

SHADOWMATCHING THE TEAM TO THE TROPHY: A CASE STUDY

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Introduction

Shadowmatch has proven its worth as being a tool that assesses individuals in terms of their habits and how to best use and develop these habits to the benefit of the individual and the organisation. The interesting fact is, long gone are the days where individuals work on their own, in isolation.

As a tool, Shadowmatch recognizes this and has measures such as team inclination vs individual inclination and attitude scales that indicate the propensity of employees to act as contributing members of a team. After having read some of the other case studies in this publication, no-one will be under any misconception as to how Shadowmatch can contribute to the success of teams.

In this light, it is interesting to note that the recent focus of industrial psychology has been on how to maximize the potential of work teams and how to put together these teams in a more productive and efficient manner. Although not commonplace in industrial psychology, teams and team-work have been studied in sport psychology for quite some time. This is also often one of the most important tasks sport psychologists are given when working with teams in sport.

With this in mind, it has been the aim of the Shadowmatch team to not only prove the usefulness of the tool in teams within a working environment, but also within the related field of sports. Thus when presented with the opportunity to get involved in the sport psychological testing of an under 19 golf side we "jumped" at the chance.

The golf team under the guidance of its manager had the ultimate goal of becoming the national champions. After having seen the Shadowmatch system, the manager and executive committee of the Golf foundation felt that Shadowmatch would be the secret weapon that would differentiate them from some stiff competition. At the end of the process, this thinking proved right and the team did in fact become the National under 19 Golf Championships.

However, getting to that point was slightly more intricate and detailed as explained in the case-study below.

Case Study

The team involved in the testing was an interesting mix of age groups, experience levels and personalities. The team would be made up of nine players, eight of whom would play on each day. These players would compete against 11 other teams over five days for the title of National Junior Championships. To put the importance and strength of this tournament into perspective, one needs to look at the names that have competed for their provinces in this format of the game. These include Ernie Els, Retief Goosen, Trevor Immelman and recent Sunshine Tour winners such as George Coetzee.

Five players from this side had competed internationally for South Africa. However, all the other players from the pool of possible selections had not played international junior golf and this presented the team manager with an interesting challenge. Excluding the obvious factors of skill level and form, how do you match five players of immense experience with four players of very limited experience at the same level?

Shadowmatch came to the fore as a way of comparing these players of differing experience levels in an equitable way. In sport this is often referred to as getting the mix right between youth and experience. By incorporating Shadowmatch into the team selection process, the manager got this mix right, not only in an intuitive way but also by using science and having valid and reliable results. How was Shadowmatch used and in which way did it contribute to the team's ultimate success?

Testing process

The group of golfers was made up of nine members who were all teenagers and who ranged in age from 16 to 19. Any form of analysis or testing on subjects from this age group is generally met by some apprehension and resistance. To break this resistance each player was given his Shadowmatch code to perform the assessment over the Internet at home.

The reason for this was twofold. Firstly, by not doing a centralized assessment players would not have the opportunity to “compare notes” and in this way feel inferior at all if they felt they may have got a question wrong. Secondly, by doing the assessment at home, players would be in a comfortable environment that would decrease anxiety whilst increasing ease of use. The reasoning for this is that players would do Shadowmatch on their own computers and this related to very few administrative glitches in the testing phase.

The group of players selected was also an ideal team for computer and web-based testing. All of the players either have their own personal computers or have a family computer at home and are thus very comfortable with using a computer. Once again this decreased much of the normal anxiety experienced in testing in that players were using a medium they knew very well.

Once the assessments were complete, each player received his two-page report back on the system. This report indirectly also helped in creating an early positive self-regard within each player. The reason for this being that each player’s strengths were highlighted to them and their parents, and this already put each player in a positive frame of mind not only towards the test, but to the whole sport psychology process that was to follow.

Results

After having gone through the process of testing the players and after having studied their results the following patterns became apparent. The five top habits of golfers in this group proved to be responsiveness or the ability to react quickly, self-confidence, resilience, discipline and the habit of simplification.

In many conversations with the manager of the side as well as the Shadowmatch team, it was interesting to note that two of the most important qualities of these golfers were “thinking” habits, or seen differently by the manager of these players and other golfing experts, as Golf **course** management skills.

Critical Habits

The habits of responsiveness and the ability to simplify bare direct resemblance to the most important abilities of the most successful golfers of all time. How can one make such a statement?

Upon close study of not only this team but also successful golfers over the last three years, it was easy to see how responsiveness could be a critical skill for success on the golf course.

Responsiveness looks at the ability of a person to think on their feet and to react quickly. This often happens on the course where conditions can change in a matter of minutes and even more during the six hours it takes to play a round. So to adjust and to respond to a changing environment successfully is possibly a large key to success.

Secondly, in being able to simplify successful golfers avoid the propensity of some less successful golfers to suffer from what is jokingly referred to in golfing circles as "paralysis by analysis". Simply put, this is what happens when a golfer has so many conflicting ideas in his or her head that they never come to the conclusion of hitting the ball.

In being able to simplify a problem or challenge, these successful junior golfers are better able to deal with them and to get better results. The reason for this is that they tend to not over-think the information presented to them by yardage books, caddies, their own experience as well as sensory input.

