The big difference between these themes is that even when players are off target they can still recover from the shot in most cases. However, when a player cannot recover from her shots, that usually means she will not have an opportunity to make up for her "bad golf shot," and she must settle for scoring a little higher on a hole than intended.

Off target. There were eight participants who defined a bad golf shot as something being off target. Rachel¹ said, "well I consider a bad shot something that goes extremely out of my target" (personal communication, February 23, 2017).

¹All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the players.

Kepner felt that a bad shot would be something that didn't put her "in a good position for the next one" (personal communication, March 3, 2017). Similarly, Arizona felt that when her golf shots do not "go where they are supposed to go" or where she envisioned them going it would be considered a bad golf shot. The way Arizona thought her coach would define a bad golf shot was similar but much more precise. She shared that if she does not play a golf shot in regulation, then her coach would consider it a bad golf shot. Regulation golf is when each stroke is expected to have a certain result, e.g., on a par four hole, a player is expected to drive the ball onto the fairway, play the second shot onto the green, and use two putts to get the ball into the hole.

Torres felt that a bad shot could fall into two categories: "I mean, you've got... bad shots and really bad shots. If you just miss 20, 10, yards you can still make up and down, but if you're in a hazard then you know it was a BAD shot" (personal communication, February 22, 2017). Sometimes players do not properly execute shots that they were more than capable of hitting well. Even though many would consider this a bad golf shot, players would usually be able to recover from it.

Other terms Torres used to describe bad golf shots included, "it's not the right shape" or bad "distance control" (personal communication, February 22, 2017). She also felt that she and her coach had different ideas of what a bad golf shot would be. She gave herself a bigger margin of error compared to what she thought her coach gave her. She felt her coach was more concerned with "the outcome" and if the result of the shot was not "where it should be" or not in "the right place it should be" then she would consider it a bad golf shot.

Some players used examples to form their definitions. Lexie's example was a slice with her driver or with irons or "anything that just goes way left or way right" than what she intended. Usually when a right-handed player hits a slice, it will result in the ball taking a hard curve to the right. Bailey felt that her and her coach's definitions were very similar: "hitting it off line or a shank" (personal communication, March 7, 2017). Shanks, for right-handed players, happen when a ball shoots to the right at a sharp angle.

Can't recover. Six participants mentioned that if they think they can't recover from a shot, they would consider it a bad golf shot. Phrases that player used included "one that I can't recover from," "I'm more likely to make a bogey," "I have no chance of getting up and down," "if it's like out of bounds," "if I chunked a shot into the water," and "when you have to penalize yourself." It came as a surprise that only six participants included this theme of impossible recovery in their definition of a bad golf shot.

Christina and Torres might have revealed why that was the case. Both players felt that bad shots could be divided into two categories. Christina felt she and her coach had very similar ideas of what a bad shot could be. For her, a bad shot could fall into one of two categories, either unacceptable or acceptable bad shots. An unacceptable bad shot would be a golf shot that gets players into trouble, meaning they would most likely be penalized or they would lose a stroke or two in order to recover. Acceptable bad shots would be when a player fails to properly execute a shot that she was more than capable of hitting well, but she could easily recover from it. An example of this would be missing the green with a short iron. Most collegiate golfers are expected to be accurate with their shorter irons.

When taking Christina's perspectives into consideration, one can see a possible reason why this theme was not more prevalent. Some players might have defined shots that they can't recover from as "unacceptable" or "really bad" but because I only asked for their definition for a "bad golf shot," they discussed the shots that they would not necessarily consider as "really bad." Rachel also shared she did not consider bad golf shots to be the same during tournament rounds and practice.

Definitions based on shot quality. The themes included under definitions based on shot quality were: lack of concentration and bad shot execution. In this case, bad shots were measured by how focused the players were during their shots, whether players took the time to think through their shot choices, and the quality of the shot from a technical perspective.

Lack of concentration. Interestingly, the definitions that centered on a lack of concentration were based on how players felt their coaches would define a bad golf shot. Players in general felt that if the result of the shot was fine, then they would not consider it a bad golf shot. No participant mentioned lack of focus or commitment to their shots in their definitions.

Lexie felt that her coach would consider a bad golf shot anything a player didn't properly think through before they hit it. This refers to bad golf course management. According to Root (n.d.), "Golf course management for a player means understanding how to play the best round possible by using your strengths as a player against the challenges the golf course has to offer" (para. 1). Therefore, Lexie felt if she executed a shot that reflected bad golf course management, her coach would consider it a bad golf

shot. The result of the shot might have been fine, but the shot selection was not the best choice she could have made.

This theme can clearly be seen in how Rachel felt her coach would define a bad golf shot:

She knows we are capable of hitting really good shots. So, her expectations, of course, are high, so she considers a bad shot anything that is unplanned... she knows that was based on nerves or... not being very focused. (personal communication, February 23, 2017)

Meredith also mentioned how she thought her coach would consider a bad golf shot something a player was not fully committed to: “I think she considers one where we’re not like completely all in and focused on one... I think she considers bad shots stuff where we’re... not trying over the ball or giving it our all” (personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Phoebe mentioned how she felt her coach would consider a bad golf shot when “her players didn’t really trust in the ball” (personal communication, February 24, 2017). This shows coaches encourage their players to think about their shots and to make a shot selection that they can trust and know they can execute well.

Bad shot execution. This theme of bad shot execution is similar to “lack of concentration” and gets to the root of the bad shot. It explains why a shot might not have gone to its target or why a player ended up with a golf shot she could not recover from. Janice could not give a very definite answer for what she viewed as a bad golf shot because she felt it depended on the situation. She mentioned that a player could

sometimes have a good shot with a bad result, and, similarly, hit a bad shot with a good result. For her, in the end, it came down to the execution of the swing: “for me a bad shot is when... my swing wasn’t okay and when I just didn’t like the contact with the ball” (personal communication, February 23, 2017). Torres had a similar interpretation because she said if the ball “doesn’t go to” her “target or the strike’s not good” then it could be considered a bad golf shot.

Monica and her coach had similar views regarding this topic. Monica specifically felt a bad golf shot would be when she didn’t like the strike: “anything that doesn’t feel solid or... anything that just doesn’t feel right I guess” (personal communication, March 1, 2017). She felt that her coach would consider “hitting shanks” and “hitting a lay-up in the water” as bad. This is similar to being off target, but in this case, Monica was referring to the shot itself and not the result.

Perceptions of Coaches’ Reactions When Athletes Hit Bad Shots During Tournament Rounds

Data analysis revealed nine categories regarding how players perceived their coaches’ reaction to bad golf shots that they hit during tournament rounds. The categories included: calm, optimistic, encouraging, emotional masking, evasive, tense, shocked, frustrated, and direct. There were some other categories not related to these perceptions that surfaced but that are applicable to this thesis and will, therefore, be reported as well.

Calm. Half of the participants felt their coach usually reacted in a calm fashion after watching them hit a bad golf shot. This calmness was also portrayed through coaches being rational and trying to encourage their players not to get worked up over

their bad shots. In total, seven participants perceived their coach as being calm. These participants were a part of two different teams and each team had their own coach.

Calmness was described through words like, “neutral”, “calm”, “mellow,” and “chill.”

Phoebe had experienced calmness through her coach’s abilities to hide her emotions. She felt that her coach had “a good poker face” because she is never able to tell what her coach is feeling. However, she explained how this uncertainty motivates her to do better:

I want to prove to coach and... myself... I belong here... I feel like it adds pressure but good pressure so I am... more focused and so I try to... make myself and her and... the team... proud. So, I feel like it’s... a positive effect on me.

