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Julien Bois, Philippe Sarrazin, Julien Southon, Julie Boiché

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1 Running head: PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL GOLFERS

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4 Psychological Characteristics and their Relation to Performance in Professional Golfers

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7 Julien E. Bois

8 University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour, France

9 Philippe G. Sarrazin

10 University of Grenoble, France

11 Julien Southon

12 French Golf Federation

13 Julie C. S. Boiché

14 University of La Réunion, France

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20
21 Corresponding authors:

22 Julien E. Bois, University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour, Laboratoire d'Analyse de la
23 Performance Sportive, Département STAPS, Quartier Bastillac, 65000 TARBES
24 France, Email : Julien.bois@univ-pau.fr

25 Or Philippe Sarrazin, Laboratoire Sport et Environnement Social, Université Joseph Fourier -
26 UFRAPS, BP53, 38041 Grenoble cedex 9, France. E-mail: philippe.sarrazin@ujf-grenoble.fr

27
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Abstract

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This study investigated the psychological characteristics of professional golfers and their relation to golf performance. The aims of the study were (a) to provide descriptive data on professional golfers, (b) to test possible differences between successful and unsuccessful players and (c) to estimate whether psychological characteristics could predict golf performance. The data were collected from 41 male professional golfers the day before an official competition. Results revealed that players who made the cut were characterized by higher scores on performance-approach goal, cognitive and somatic anxiety, relaxation strategies, attentional control, emotional control and lower score on performance-avoidance goal. Subsequently, a multiple regression analysis revealed that higher cognitive anxiety, more frequent use of relaxation strategies and emotional control strategies were associated with better player's ranking at the end of the competition.

2

3 Golf is an activity that has consistently been studied by sports psychologists (e.g.,
4 Chamberlain & Hale, 2007; Cunningham & Ashley, 2002; Davidson & Templin, 1986;
5 Gaudreau, Blondin, & Lapierre, 2002; Hudson & Walker, 2002; Nicholls, Holt, & Polman,
6 2005; Ramsey, Cumming, & Edwards, 2008). This popularity might come from the
7 specificity of this sport: players spend a very short time at hitting the ball whereas moving
8 across the course and waiting represent the majority of the duration of a game. The golfer
9 must therefore develop emotional management skills (i.e., emotional control) and “adjust”
10 his/her level of physiological and psychological activation. An efficient use of this time,
11 which is mainly based on psychological competencies, is probably critical for golf
12 performance. Therefore, golf clearly represents an ideal activity to be studied by sport
13 psychologists.

14 In order to investigate the determinants of golf performance, a lot of studies have been
15 conducted. Technical aspects interested some. For example, Davidson and Templin (1986)
16 demonstrated the critical importance of acquired skills in golf performance. In a study of 119
17 professional golfers, they showed that driving and putting abilities as well as hitting green in
18 regulation predicted 86 % of the variance of professional scoring average of the 1983 pro
19 tour. Other researchers mainly focused on psychological factors related to golf performance.
20 The studies can be classified into three categories depending on the variables examined:
21 emotional factors, coping or performance strategies, and integrative studies. In the first part of
22 the investigative rationale, we therefore present the golf-related studies. In the second part, we
23 present studies examining psychological profiles of elite athletes in other activities.

24 *Psychological Factors Related to Golf Performance*

1 Among the three categories identified, the majority of the studies concerned the
2 emotional aspects related to the performance, the most popular factor seeming to be state
3 anxiety (e.g., Chamberlain & Hale, 2007; Cook et al., 1983; Cunningham & Ashley, 2002;
4 Hardy, Woodman, & Carrington, 2004; Hassmén, Koivula, & Hansson, 1998; Hassmén,
5 Raglin, & Lundqvist, 2004; Jones, Swain, & Hardy, 1993; Krane & Williams, 1987; Krane,
6 Williams, & Feltz, 1992; McAuley, 1985; McKay, Selig, Carlson, & Morris, 1997). Results
7 concerning this line of research are rather inconsistent. In a majority of studies, the
8 relationships among the subscales of the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2;
9 Martens, Vealey, Bump, & Smith, 1990) – namely cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety and
10 self-confidence – and golf performance were examined.