They have developed the habits of thinking and reacting quickly due to time constraints and they do this by only working with what they perceive the essence of the problem to be. A good example of this came to the fore in discussing the mental routines this group followed when faced with very long putts. The consensus amongst the group was that when faced with this tricky situation they only focused on two things, the pace of the putt and to get it as close to the hole as possible.

The reason ventured for this by the manager and our team is that on a 30m putt there are too many factors to take into consideration to get the ball in the hole. This includes slope, speed of the green, pin placement, input from the caddy, type of putting stroke needed, power on the stroke, visualization and a myriad of other data. Thus players have learnt to cope by using the habit of simplifying this whole process by focusing on only two of the most important aspects.

Whereas responsiveness and simplification are **course** directed habits the other three critical habits in this group proved to be more internally directed.

Self confidence is probably one of the most important skills any person who is trying to perform in any environment and at any level can have. In this group it resulted in a team dynamic that was self-assured without being arrogant and a belief that no matter how tough the situation, the team could rise above the challenge.

This proved to be the case when the team lost one of its games on the second day of the tournament. Instead of the team disintegrating or a negative vibe developing in the team, all the players pulled together with a sense of confidence and made a promise to one another to not lose one more game. Something they achieved quite easily.

This tournament also tapped into the teams combined habit of resilience, something that is not only imperative in a tournament environment such as this but also in golf in general. The reason for the importance of resilience in golf is that one is faced with more disappointment than you are faced with success. Tiger Woods, the world's number one player wins only roughly every four tournaments he enters. A very poor success rate if one takes into account that this is the way he makes his living.

Thus from a young age players have learnt the ability to bounce back after disappointments on the course. Something that is needed if one is to play top amateur golf or even just return for a next round after the disappointments of a bad round.

Lastly, discipline. If one looks at the sport of golf from the outside, such as I have done for the better part of the last three years, one is struck by the discipline one needs to compete at the top level. This does not only include discipline to practice the various important skills of the game, but also the mental discipline needed to put together a successful round after having played badly the day before.

Discipline is also a bed-rock of the rules of the game. Players will often mark their own score cards and if a player is not disciplined or honest in his scoring he or she can be a detriment to the game and to their team.

Conceptual ability and attitude scale

On conceptual ability this group of junior golfers achieved a combined score of six out of ten. This is a high score for a group of young people and it is postulated that this is due to the nature of the game of golf. When these players engage in a game of golf, their conceptual ability is tested and developed.

This is due to the fact that various forms of information is put to the golfer on the course before playing certain shots. This information includes score card information on how long the hole is in meters and yards, how far the player is from the green, which club will allow the player to hit the best shot, what external influences such as wind are present and how this will affect the shot.

The player needs to take all of this into account before selecting a club and playing a certain shot. This equates very well to conceptual ability which asks the person to look at data, re-work it using their own frame of reference and then solve the problem to the best of their ability using the information provided. Success on the course also compares very well to players who have a higher conceptual ability as this allows them to make better informed decisions, and better execute their preferred solution

On the attitude scale, players tested predominantly on the first quadrant of the attitude scale. This implies that this group of golfers are predominantly involved and unaggressive in their approach to their world and relationships. All the players involved, interacted predominantly in this way and there were very few altercations during the week of the tournament and in the weeks leading up to the competition.

This made the task of being the sport psychologist much easier and also made the interaction of the manager with the players a lot less strained. This also allowed the players to cope more successfully with disappointments and to work together when challenged.

Teambuilding

In the lead up to the tournament, time was also spent in analyzing the combined Shadow of the team. This was done to show the team its strong habits and areas where they don't display such

strong habits. This made them aware of how they looked as a team. At this stage no individual results were made available.

This was done to ensure that the players did not face criticism from team mates if they did not match the Shadow, or that players who were a good fit to the Shadow looked down on teammates. It was purely a teambuilding exercise where all the players were made aware of strong habits and behavioural areas where they didn't display strong habit patterns.

A lot of hard work was put into the testing and the development phase of this teams existence, but the question still remained: What would the players do in the heat of battle? They did exactly what Shadowmatch had predicted and what they set out to do.

Results in the tournament

Statistics on this tournament indicate that the team involved won 92,5 out of a possible 132 points against 11 other provinces over five days of competition. That equates to a win ratio of 70% in one of the toughest inter-provincial tournaments on the SA golfing calendar. The team had six of its players chosen for national squads at the end of the tournament and this team had only lost to one other team by the slim margin of one point. Statistics however can be misleading.

What differentiated this team from the rest was how they dealt with disappointments and challenges throughout the week. This became very apparent when the team lost on the second day. This loss was only by one point but it could have been the end of the tournament. However true to the predicted habits on Shadowmatch, the team did two things that ultimately ensured success. They pulled together as a team and they kept their involvement un-aggressive.

The golfers in this team were tested as predominantly team-inclined and this shone through on the day they lost. The evening after the loss, the team and their captain set the target of not losing one more game. This they achieved with distinction. At no stage did any of the players become problematic in their behaviour and it was extremely interesting to see how, after the loss, the team seemed to gel even better and performed to their true potential.

Conclusion

Shadowmatch has been used in many industrial settings that include many different teams and groups. It has now however crossed over into mainstream sport in that it has helped a team of aspiring young golfers win the national championships they had been striving for.

In looking to the future in the golfing industry in South Africa, it would not be surprising to see more teams use this tool to pick teams and to match their teams to the trophy - something that is becoming more and more important in the world of golf and the world of sport.