(personal communication, February 24, 2017)

Monica described how her coach is “usually pretty neutral” and she does not get emotional about good or bad golf shots. Instead her coach would try to calm her down in those situations: “She’s very calm, and she’s seen me hit some bad shots, and it’s just always the same... She’ll just... talk to me about other stuff, just to take my mind off it, ...which is good so I’m not distracted from the bad shots” (personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Similar to Monica, Bailey felt her coach would not only remain calm, but she would also try to encourage her on her bad golf shots. She explains, “so usually coach is actually... really good about keeping calm and... making sure... we don’t really take it to heart too much” and “she just acts like really mellow and chill about it” (personal communication, March 7, 2017).

Additionally, calmness would be perceived in timeliness as coaches would sometimes take a while before they responded verbally. Torres said that her coach's verbal responses aren't always immediate; she would take the time to think before she spoke. Torres said, "she really takes the time to... think about what she's gonna [*sic*] say before she says it" (personal communication, February 22, 2017). She also discussed how her coach would encourage her even though they both knew it was a bad shot. "She kind of makes you forget about it" (Torres, personal communication, February 22, 2017). Torres shared how she would occasionally show her own disappointment after a bad golf shot, by walking with her head down. Her coach would respond by telling her to press on: "so she says to just forget about that and move on to the next hole" (personal communication, February 22, 2017).

The theme of encouraging players to move on was also shown in how Monica and Arizona perceived their coach. Monica shared how her coach would tell her to carry herself more positively by smiling and focusing on the next shot. Arizona explained how her coach would usually calm her down by talking to her until she finished that hole and then she would say "it's done, that's it, move on" and "take a deep breath" (personal communication, February 23, 2017). She feels that it helps her when her coach does not show her frustration. Even though she still feels bad for hitting a bad golf shot, she is hopeful that her next shot will be better.

Optimistic. Optimism was mentioned in six interviews and was revealed through phrases such as "it's all right," "it's fine," "you got it, girl," "don't worry about it," and

“she is just very positive.” Three themes were related to optimism. These themes included optimism itself, positivity, and unrealism.

Izzie shared how her coach normally responded to bad golf shots that ended up in greenside bunkers. She would usually respond by saying something like, “you’re great at sand so it’s just... an up and down” or say “it’s not a big deal” (personal communication, February 23, 2017). She recognizes that her coach could have had a very different response like, “Oh, no. You’re in the sand,” but, instead, she will say something more optimistic like, “oh, it’s a good opportunity to show off your sand game.”

Kepner, Monica, and Janice felt their coaches came across as positive in their verbal reactions. Kepner said that when “she knows that I’m playing well, she’ll just be, like, you know, that’s fine, you can still save par, or you can make that up and down” (personal communication, March 3, 2017). Monica on the other hand felt that her coach had several types of responses, but, in general, they all would come across in a positive manner.

There were, however, times when players felt their coach was too optimistic. Jess shared that her coach would sometimes respond, “Oh lets, I don’t know, finish birdie, birdie, birdie” and she would rather have her coach “just pick something... realistic” (personal communication, March 8, 2017).

Encouraging. The theme of encouragement was revealed in six interviews. Christina noticed a few occasions where her coach would turn away after a bad shot for a few seconds, only to turn back and give her verbal feedback, or she would give her a hug and follow it up with a motivational “you go, girl” (personal communication, February

22, 2017). She believes her coach does this so that she can think of the best way to respond to her players.

Phoebe shared how “she will always... remind us ‘believe in yourself, you got this,’ and she is very... encouraging” (personal communication, February 24, 2017).

Monica described how her coach would sometimes tell her to trust her swing, and she liked it when her coach would encourage her by telling her she is a good golfer. She said that when her coach tells her that it “really motivates” her “to do better” (personal communication, March 1, 2017). That type of encouragement helps change her attitude and gives her “a more positive outlook” during her round (personal communication, March 1, 2017). Another encouraging comment that a coach was reported making was, “ah, come on let’s go” (personal communication, February 23, 2017).

Emotional masking. There were five participants who felt their coach may not sound convincing in what they were saying or that they would try to hide their true feelings or perceptions. Meredith shared how it was hard for her to explain how her coach reacts after seeing her hit a bad golf shot because she feels her coach “really tries to hide her emotions” (personal communication, March 1, 2017). Cece thought her coach would sometimes try to disguise her anger: “you know she’s mad because you know her, but she tries to hide it from you” (personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Christina said she isn’t always sure how to perceive her coach’s reactions. She feels her coach says one thing, but may mean something else. Similarly, Lexi said her coach sometimes sounded unconvincing and come across as fake; this prompted Lexi to

think, “okay I don’t know if you, if you really mean that or if you’re just kind of acting in a way.”

Phoebe felt confused at times:

Well, usually I don’t know if... what she’s saying is what she actually means, but she’s always like “okay just go up there...” if I did chunk the wedge then she would be like “just get up there and try to get up and down from there” ... so I don’t know. (personal communication, February 24, 2017)

Evasive. A total of four participants felt their coach was being evasive. At the core of this theme is physical presence. When a coach would remove herself physically, most players would not receive the act well. After asking Bailey what the worst response was that her coach had ever experienced during a tournament she reflected on a time when her coach just decided to walk away from her. This resulted in her feeling she disappointed her coach, “I just felt I let her down in a way” (personal communication, March 7, 2017). However, even though she felt she disappointed her coach: she did not think it necessarily affected her performance: “I mean it impacted me in... the way I felt throughout the round but... at the same time, I finished out... playing better because I wanted to... make her happier in a way” (personal communication, March 7, 2017). Kepner also discussed how her coach had once walked away, but she thinks it was because she was simply in shock, and she wasn’t sure how to respond. Nevertheless, she was not concerned about her coach walking off because she was more frustrated with herself for hitting a bad golf shot.

Evasiveness was also perceived when coaches would retreat to their golf carts and simply sit in them or drive off. Jess recalled an instance where her coach “didn’t say anything and just went to her cart and looked at her phone” (personal communication, March 8, 2017). Jess admitted that it bothered her when her coach responded in that manner. After Monica’s coach drove off in her cart, she felt her coach was very dissatisfied.

Tense. Four participants mentioned how they would feel tension when perceiving their coach’s reactions. These moments of tension were revealed by participants using the following words, “harsh”, “tense,” and “rigid.” Rachel said that when she hits a “really bad shot,” her coach would usually not say anything but instead she would just give her “a harsh look and just step away” (personal communication, February 23, 2017).

Meredith described how she once chunked her drive into a hazard and that in the moment, she thought her coach looked “more tense.” However, her coach’s response did not really affect how she felt because she believed she was more disappointed with herself than what her coach could be: “I don’t feel any different because I’m - I think inside I’m more angry [*sic*] than she could be angry with me” (personal communication, March 1, 2017). Cece described her coach’s facial reactions as being “rigid” on occasions where she could feel some tension. Jess shared how perceived tension would affect her and her team:

I feel that tension... sometimes it affects me and I know it can affect other of my teammates because we have talked about it, that sometimes you feel it too much that you can’t even play. (personal communication, March 8, 2017)

She continued saying, “so sometimes yeah... I’ll start playing a little bit worse or start putting... more pressure unto myself.”

Shocked. Closely related to perceived calmness was shock. There was a fine line between distinguishing between these themes since perceptions were based on a coach’s silence. However, four participants’ perceptions seemed most fitting to this theme. It was best explained by Meredith when she reflected on her coach’s response to a bad golf shot in a recent tournament:

I... chunked my drive into... the water and she just... looked at me... like a “what?” look and so I asked her I said, “can you... go down there and make sure it’s in the water?” and she ran as fast as she could, so I think... she just looks more tense, and she’s... appalled almost, if that makes sense... you know, just shocked.