11 Cross-sectional and nomothetic research designs often revealed non-significant
12 findings (e.g., Hassmén et al., 1998; McAuley, 1985; McKay et al., 1997). For example,
13 McAuley (1985) used the CSAI-2 to examine the reciprocal effects between pre-competitive
14 state anxiety and self-confidence on the one hand, and golf performance on the other hand,
15 among collegiate golfers. The results showed that pre-competitive measures did not predict
16 golf performance but that golf performance was a significant predictor of post-round
17 cognitive state anxiety and self-confidence. Similar results were found with elite golfers
18 (Hassmén et al., 1998; McKay et al., 1997). In a study of eight male golfers of the Swedish
19 National Team, Hassmén et al. (1998) did not find a consistent relationship between pre-
20 competitive mood states and performance. McKay et al. (1997) examined self-reported state
21 anxiety measured by the CSAI-2 and physiological responses in 15 male professional golfers
22 prior to, during and on completion of a tournament and practice round. If an increase in the
23 anxiety variables and a lower self-confidence during competition compared to practice were
24 observed, there was no significant correlation between psychophysiological variables and golf
25 performance.

1 The results are a little bit more consistent in studies where experimental (e.g.,
2 Chamberlain & Hale, 2007; Hardy et al., 2004) and/or idiographic approaches (Hassmén et
3 al., 2004) were used. For example, among a sample of eight male golfers of the Swedish
4 National Team, Hassmén et al. (2004) showed that variability in somatic anxiety was
5 significantly related to variability in golf performance. Using an experimental design and
6 within-subjects comparisons with a sample of 12 experienced male golfers, Chamberlain and
7 Hale (2007) brought partial support for the predictions of the Multidimensional Anxiety
8 Hypotheses (MAH; Martens et al., 1990). More precisely, a negative linear relationship, a
9 curvilinear relationship and a positive linear relationship were found respectively between
10 cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety and self-confidence on the one hand, and performance on
11 the other hand. They also confirmed the impact of the directional aspect of competitive state
12 anxiety - facilitative vs. debilitating - on performance.

13 Finally, testing the “catastrophe model” of anxiety and performance (see Hardy,
14 1996), few works (e.g., Hardy et al., 2004) proposed that cognitive anxiety, physiological
15 arousal and self-confidence affect performance in an interactive fashion. In their study, Hardy
16 et al. (2004) investigated eight male golfers participating in a golf tournament who reported
17 their cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and self-confidence prior to their tee shot on each
18 hole. The results showed a complex relationship between these three variables. In a low self-
19 confidence condition, cognitive anxiety was positively related to performance when somatic
20 anxiety was low but negatively related to performance when somatic anxiety was high. By
21 contrast, under condition of high self-confidence, cognitive anxiety was more positively
22 related to performance when somatic anxiety was high than when it was low. The conclusion
23 of such research is that cognitive anxiety is not as detrimental for performance as
24 hypothesized in MAH. It could have a beneficial effect upon performance when competitors

1 have low levels of physiological arousal and interpret their anxiety symptoms as being
2 beneficial to performance.

3 Another line of research concerned the coping and performance strategies likely to
4 moderate the effect of anxiety on performance and/or to reinforce self-confidence.

5 Certain studies have investigated imagery direction and its subsequent effects on golf putting
6 performance (Beilock, Afremow, Rabe, & Carr, 2001; Ramsey et al., 2008; Short et al., 2002;
7 Wegner, Ansfield, & Pillof, 1998). They generally demonstrated improved performance
8 following positive imagery such as seeing the path of the ball until the hole (Ramsey et al.,
9 2008; Short et al., 2002), and impaired performance following negative imagery such as
10 missing the putt (Short et al., 2002) or through suppressive imagery, such as do not image
11 hitting the ball “pass the target” (Beilock et al., 2001; Wegner et al., 1998) or do not image an
12 obstacle (a bunker) to avoid (Ramsey et al., 2008). In the same vein, one study (Smith &
13 Holmes, 2004) examined the effect of various imagery modalities (i.e., self-modeling via
14 video intervention, audio intervention, written-script intervention) on golf putting
15 performance. It appeared that the video and audio groups performed significantly better than
16 the written script and control groups.

17 Others studies were carried out especially to examine the role played by coping
18 strategies (e.g., Gaudreau, Lapierre, & Blondin, 2001; Nicholls, Holt, & Polman, 2005;
19 Nicholls, Holt, Polman, & James, 2005). Nicholls’s studies were qualitative and implicated
20 adolescent elite golfers. The existence of efficient (e.g., positive self-talk, breathing exercise,
21 following a routine) and inefficient (e.g., negative thoughts, trying too hard, speeding up)
22 coping strategies was emphasized. Gaudreau et al. (2001) demonstrated that the coping
23 strategies used differ throughout the pre-competitive, competitive and post-competitive
24 phases of a golf competition. However, this piece of research does not concern the possible
25 effect of coping strategies on golf performance.