(personal communication, March 1, 2017)

Kepner shared how she once played two consecutive bad golf shots into a water hazard. She continued to say, “I think my coach was just kind of shocked and she didn’t know what to say, so she didn’t tell me anything” (personal communication, March 3, 2017). This is one of those instances where a coach and player might be caught completely off guard by what happened. However, as unpredictable as those shots are, so too is a coach’s response. Jess felt that a big contributing factor to a coach’s response is the mood she is in. She mentioned an occasion where she played a bad golf shot that was so uncharacteristic of her that she just laughed about it and when she saw her coach, she was laughing too.

Frustrated. Frustration was revealed in a couple of interviews. Other themes that contributed to frustration were perceptions of anger and short temperedness. Rachel shared the following experience:

Well the first day at this tournament she saw me do... two, three putts, and she saw me from far, and she didn't come closer, and I knew she was mad because I was hitting the ball very, very close to the hole, and she didn't say anything during the round. She just stepped away, went to... another person and after the round, she told me that, I uh, had to practice. (personal communication, February 23, 2017)

However, according to Rachel, her coach's reaction did not have a significant effect on her. She explained:

I was not mad at her. I was just disappointed in me for making those mistakes because I know it's stupid mistakes, and I have been struggling with my putter in the last couple, few... qualifying rounds I struggled with my putt... I know at St. Mary's I struggled with my putt so like frustrated and trying to find a solution, but... it didn't affected [*sic*] me like when she walked away because I knew she was frustrated the same as me and her frustration cannot fix anything. (personal communication, February 23, 2017)

She could identify that her coach's response was not a reflection of necessarily being disappointed in her as a player. She realized her coach wanted the best for her and wanted to help her in any way possible: "she with you 100% whenever she goes out there with you" (personal communication, February 23, 2017).

Arizona shared the worst reaction her coach had ever had to one of her bad golf shots,

In my freshman year, our home tournament, I was doing really bad, but she told me to get my head out of my ass... I was like, “ok that's not gonna [*sic*] help me” but, you know it’s... just a reality check, like, I need, I need to do better. I can be doing better. (personal communication, February 23, 2017)

In this case, her coach’s response was out of frustration because she had not been playing well. I assume her coach’s comment was an attempt to get her to overcome the mental block she thought her player was dealing with.

Direct. Three participants perceived their coach as being direct or honest when there was a lot of pressure on the team to perform well. Izzie shared that “if it's... a high-stake situation, she's more honest” (personal communication, February 23, 2017). These high-stake, situations are usually when the team must score well because they are close to either accomplishing a goal or advancing to the next stage of competition. She shared the following experience where her coach responded in a direct way because there was a lot at stake. They were in close contention to advance to nationals:

It was... 16 at regionals, and I had gone into the water, and I had hit... a save shot to the side where I didn't have to go over the water a second time, but I... would have to chip up and she said “from this spot you need to at least make less than a triple” and I remember that being, like, “ahh OK...” maybe not [*sic*] should have said that, but that’s just ‘cause [*sic*] I perceive it like “okay, now I'm nervous

cause I don't want to blade it into the water or something. (personal communication, February 23, 2017)

Izzie ended up playing another bad golf shot that resulted in her having a score worse than what her coach had told her to make.

Rachel shared how her coach would usually be straightforward when advising her after a bad golf shot:

I think what she has told me in the past has been... "Rachel, get your head out of your way." You know... what happens to is I think too much, overthink stuff, so she knows that I overthink stuff, so the way I think she tries to help me is she always tells me, "stop thinking, just hit the ball, get your head out of the way."

Yeah... and it does help because that's my problem. (personal communication, February 23, 2017)

Rachel explained how her coach had once told her that because her teammate was not playing well, she needed her to step it up:

When we went to Puerto Rico, Amelia was struggling and she told me... "c'mon Rachel" ... and I did get... more encouraged because I was, like, "OK... I have to show up in this moment." You know, like, someone needs me to play good.

(personal communication, February 23, 2017)

Other findings. Three participants mentioned how they don't see their coach's reactions when they hit bad golf shots because they purposefully avoid making eye contact with their coaches. After Lexie explained that because she has only been an individual competitor in tournaments and not a part of the actual team, she rarely got to

see her coach. However, she did say that if she qualified to be on the team she would not look at her coach after hitting a bad golf shot because she “wouldn’t wanna [sic] know what her facial expression was” (personal communication, February 22, 2017). Similarly, Phoebe said she would not look at her coach either because “if it was... negative, then that would impact” her, so she tries to keep to herself. Monica is a regular competitor for her team, and she, too, prefers not to see her coach’s reaction “in case she’s... angry” and “her body language isn’t good” (personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Players had various opinions about whether they wanted their coaches to physically be around during their round or not. Two participants were indifferent about whether their coach was around. After asking Monica if she likes having her coach around, she explained, “yeah I’m not... fussed about that... it would be nice for her to watch some good shots, but I’m not, like, ‘Come here! Come watch me! I’m playing well!’” because it is not important to her.

Izzie said if her coach is around her, it does not affect her much. However, she did recognize that was not always the case, especially during her freshman year:

Yeah, I kind of do better when she's not there because, I mean, she doesn't react bad, but I kind of think about what she's thinking more and then I don't know...

I'm better at it now, but... freshman year, if Coach had walked up and I had just hit a bad shot, that whole hole was bad because I was just thinking, “Oh my gosh, this is so bad and she's watching.” (personal communication, February 23, 2017)

There were four participants who preferred not having their coach around when they were playing well. Kepner explained, “Yeah, sometimes when I’m playing good I almost

don't want to see her, 'cause [*sic*] I feel I'm... in my zone" (personal communication, March 3, 2017). Torres and Janice agreed that when they are playing well, they did not want their coach close by because her presence added more pressure. Torres said that she finds herself trying to play "the top shot" instead of playing the smart shot. She continued to describe the following: "With this tournament, I realized I don't like having Coach with me. So, I was playing really well and I had four bogeys at tournament and three of them were when coach were [*sic*] with me on the hole" (personal communication, February 22, 2017). After that tournament she told her coach to keep her distance if she knew she was playing well.

Bailey said when her coach would watch her when she is playing well she tended to get "even more nervous" (personal communication, March 7, 2017). Therefore, similar to Torres, she and her coach reached a mutual understanding, "I don't really see my coach too much during the tournaments. We've kind of set up a thing where... unless I really need her, she kind of just tends to just stay away" (personal communication, February 22, 2017).

Perceptions of Coaches' Reactions When Athletes Hit Bad Shots During Practice

Multiple categories surfaced as participants reflected on their coaches' reactions during tournament rounds; however, data analysis revealed participants had fewer perceptions of their coaches' reactions during practice rounds. The categories related to practice rounds included: calm and motivational, irritated and frustrated, technical, and disappointed.

Calm and motivational. Of the 14 participants who were interviewed, six perceived their coach as being calm, and one perceived her coach as being more motivational, during practice. When players perceived their coach as being calm they used the following phrases, “she’s usually pretty laid back”, “she’s very... calm,” and “pretty calm across the board.” Rachel perceived her coach as being “very calm” but also pointed out her coach would remind the team to focus during practice as well. Phoebe was the only participant that felt her coach came across as motivational and gave the following example,

There was a time when I was decelerating the ball, and she was... like, “Oh, I bet you can’t even hit this by her ball,” and so then made me... not mad... but like, motivated me. (personal communication, February 24, 2017)

Technical. Five interviews revealed coaches as being perceived as technical. This refers to any time a coach would give athletes any advice concerning their swing or set-up. Torres could clearly tell a difference in the way her coach responded to bad shots during practice compared to tournament rounds. When practicing, her coach is not necessarily showing concern for her mental condition but more the mechanics of her actual swing; “she will sort of take a step back or like look at you and get way more technical with you.” Izzie also recognized a difference in the way her coach would respond to bad shots during practice:

She’s more critical in practice just cause it’s practice, so I mean we take, we’re supposed to work on our game... even when we are out playing holes and stuff she can be like, “OK, throw another ball down. We’ll try this shot instead cause that

one wasn't the best, so let's try something different.” (personal communication, February 23, 2017)

Bailey did not specifically perceive her coach as being outright technical but did say she would always be available to help her if she needed help with her swing. Arizona reflected on an occasion where her coach made her feel incompetent because she tried to hit a specific shot with the wrong club:

There is one practice-round where I try to hit a low shot with my hybrid, and hit a tree, and she just... looked at me as if I'm the stupidest person ever... she was like, “That’s a hybrid, you should use a [*sic*] iron because you can shape the shot better.” I mean, she didn't say it like that, she was more aggressive, but I was like, “Hmmm okay.” (personal communication, February 23, 2017)

Irritated and frustrated. After participants reflected on how their coaches responded to bad golf shots during practice, three interviews revealed themes of irritation and frustration.

Lexie gave the following example of how her coach reacted after she hit a shot into tall grass, which, under most circumstances, would be difficult to recover from: “she was helping me look for it and she said ‘you have to, you girls have to take the time to line up...’ she seemed, I don’t know, kind of irritated about it.” After her coach made that comment, the player said her own frustration continued to build. She had already been struggling, and her coach had not been around to help her. After that, she said she continued to play badly, and she felt helpless.

The theme of frustration was clear when Torres shared some of the worst responses her coach has had during practice and how she was left almost speechless:

I've hit quite a few wedges where she was just like "What the hell is that?" type thing. Like, "What are you doing? What are you thinking?" And... you don't really know what to say because I didn't mean to hit a bad shot... but it's just one of those things.

Disappointed. Three participants felt they disappointed their coach. After asking Christina what the worst response was her coach had ever exhibited during practice, she reflected on a time when her coach just decided to walk away from her. She recognized that the reason her coach walked off was because she might have needed to think about how to best help her recover from the shot. However, when her coach walked off without saying anything, she felt it was because she had let her down; "I just feel... I disappointed her" (personal communication, February 22, 2017). Cece felt she could tell by her coach's facial reaction that she was dissatisfied with her shot even though she remained mostly calm:

She's... very neutral in her face, but you know, my coach, the thing with my coach is she's not the type of coach that shouts unless she's really mad or we play really bad in a [*sic*] event, but it's like that those silent mad persons that just by the way she, you look at her and her face is, you know she's mad. (personal communication, March 1, 2017)

Lexi felt she was very inexperienced compared to her other teammates and that her coach would not always take this into consideration. She shared how her coach would

say, “Well, why do you do this?” or “Why, why have you never thought about doing this?” and that would just make her feel incompetent and “down on myself.”

Observations

Observing the current phenomena proved to be significantly more challenging than what I originally thought it would be. The players who I observed were all part of two accomplished and experienced teams who have been performing well in their region. Therefore, these players played well, and hitting bad golf shots was not a regular occurrence. Teams were also divided into different groups, and this decreased the chances of their coach being present to see them hit a bad golf shot. On most occasions, whenever there was any kind of dialogue between the coaches and their players, it was nearly impossible to hear what they were discussing without being a distraction. Most observations are, therefore, based on how I would interpret the body language and facial reactions of the players and coaches.

Practice. Practice-round observations revealed two dominant themes which included calmness and interaction avoidance. Observations were conducted during the practice-round for an upcoming tournament. I followed the coaches throughout the day because that was the only way I could see how they interacted with their players after they hit bad golf shots.

The theme of calmness appeared to be most common. Coaches and players, in general, had a calm demeanor and rarely got emotional in response to bad golf shots. Coaches’ portrayed calmness by remaining composed after seeing their players hit bad golf shots or by patiently waiting for their players to approach them, but if their players

chose to avoid making contact with them, they would either leave them alone or steadily approach them and engage in a conversation. Interaction avoidance occurred when players and coaches avoided making any kind of contact after the player hit a bad golf shot. What made this interesting was the fact that players were always aware of their coach's presence, therefore, players either purposefully ignored their coaches, or they simply were not concerned with their coach's reaction. It seemed like coaches had one of two responses. They either paid little attention to their players' bad shots and just allowed them to process it by themselves, or they would go up to them and initiate a short conversation.

The first player who avoided interacting with her coach was Phoebe. After missing the green on her approach shot, she chose to putt the ball from the fringe instead of chipping it. Unfortunately, her ball came up short and was off line. Even though she was wearing glasses, which made her gaze difficult to observe, she never faced her coach.

Meredith avoided interacting with her coach on numerous occasions during her practice-round. After hitting a bad drive, she avoided looking at her coach most the time. There was one occasion where she took a quick glance at her, but her coach did not acknowledge her shot. Throughout the entire process, she was looking at her notes and did not see Meredith hit the drive. On another occasion, Meredith had come up short of the green after an approach shot. Again, she avoided looking at her coach, but this time her coach was paying attention to her and was watching her the entire time. After a short while, her coach went up to her and talked to her. It seemed her coach was watching her

and waiting for her to look back so that she could give verbal feedback, however, when Meredith failed to acknowledge her, she was forced to walk over to her and initiate the conversation.

Monica made it a little more obvious when she was not satisfied with one of her golf shots. After hitting a bad drive, she slammed her driver into ground and made no effort to look at her coach. She decided to hit a second shot after that and, at this point, her coach went up and talked to her. It appeared she must have said something that lightened the mood because they were both smiling during the conversation. Once they were done talking, Monica went and hit her second shot, and it had a significantly better result compared to the first shot. There was another occasion where Monica had clearly hit a bad golf shot, but the result was not detrimental. On that occasion, Monica looked at her coach multiple times, but the coach did not acknowledge her.

On one occasion, Torres had a series of bad shots and her coach was present for each one. She started off by hitting her drive into a group of trees in the rough on the right. When she started walking to the ball, her coach went up to her and told her to get in the cart. I assumed they were talking in the cart as they were driving to her ball. When they got there, she attempted to punch the ball out of the trees on several occasions, but each time she seemed to have an even worse result. Eventually she moved on, but her coach only left her after she had hit a better shot.

Rachel hooked a ball that ended up short and left of an elevated green. Even though her coach was nearby, she never looked at her. However, it didn't look like she was purposefully ignoring her coach; she just seemed at peace with what happened and

continued through the motions. Her coach did not seem to have any kind of reaction to the shot either. Rachel went on to make a good recovery after her shot.

Kepner had an interesting interaction with her coach. After hitting a great recovery shot out of the rough, she looked at her coach and asked her if it was good. In my opinion, she must have known that shot was good. Nevertheless, I think she asked her coach if it was good because she wanted her to know that she had redeemed her bad shot and wanted her coach to acknowledge it. I felt she needed to get some encouragement from her coach, and that's why she asked if the shot was good, even though I am sure she knew it was acceptable.

Tournament. During tournament rounds, players are always focused on playing well. This tournament was a testament to that because each player I observed played well. I tried my best to stay at a distance so I would not distract them, and that made observations particularly challenging. Regardless of the difficulties observing, I was able to collect some valuable information. Data analysis revealed two themes: calm and supportive interactions, and interaction avoidance.