1 Finally, integrative studies used one or two of the above factors in a context of a golf
2 performance (Beauchamp P., et al., 1996; Beauchamp M., et al., 2002; Catley & Duda, 1997;
3 Cumming, Hall, Harwood, & Gammage, 2002; Gaudreau & Blondin, 2004a, 2004b;
4 Gaudreau et al., 2002; Thill & Cury, 2000). Two studies can be distinguished because of their
5 use of an experimental design (Beauchamp et al., 1996; Thill & Cury, 2000). Beauchamp et
6 al. (1996) examined the effect of a 14-week golf-teaching program on the motivation,
7 preparation, and putting performance of novice golfers. Three groups were compared:
8 participants in the first group followed a cognitive behavioral program, those in the second
9 group used a physical skill-training program and the third group was a control group. The
10 results indicated that the cognitive-behavioral group presented higher levels of intrinsic
11 motivation, a more consistent use of pre-putt routines and better putting performance as
12 compared to the 2 other groups. Thill and Cury (2000) used a similar design with recreational
13 golfers and found that a motivational context of one-on-one competition leads to anxiety and
14 distraction, whereas a task-involving context excludes intrusive thoughts and is negatively
15 related with self-handicapping. Using a correlational design with a sample of recreational
16 golfers, Catley and Duda (1997) studied the psychological antecedents of flow and found that
17 pre-round measure readiness variables (calm, positive focus, confident readiness and
18 pessimism) as well as golf skill level were significantly related to the frequency and intensity
19 of flow.

20 The rest of this set of studies has focused mainly on the role and the importance of
21 coping strategies in golf performance and emotional reactions (Beauchamp et al., 2002;
22 Gaudreau et al., 2002; Gaudreau & Blondin, 2004a, 2004b). Studies conducted by Gaudreau
23 and his colleagues investigated the mediating role of coping strategies between (1) emotional
24 reactions and performance (Gaudreau et al., 2002) and (2) pessimism/optimism and emotional
25 reactions (Gaudreau & Blondin, 2004b). These studies conducted with male amateur golfers

1 confirm the great importance of coping strategies for emotional adjustment and performance
2 in golf. For example, using a sample of regional male golfers, Gaudreau et al. (2002)
3 investigated the mediating role of coping in the relationship between Performance Goal
4 Discrepancy (PGD) and affect. Multivariate path analyses revealed that active coping and
5 behavioral disengagement mediated the relationship between PGD and positive affect during
6 competition, whereas only behavioral disengagement mediated the relation between PGD and
7 negative affect, during the competition.

8 *Psychological Profiles of Elite Athletes*

9 As indicated above, only a few studies carried out in golf concerned “elite”
10 participants and this statement is also true for other sports. Only a limited amount of articles
11 report empirical data on psychological profiles of elite athletes. Most of them stress the
12 importance of psychological skills (or performance strategies) used by high performers
13 (Vealey, 2007). Early research in this domain aimed at discriminating successful and less
14 successful athletes in gymnastics (Mahoney & Avener, 1977), racquetball (Meyers, Cooke,
15 Cullen, & Liles, 1979) and wrestling (Gould, Weiss, & Weinberg, 1981; Highlen & Bennett,
16 1979). Overall, this set of studies revealed that the best athletes involved in these
17 investigations (a) presented higher levels of self-confidence (Gould et al., 1981; Highlen &
18 Bennett, 1979; Meyers et al., 1979), (b) were closer to achieving their maximum potential
19 (Gould et al., 1981; Highlen & Bennett, 1979), (c) focused less their attention on negative
20 thoughts before competition (Highlen & Bennett, 1979; Meyers et al., 1979) and (d) used
21 more self-talk (Mahoney & Avener, 1977; Meyers et al., 1979).

22 More recent qualitative and quantitative researches confirmed and supplemented the
23 elites' athletes profile showing that Olympic/ World championship competitors were
24 characterized among others by: imagery skills (Orlick & Partington, 1988), pre-competition
25 and competition game plans (Orlick & Partington, 1988), strong self-beliefs (Mallett &

1 Hanrahan, 2004; Marsh & Perry, 2005), high personal drive, with high ego and high task
2 orientation as well as high intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Mallett & Hanrahan, 2004),
3 abilities to focus and to block distracters (Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 2002; Orlick &
4 Partington, 1988), to set goals (Gould et al., 2002; Orlick & Partington, 1988) and to cope
5 with and control anxiety (Gould et al., 2002). Results regarding anxiety are not congruent in
6 that some studies reported lower levels for the best achievers (Gould et al., 2002; Highlen &
7 Bennett, 1979; Meyers et al., 1979) whereas other found no differences (Gould et al., 1981).