Both coaches seemed to be calm during the tournament. They rarely showed emotion and, if they did, it usually came in the form of congratulating a player on a good golf shot. However, when players hit bad golf shots, they remained composed. Sometimes they would offer support to their players either physically (e.g., pat on the back or staying with player when they struggled) or verbally. Monica had a series of bad golf shots on a par 3. She hit her approach into the greenside bunker, and her second shot went flying over the green. At this point, her coach was there and saw it all happen, but

she remained calm. Monica avoided making any kind of contact with her coach. After a short while, her coach approached her and gave her a pat on the back. That little act of encouragement seemingly made an impact because she then proceeded to successfully convert her chip and put. In this case, this scene between Monica and her coach portrayed all three themes.

Unlike Monica, who avoided her coach after a bad golf shot, Meredith looked at her coach after hitting bad golf shots. On one occasion, she pulled her shot off the tee box and immediately looked at her coach. Her coach did not have much of an expression from what I could tell. It could be that Meredith was looking at her coach for some form of explanation for why she pulled her shot, and it could be that her coach did not have an immediate response because she was thinking about how she could help her player.

Later during Meredith's round, she was really struggling, and bad golf shots were becoming a more regular occurrence. During this period, her coach was following her and offering help. Even with her coach around her, she continued to struggle. After bad golf shots, she wouldn't look at her coach immediately.

Bailey's coach appeared to have a certain tactic during tournament rounds. She would usually stick to specific holes and help all her players as they came by. When Bailey arrived to the tee box, she and her coach engaged in a conversation. I could see her coach making hand gestures and pointing down the fairway. This led me to believe that her coach was simply giving her some advice on how to hit the upcoming shot. Unfortunately, even though I could not see how Bailey's shot turned out, she seemed a little disappointed with it. Her coach remained calm and composed after the shot, and as

Bailey started walking off, her coach called her from the tee box and said something to her. I could not hear what she was saying, but it was short, and Bailey seemed to respond well to it.

Kepner pushed her shot off the tee, and it looked like her ball went into the bunker. She kept watching it until the ball came to a stop, and then she looked at her coach. At this point in time, her coach walked over to her and they engaged in a short conversation. Bailey and Kepner had very different responses after hitting a bad golf shot. After pulling her shot from the tee box, Bailey walked back to her bag and avoided interacting with her coach. Even while her coach was talking to her, she still refused to look back.

Athletes Recommendations on How Coaches Should Respond to Bad Golf Shots

Tournament rounds. Participants appeared more than eager to share how they felt coaches should respond to bad shots. After coding the interviews, several themes emerged and were divided into seven categories. These categories were: encouraging, stick around, technical, remain calm, serious, offer reassurance, and move on.

Encouraging. More than half of the participants felt that coaches should be more encouraging toward their players. This theme was found in eight interviews. Other themes that were included in this category were motivation, reinforcement, and positivity.

Christina mentioned that she felt a coach's response should depend on the situation. When the moment is not as serious, she would prefer her coach be positive and encouraging. She feels this will help her feel more at ease, and consequently able to perform better.

Monica felt coaches should uplift their players when they are discouraged: “I think they should just, just build you up, just, just encourage you to keep fighting” (personal communication, March 1, 2017). Bailey shared that coaches encourage their players by telling them to “brush it off” or “don’t worry about” (personal communication, March 7, 2017). She felt that if coaches responded in this manner, instead of “thinking on the negatives,” then athletes would play better. Torres felt that the way her coach encourages her is of importance because if her coach says something similar to “you can make an up and down,” she feels pressured to achieve specific results. Instead she wants her coach to say things similar to “it’s fine, keep your head up, don’t worry about it” (personal communication, February 22, 2017).

When players play one bad golf shot after another, it is easy to get worked up. When that is the case, Lexi said a coach should remind her player “that it’s just one shot,” and then “encourage players to breathe, relax, and take their time on the next shot.” Comments like “you’ve got it” or something similar would also be preferred. Similarly, Jess explained she would like for her coach to say, “don’t give up, let’s get a good finish” and to play to her potential or to build her up by telling her what she is good at; for example, “hey, your short game is super good” (personal communication, March 8, 2017).

Stick around. A coach’s physical presence proved to be very important to some players. Six participants felt their coach should stay with them to either watch them redeem themselves or to help them until they start playing better. Christina said that she

would like to have some sort of confirmation that her coach believes in her. She wants her coach to watch her redeem herself, not just tell her she trusts she can do it:

If she is encouraging me... positively, it will make me feel more comfortable in my next shot and it might make it better, but when she's just like "OK fine, you go girl" and then she's just... left to see somebody else and then, I will feel... "Oh, she didn't even think, she didn't even want to watch me redeem myself."

Similar to Christina, Lexie, Janice, and Rachel did not like it when their coaches leave after a bad shot. Lexie feels it's because her coach doesn't think she can help her, so she moves on to the next player, but if her coach stayed and helped, it would give more validity to her verbal statement, "You've got it" (personal communication, February 22, 2017). Janice simply said she wanted her coach to help her and to stay until she does better. Rachel explained why she wanted her coach to stick around:

I get a little discouraged when she stops following me at all you know... I feel... I failed, you know, but if she is continuously coming to me, I feel... she is like, "Okay she is playing good or she has the potential to play better if I am with her." So, it gives me trust to keep on... grinding or something she will mention in a tournament like, "Oh, so and so is playing bad, c'mon... yeah... c'mon keep, keep on fighting." (personal communication, February 23, 2017)

Janice and Torres both agreed that when they are not playing well, they would like to have their coach with them so that she can give them some guidance. Janice said that she is the kind of player that wants her coach to either stay for the entire round, or not at all, except if she is struggling. In that case, she would like to have her coach there

to help her. Similarly, Meredith said that she has asked her coach to leave when she felt she had everything under control, but if she is playing badly, she wants her coach to be there with her.

Technical. Five participants referenced the concept of coaches being technical. Some participants felt it would be better for a coach not to try and make any technical adjustments. However, a few said that they would like their coach to give them some feedback on technique if it was a small adjustment and not something major:

During a tournament-round they probably shouldn't critique your swing after the shot cause [*sic*] it will make you think about it the rest of the time and try to fix it and that could make things totally worse. You should just try to groove what you have. (Izzie, personal communication, February 23, 2017)

Similarly, Monica said that she didn't think a coach should start talking about a player's "swing or technical things" (personal communication, March 1, 2017). Yet, she also explained that "if it... was something technical and it was only little," for example, "maybe a bit more forward press or something," she would not mind her coach telling her that.

Kepner and Jess provided examples that showed they would want their coach to make minor adjustments. Jess said she would like for her coach to remind her "to stay down" on her putts. Kepner said that she liked getting feedback regarding why she hit a bad golf shot and felt that it might help her. Phrases like "alignment is off" or "I'm just kind of lifting my body" showed the kind of feedback she was referring to are small adjustments.

Remain calm. There were four participants who suggested coaches try to remain calm when their players hit bad gold shots. Cece said she felt coaches in general should “keep it neutral because the players have enough pressure, and it's not like if they miss it on purpose” (personal communication, March 1, 2017). Likewise, Meredith expressed that she thought it would be best for coaches to “hide their emotions” (personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Phoebe and Izzie didn't use the term “calm,” but the ideal manner they described resembled the concept of calmness. Izzie felt that “they probably shouldn't... visually react” and that they should refrain from saying anything that might be considered negative like “oh my gosh,” “oh crap, that's not a good shot,” or “that won't be a good spot to be,” because she thinks that would affect a player negatively later in the round.

Offer reassurance. Three participants mentioned how they would want their coach to give them assurances during tournament rounds. Meredith made several statements regarding this topic explaining, “I really want her there for reassurance” and “I just want someone to be there to make sure that... I'm making the right decisions” (personal communication, March 1, 2017). Sometimes players are faced with difficult shot choices, and having their coach there to assure them they are making the right decision can help boost their confidence. Cece felt she would perform better if her coach would reassure her she believed in her, “If she reacts in a way that I know that she's trusting me, I will do good” (personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Move on. At the core of this strategy is the idea that coaches should help their players move past their bad shot and not dwell on it. Three participants discussed how

they would like coaches to enforce this notion when responding to their bad golf shots. Meredith shared how she didn't want her coach to sugar coat the truth by saying her shot was okay when it was not. She would prefer her coach tell her to forget about the bad shot and "move forward." Similarly, Jess wanted her coach to say, "okay, what is in the past is in the past... let's just try to move on" and then ask her if she would like her to stick around.

Torres shared that, during tournament rounds, she usually had a specific thought that she would focus on during the day. So, if she had to play a bad golf shot, she would want her coach to reinforce that specific thought and then encourage her to stay in the moment and focus on the next shot instead of thinking about the bad shot.

Serious. The idea of coaches being more serious was mentioned in two different interviews. Christina felt that in pressure situations, when there is a lot at stake, she would like her coach to be more serious and direct in regards to what needs to be done: "For example, ...if I really need to make this putt to win or to go play off, whatever, I prefer her to be like, "OK, you need to focus, listen to me", "...you have to make this one" (personal communication, February 22, 2017).

Rachel also expressed how she would prefer her coach to respond:

They should be disappointed sometimes. They should... pass that message to us as a player, but they shouldn't get mad to the point that they make us feel bad... I don't think... making others feel bad will make us play better, more like, "OK, you know, guys we have to step it up, ...we need to show up." Not, like, yelling at you, like, rude, you know. (personal communication, February 23, 2017)

Practice. In general, players felt practice was much more relaxed because it was not like tournaments where they were competing. Players had very similar opinions regarding how they felt their coaches should react, and, therefore, only two categories were established: encouraging and instructional.

Encouraging. Data analysis revealed that three participants felt coaches should be encouraging during practice. Some players wanted to receive a simple reminder they should not get too discouraged with bad shots during practice. Christina said the best thing her coach could do for her was to encourage her with phrases like “It’s alright, it’s just a practice-round,” “let’s try again”, or simply encourage her to stop thinking about it. Cece felt her coach could lighten up a bit; “I think I would just prefer for her to... maybe be a little cheerful,” and say “Hey, it's okay, don't worry” because, in general, she does not perceive her coach to be “a very cheering person” (personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Instructional. Instruction and technique were by far the most popular themes that emerged from interviews. In total, nine participants felt coaches should give instruction during practice. This makes sense because this is when players can work on improving and refining their technique.

Torres said during practice she would want her coach to respond in way that would help her figure out why she hit the bad shot:

I’d rather her be like “OK, let’s look at why you hit that bad shot” and then be like “OK, so it went right which means either... your club face is open” and then

go back to why it happened, and then figure that out. (personal communication, February 22, 2017)

She continued to say that she wants her coach to get technical because, unlike tournament rounds, this is the time to try to fix these issues in her swing. Similarly, Monica said she would want her coach to analyze her swing, so that they can figure out what she is doing wrong and then tell her how she can correct it.

Arizona gave examples of how she would want her coach to respond. She would want her to show her what changes she needs to make:

Just to be, like, “let's try this and do again and see if this would work better.” ...I like that just cause I'm a visual learner so I... can see the pros and cons to each side and that will help me more in the long run whenever I need to... use which shot. (personal communication, February 23, 2017)

Rachel and Jess referred to how they would like their coach to tell them what kind of drills to practice to improve themselves. Izzie and Kepner just wanted their coaches to tell them what they are doing wrong. Izzie expanded on that as she expressed her desire to fix what she is doing wrong, so that she can be a better player.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This research explored interpersonal communication between female Division II golfers and their coaches. It focused on communication within a specific context of collegiate golf that has received little, if any, attention in the field of communication. In fact, research concerning interpersonal communication between female collegiate golfers and their female coaches has been scant. After reviewing literature related to the topic, two research questions were established. These research questions set out to fill the large void concerning female golfers' perceptions and interpretations of female coaches' reactions within the framework of Division II golf. The results from observations and 14 in-depth interviews were presented in the previous chapter and will now be discussed as they relate to each of the research questions:

RQ 1: How do athletes perceive their coaches' reactions when they hit bad golf shots during tournament rounds?

RQ 2: How do athletes perceive their coaches' reactions when they hit bad golf shots during practice/training?

Participants provided recommendations for the best and most appropriate way they believed coaches should react in the given situations.

This thesis used attribution theory to lay a theoretical foundation for the study. Attribution theory seemed to be the best fit as it sets out to deal with the “common sense way of answering ‘why’ questions” and this thesis, at its core, sought to explore the question, “why do coaches react like that?” (Miller, 2005, p. 89). The findings in the previous chapter reflected how participants perceived their coaches’ reactions within two specific interpersonal communication contexts. According to Manusov (1990) “people are active interpreters of the events occurring in their sphere” and that “attributions use consistent and logical bases upon which to make their casual claims” (p. 105). These “casual claims” are what helped form the essence of the experience.

Before athletes were asked to elaborate on their perceptions of their coaches’ reactions to bad golf shots, they were asked to provide their definition of a bad golf shot, as well as how they think their coach would define a bad golf shot. By asking them to provide their own definitions, it not only gave more insight into how there are different ways to interpret a bad golf shot, but it also allowed athletes to start thinking about how they have experienced those bad shots in tournament rounds and practices. In a sense, it served as a warm-up question before asking athletes to recall more in-depth information, such as perceptions and emotions. Most athletes gave examples of what those bad shots looked like for them, which I explored in chapter 4.

Bad golf shots were defined based on results and shot quality. The four themes that emerged were: off target, can’t recover, lack of concentration, and bad shot execution. Even within each theme, participants had varied opinions. Some participants felt that they had the same definition as their coaches, while others felt that they had

higher expectations of themselves compared to those of their coaches, or that their coaches had a smaller margin of error compared to what they had for themselves. This also revealed that participants had different skill levels. As would be expected, the athletes who competed on a regular basis had higher expectations of themselves, and players who usually competed as individuals gave themselves a larger margin for error. Interestingly, the theme “lack of concentration” was based on how athletes thought their coaches’ would define bad golf shots. This shows that coaches encourage their players to not only develop the mechanics of their actual swing, but also develop their mental strength, because this can influence an athlete’s shot selection and how they execute said shots. Therefore, a bad golf shot is defined based on the skill level of the player, and the expectations they have of themselves, along with the expectations they think others, including their coaches, might have for them.

Findings related to the first research question revealed participants had both positive and negative perceptions of their coaches. In total, nine categories were established: calm, optimistic, encouraging, disingenuous, evasive, tense, shocked, and frustrated. While some categories could be identified as positive (e.g., calm, optimistic and encouraging) or negative (e.g. disingenuous, evasive and tense), some categories, depending on the participant, were identified as both positive and negative (e.g. shocked, frustrated, and direct).

In general, when athletes perceived their coach in a positive manner, it had a positive effect on them as well. Optimism specifically was received well by players (apart from Jess, who felt that her coach was sometimes unrealistic with her optimism).

Previous research indicates when people have a more optimistic outlook on life, they tend to have higher levels of motivation, persistence, and performance (Taylor & Brown, 1988; Wilson, Hawkins, & Joyner, 2015). Le Foll, Rasclé, and Higgins (2006) also found that an optimistic person tries harder when they are faced with a bad situation. Based on these findings, it comes as no surprise that players responded well to optimism because, in theory, it should not only affect them positively on a psychological level, but in terms of their actual performance as well.