8 *The Present Study*

9 At this point several comments can be made: although the amount of studies
10 concerning recreational or amateur golfers is significant, only few studies included a sample
11 of professional golfers (e.g., Davidson & Templin, 1986; Hassmén et al., 1998, 2004; McKay
12 et al., 1997). This is unfortunate because psychological training for peak performance
13 interests high-level competitors. Hence research is needed on that population. Several sets of
14 factors have been distinguished in the literature reviewed above: motivational factors,
15 emotional factors and coping strategies. However, even the integrative studies fail to combine
16 these three categories of factors to better understand psychological functioning and to predict
17 golf performance.

18 Based on the literature reviewed above, this study has three purposes: (1) to provide
19 descriptive data on a population poorly explored: professional golfers; (2) to study differences
20 between players who competed for the whole tournament and players who were excluded
21 after two days of competition; and (3) to investigate possible psychological predictors of golf
22 performance. We conducted a study on 41 male professional golfers. Based on previous
23 studies, several motivational variables (achievement goals, perceived competence), emotional
24 reactions (pre-competitive state anxiety) and coping strategies (relaxation, imagery, emotional
25 control, attentional control, negative thoughts and self-talk) were assessed the day before an

1 important competition. The relationships of these variables with two performance indicators
2 (cut success, final ranking) were subsequently examined.

3 The following specific hypotheses were made. With regard to the motivational factors,
4 we expected that the best golfers would present higher mastery-approach and performance-
5 approach goal (e.g., Mallett & Hanrahan, 2004), higher perceived competence (e.g., Marsh &
6 Perry, 2005) and would present higher use of coping strategies, in particular attentional
7 control, self-talk and imagery (e.g., Gould et al., 2002; Mahoney & Avener, 1977). Eventually
8 we anticipated that the best golfers would display lower somatic and cognitive anxiety and
9 higher self-confidence.

10 Method

11 *Participants*

12 Forty-one male professional golfers ($M_{\text{age}} = 28.8, \pm 5.75$) volunteered for this study.
13 These players had been professionals for 3.68 years (± 3.42) and practiced 30.9 hours (± 14.1)
14 a week.

15 *Procedure*

16 This study was part of a larger project in collaboration with the French Golf
17 Federation. As the goal of the study was the examination of several psychological factors of
18 golf performance and their consequences for professional golfers, we chose to focus on an
19 important event: the Open of Bordeaux, which is the first stage of the French professional
20 tour. This competition opened the season 2004 and lasted 4 days (i.e., 72 holes stroke play, 18
21 holes a day, cut after the second round). As it is the case for professional tournaments, the cut
22 after two days of competition, which is a selection procedure, enabled the first 50 placed
23 competitors to stay in the tournament, excluding the rest of them. In the present study we
24 labeled “successful golfers” the players who made the cut and hence competed for the entire

1 competition whereas the adjective “unsuccessful” was used for players eliminated after two
2 days of competition.

3 All the golfers were informed prior to the competition that they would be presented
4 with a questionnaire on their attitudes during competition. Players were contacted the day
5 prior the competition to fill out the questionnaire. They were informed that the questionnaire
6 was not anonymous so that the data concerning their subsequent performance could be
7 collected and that this information would only be accessible to the researchers of the study
8 and treated consistently within the ethical guidelines of the university of the second author.

9 *Measures*

10 *Achievement goals.* A French version of the Achievement Goals Questionnaire for
11 Sport (Conroy, Elliot, & Hofer, 2003), the “Approach and Avoidance Questionnaire in Sport
12 and Physical Education” (QAE-EPS; Schiano-Lomoriello, Cury, & Da Fonseca, 2005) was
13 used to assess situational achievement goals. Grounded on the 2 × 2 achievement goal
14 framework (Elliot & McGregor, 2001), the scale consists of 12 items divided into 4 sub-
15 scales: 3 items assessed mastery-approach goal (e.g., “It is important to me to perform as well
16 as I possibly can”), mastery-avoidance goal (e.g., “I worry that I may not perform as well as I
17 possibly can”), performance-approach goal (e.g., “It is important to me to do well compared
18 to others”), performance-avoidance goal (e.g., “I just want to avoid performing worse than
19 others”). Responses were indicated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) “not at all
20 like me” to (7) “completely like me”. Construct validity and reliability of this scale were
21 supported in previous research using French (Schiano-Lomoriello et al., 2005) or English
22 (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2008; Conroy et al., 2003) samples.