Verbal encouragement helped motivate players and build up their confidence levels. Bum and Shin (2015) stated that “it can be assumed that a coach’s efforts to continuously encourage, show sincere interest in, and maintain a close relationship with athletes is effective in reducing athletes’ anxiety” (p. 381). Not performing well, and hitting bad golf shots can easily result in disappointment and sometimes even anxiety. That is why it is vital for coaches to pay close attention to what they say and do. Research has shown that, in the case of wrestlers and soccer players, a coach has an influence on an athlete’s anxiety level depending on the perception athletes have of their coach’s actions (Lewthwaite & Scanlan, 1989; Scanlan & Passer, 1978).

When coaches were perceived as being disingenuous, evasive, or tense, in this study, it had a negative impact on players. Coaches were perceived as being disingenuous when they hid their emotions and came across as fake, or did not sound convincing in what they were saying. This could potentially be very dangerous to the coach-athlete relationship because it can diminish trust. If players feel they can’t trust what their coach is saying, it can make it very hard if not impossible for coaches to help their players.

When coaches were perceived as being evasive, participants shared how they often feel they disappointed their coach and that it would bother them during the round. One participant, Bailey, explained that, even though she felt she let her coach down, she found she played better from that point onward. The perception of disappointing her coach had a negative impact on her emotionally, but in terms of her actual performance, she played better because she was motivated to make her coach happy again. Rachel said she can sometimes tell that her coach is frustrated, but once she thinks about it, she realizes that her coach wants the best for her and that she is frustrated with the situation, not with her as a player. Apart from Rachel, Jess was the only other player who reported trying to look at the situation from their coach's perspective, trying to create casual explanations for why they perceived their coach's response in the way they did. Similarly, Sagar and Jowett (2012) stated that, "athlete's responses to coaches' behaviors may be moderated by the athletes' personalities...which is likely to influence their perceptions of the situation" (p. 165).

The perception of coaches being shocked, frustrated, and direct was negative for some and positive for others, and sometimes both. Usually when players perceived their coach as being shocked, they were shocked, too, because the bad golf shot they hit was unexpected. Coaches would usually come across as frustrated if players continually played badly. I suspect from personal experience that the reason coaches seem frustrated is because they don't feel the player is focused and that players have already given up. However, the two participants who perceived frustration ended up benefiting from it, even though, at the time, it wasn't a pleasant feeling. Coaches usually responded with

comments that were direct or to the point when there was a lot at stake. One player felt that her coach should have remained calm, but another player felt motivated by it. Sagar and Jowett (2012) explained that “coaches may use less supportive forms of messages and feedback in an effort to focus athlete’s attention on the need to succeed and win” (p.168). This just shows that athletes are different, and that they respond differently to certain coaching methods. Coaches are tasked with the responsibility of figuring out what kind of verbal and non-verbal feedback would invoke the most beneficial response in their players.

The results revealed that players not only pay attention to their coach’s responses, but that they can also be affected by it. Some participants even said that they purposefully avoid looking at how their coaches respond because they were scared they might be discouraged by what they see. Even though they knew their coach might encourage them, they felt it would be safer to just avoid making contact completely because the fear of disappointing their coach outweighed the hope of being offered encouragement. Several players said they preferred not having their coach around when they are playing well because it might add pressure or make them more nervous. Several players perceived their coach as being calm because their coach was hiding her emotions. This aspect of mystery can also explain why players were so affected by their coach’s presence because they were left wondering what could be going through their coach’s mind. The situation, in and of itself, is tense because a player had just made a mistake. Sometimes that mistake can be detrimental. It could be the one golf shot that makes the difference between winning or losing a tournament or qualifying to go to nationals. This lived

experience sets itself up for disappointment, but the way a player recovers from it is something that can be controlled to a certain extent.

This phenomenon revealed at least nine different perceptions players have developed about their coach. This shows that there are some inconsistencies regarding how coaches respond to their players' bad golf shots, but the situation usually dictates the rhetoric or response. If a coach continually responded in a manner which is positively perceived by the player, it would create a sense of trust in their relationship. If this was the case then, when a coach is not present for a bad golf shot, they could still find encouragement in knowing that even if their coach was there, they would have had a similar response. For example, Phoebe explained how, as a player who has only competed as an individual, she rarely gets to see her coach because her coach is with the team. However, she already had an idea of how her coach would have responded, so she thinks about what her coach would have told her, tries to apply it, and that usually helps her recover.

Hitting bad golf shots for any collegiate golfer is inevitable; it is even inevitable for professional golfers. It is something no golfer can avoid, but through practice, hard work, and building a strong mentality, it is something that can be prevented from happening on a regular basis. This phenomenon comes loaded with emotions and creates mental obstacles. When it happens, it is disappointing, but the level of disappointment can vary based on numerous factors. One of these factors is how a coach responds. A coach should be their players number one fan, but when a coach is perceived to be disappointed in her players, it can make it harder for athletes to overcome their mistake.

Even though hitting a bad golf shot is less than ideal, it can become a strong motivating factor that can produce even better results. It is up to the coach and player to find out how to make that a reality and not just an ideal.

There was significantly more data gathered in relation to the first research question compared to the second, but it was still sufficient for the purposes of this thesis. Results revealed four categories of perceptions that participants had of their coaches regarding how coaches responded to their bad golf shots during practice. These categories included: calm and motivational, irritated and frustrated, technical, and disappointed.

Being calm and motivational was the most common perception that athletes referred to. These positive findings are similar to those of Sagar and Jowett (2012). They studied communicative acts in the coach-athlete relationship when athletes lost competitions and when they made mistakes in training, and hitting a bad golf shot during practice would be considered making a mistake in training. Their findings revealed that athletes perceived their coaches as being calm and relaxed and showing a positive appearance or outlook. These perceptions in turn had a positive effect on the players, as well. It would not only build their confidence, but it would also motivate them to press on. Previous research has found that positive coaching behaviors like encouragement, support, motivation, instruction, and interpersonal commitment can help to build a player's self-esteem, satisfaction, motivation (e.g., Smith & Smoll, 1990) and intrinsic motivation (e.g., Adie & Jowett, 2010). Sagar and Jowett (2012) explained that these findings, along with their own, revealed that even in negative situations (e.g., hitting a

bad golf shot) that are usually displeasing and disappointing, “positive coach reactions can potentially have beneficial and desirable outcomes for the athlete” (p. 165).

Several participants recalled their coach being technical in response to bad golf shots. This is not only understandable but expected. Practice is when players have time to do exactly that. It is a time for players to try to refine their skill set. Therefore, if coaches see something in a player’s swing that might have been a contributing factor to the bad golf shot, they will approach players and either tell them how to fix or work with the player to see if they can find a solution together. Players welcome this kind of response from their coaches. However, this can also open the door for some less-than-ideal responses. Six participants recalled a time when they perceived their coach as being irritated, frustrated, and disappointed. Irritation and frustration seemed to be linked with the aspect of swing mechanics or concentration. Coaches would get frustrated if players continually made the same mechanical mistakes such as not checking their alignment before hitting their shots. This also shows why the only definition of bad golf shot that was related to a lack of concentration came from how players felt their coaches would define bad golf shots. It seems that coaches would make it somewhat clear if they were unhappy about players making mistakes that can easily be avoided if they just paid attention. Frustration and irritation also surfaced when coaches seemed to not know how to help their players or when players cannot execute what they are trying to teach them. Lastly, coaches were perceived as being disappointed. When coaches were perceived in this manner, players tended to respond negatively to it as well. Players feel they not only let their coaches down but they would also be disappointed in themselves. One

participant even mentioned that she would question her capabilities and would feel stupid because she didn't know as much about golf compared to her teammates and her coach's response would highlight that. This aligns with previous research that revealed that when coaches portray negative behaviors in an instructional context, it would negatively affect a player's motivation and sometimes their relationship with their coach as well (Jowett, 2009; Martin et al., 2009).

Practice is a time for players to refine their skills and better themselves. It is less stressful than tournament days, but there are still certain aspects of it that can cause mixed emotions in players. The way a coach interacts with players when they hit bad golf shots during practice can either help players improve their swing and motivate them to continually try to better themselves, or it discourages a player, making them feel like they aren't talented enough, and like they don't know enough. Unfortunately, this "lived experience" is less than ideal, because it starts with doing something that points out that you are imperfect. The challenge is to not allow a bad golf shot define you, but to use it as motivation to improve. The challenge for a coach is to find the perfect balance, to know how to react to each individual player, for them to walk away from the experience a better golfer, equipped with added knowledge, insight, and a swing that is mechanically sound.

Recommendations

Participants provided the following recommendations for coaches to help them better manage their reactions when their players hit bad golf shots during tournament rounds and practice. In general, athletes wanted coaches to avoid giving athletes advice

regarding their swing mechanics, with the exception being if it was a minor adjustment that players would need to make. It is also important for coaches to remain calm and encourage players by motivating them, being positive, providing reinforcement, and encouraging them to move past their mistake and not dwell on it. Instead of a coach walking off after a bad shot, they should go up to their player and give some sort of encouragement, and unless discussed otherwise, it would be better for a coach to stick around so that they can see their players redeem themselves. Lastly, if the situation at hand is high stakes, coaches should still be positive, but a bit more serious just so the player can heighten her concentration.

During practice, participants felt that the best way their coaches could respond to bad golf shots would be to continually encourage players and offer instruction. Because practice is not as serious as tournament rounds, participants would prefer it if their coach could be a little more cheerful and just be supportive of them. Most players mentioned that they wanted their coach to offer instruction because this is the best time to fix issues in their swing and to refine their technique. Part of providing instruction is to show players what changes to make instead of telling them, this can be significantly more challenging for coaches who are not experienced golfers.

Limitations and Future Research

The data collected for this thesis proved to be very valuable, but as with every study there were limitations. Data gathering started with the observation process.

Unfortunately, because I had not yet conducted the interviews, I did not know what each player's definition was for a bad golf shot. Thus, I took notes based on my own definition

for a bad golf shot. Observations during tournament rounds also proved to be very challenging. I was not able to listen to conversation between coaches and their payers without being a distraction. I was limited to observing the players that coaches observed and helped during the round and consequently, I did not have the opportunity to observe interactions between each player and their coach after the player hit a bad golf shot.

This study only analyzed the perceptions of the players and not their coaches. It would have been valuable: to know if coaches were aware of how players perceived their reactions; to get coaches' perspective regarding the context of this study and; and to compare their actual definition of a bad golf shot to what the athletes thought they thought. Future research should perform co-orientation analysis to identify perceptions of both coaches and their players.

Attribution theory has two basic distinctions. The first is internal attribution which "locates the cause of a particular behavior within the person" (Miller, 2005, p.89). The second is external attribution and that "locates the cause of the behavior in the situation" (Miller, 2005, p.89). It is possible that when a player makes certain attributions of their coach, those attributions are not necessarily accurate. A fundamental attribution error would be when a player "overestimates the importance of internal factors and underestimate the importance of external factors" (Miller, 2005, p.90). Athletes were interviewed at different times, and the best data was gathered from participants who had just gotten done with practice or who had recently competed in a tournament. Participants struggled to recall and discuss these perceptions if they had not been exposed to it closer to the time of the interview. The reason for this could be because golf coaches might

encourage their players to forget their bad golf shots and to move on. Therefore, because athletes might be encouraged to have short memories, they could have difficulty being able to recall and articulate events well.

Of the five interviews that were conducted using video calling software, two did not have video streaming during the interview. This made the interview more impersonal and restricted me from seeing participant's facial reactions as they were answering questions. Further expansion of the study could compare results for male golfers and male coaches to the way their female counterparts interact. Finally, only participants from two teams were used for the purposes of this thesis, future researchers should consider getting participants from a larger variety of teams.

Conclusion

This thesis explored communicative acts within the coach-athlete relationship, specifically how female Division II golfers perceive their female coaches' reactions after they hit bad golf shots during tournament rounds and practice. Analysis revealed the perceptions that athletes developed of their coaches during these situations could have a significant impact on their emotional state as well as their performance. The importance of the coach-athlete relationship was highlighted since every participant had personal preferences regarding how they felt their coach should or shouldn't respond. Therefore, it is vital that coaches and athletes clearly communicate to develop a mutual understanding of how a coach should respond to best serve their athlete. This thesis addressed communicative acts within a specific sport and paves the way for future research by

encouraging future researchers to explore specific communication acts within specific sports.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ATHLETES

Part 1: Tournaments

- 1) What would you consider a bad golf shot?
- 2) What do you think your coach would consider a bad golf shot?
- 3) Describe how your coach usually reacts after you hit a bad golf shot during tournament rounds. Please give examples of how she behaves and what she says.
- 4) How does this reaction make you feel?
- 5) Describe how your perception of your coach's reaction influences your performance from that point onwards.
- 6) In your opinion, and based on your experience with coaches, explain what you consider to be a good and appropriate way for coaches to react after their athletes hit bad golf shots during tournament rounds.

Part 2: Practice

- 1) Describe your coach's worst reaction after you've made a mistake in training, and how this reaction made you feel?
- 2) Explain how you would like, or prefer, your coach to react after you've made mistakes in training.

APPENDIX B

AUDIT TRAIL

Torres

- Type: In-person
- Date: February 22, 2017
- Time: 17:00
- Duration: 24 min. 53 sec.

Izzie

- Type: In-person
- Date: February 23, 2017
- Time: 13:00
- Duration: 23 min. 17 sec.

Christina

- Type: In-person
- Date: February 22, 2017
- Time: 15:00
- Duration: 18 min. 12 sec.

Janice

- Type: In-person
- Date: February 23, 2017
- Time: 11:00
- Duration: 21 min. 30 sec.

Lexie

- Type: In-person
- Date: February 22, 2017
- Time: 13:00
- Duration: 23 min. 42 sec.

Phoebe

- Type: In-person
- Date: February 24, 2017
- Time: 10:30
- Duration: 25 min. 23 sec.

Arizona

- Type: In-person
- Date: February 23, 2017
- Time: 18:30
- Duration: 24 min. 23 sec.

Cece

- Type: Facebook Video Call
- Date: March 1, 2017
- Time: 15:00
- Duration: 25 min. 39 sec.

Rachel

- Type: Skype Video Call
- Date: February 23, 2017
- Time: 17:00
- Duration: 24 min. 39 sec.

Monica

- Type: In-person
- Date: March 1, 2017
- Time: 14:00
- Duration: 28 min. 55 sec

Meredith

- Type: In-person
- Date: March 1, 2017
- Time: 12:30
- Duration: 24 min. 49 sec.

Kepner

- Type: Facebook Video Call
- Date: March 3, 2017
- Time: 19:00
- Duration: 31 min. 24 sec.

Bailey

- Type: Facebook Video Chat
- Date: March 7, 2017
- Time: 14:30
- Duration: 19 min. 52 sec.

Jess

- Type: Skype Video Chat
- Date: March 8, 2017
- Time: 17:30
- Duration: 39 min. 48 sec.