23 *Perceived competence.* To assess perceived golfing ability, a questionnaire similar to
24 the one developed by Nicholls and colleagues (Duda & Nicholls, 1992; Nicholls, Patashnick,
25 & Nolen, 1985) was used. Due to the length of the questionnaire, only two items of the scale

1 were used in this study. (“When you are golfing and you compare yourself to most of the
2 other golfers, you consider yourself...”; “I feel that my level in golf is...”). Responses were
3 indicated on an 8-point scale ranging from (1) “very bad” to (8) “very good”. This scale has
4 already been used with French samples and has demonstrated good construct validity, internal
5 consistency and predictive validity (Sarrazin, Roberts, Cury, Biddle, & Famose, 2002;
6 Trouilloud, Sarrazin, Martinek, & Guillet, 2002). The correlation between the two items was
7 high ($r = .68, p < .001$), and the answers of the participants to these two items were averaged.

8 *Performance strategies.* The French version carried out by Debois, Quillet, Sylvestre,
9 and Calmels (2004) of the Test of Performance Strategies (Thomas, Murphy, & Hardy, 1999)
10 was used. This 64-item questionnaire assesses 16 psychological skills and strategies used
11 either in competition or during practice. In this study we retained only 6 dimensions of the
12 competition setting¹. This selection was made in line with previous studies, which also chose
13 to focus on the most commonly cited psychological strategies (Fletcher & Hanton, 2001;
14 Harwood et al., 2004). Three items per variable were used to assess relaxation (e.g., “I am
15 able to relax if I get too nervous at competition”), imagery (e.g., “I visualize successful past
16 performances”), emotional control (e.g., “In competition my emotions prevent me from
17 playing my best”, inversed form), attentional control (e.g., “In competition, I am able to
18 control my negative thoughts”), negative thoughts (e.g., “In competition, I have negative
19 thoughts”) and self-talk (e.g., “I talk positively to myself to get the most out of competition”)
20 strategies. Responses were indicated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) “never”
21 to (7) “always”. This scale has been consistently used in the past and has demonstrated good
22 psychometric properties (Debois et al., 2004; Fletcher & Hanton, 2001; Harwood et al.,
23 2004). Thomas et al. (1999) reported Cronbach alpha coefficients ranging from .73
24 (attentional control) to .80 (self-talk) for the six dimensions used in the present study.

1 to .95. Only mastery-approach goal presented a Cronbach coefficient of .32 and was therefore
2 excluded from subsequent analysis. The correlation matrix between the studied variables is
3 displayed in Table 2.

4 *Cut Effect*

5 To investigate possible differences between players who passed the cut selection and
6 players who were excluded after two days of competition, we carried out a MANOVA on the
7 variables of the study, with the cut passed or not as the independent variable. The main effect
8 was significant: Wilks $\lambda = .45$, $F(13, 27) = 2.54$, $p < .05$. Follow-up univariate analyses
9 revealed significant differences (see Table 1) for performance-approach goal [$F(1, 39) =$
10 4.42 , $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .10$], cognitive anxiety [$F(1, 39) = 5.57$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .13$], somatic anxiety
11 [$F(1, 39) = 6.90$, $p = .012$, $\eta^2 = .15$], emotional control [$F(1, 39) = 4.48$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .10$],
12 and attentional control [$F(1, 39) = 5.26$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .12$]. According to Cohen's (1988)
13 guidelines for interpreting an eta square value (η^2), .01 indicates a small effect, .09 indicates a
14 medium effect and .25 indicates a large effect. Hence the effects reported in this analysis can
15 be considered as medium.

16 *Discriminant Analysis*

17 In order to discriminate between players who made the cut and players who failed to,
18 we used discriminant analysis (DA). Due to the high number of variables with regard to the
19 number of subjects we used a similar procedure to the one used by Highlen and Bennett
20 (1979). First, an overall DA using all 13 variables was conducted to obtain each subject's
21 discriminant score. These scores were then correlated with each subjects' raw scores on each
22 of the 13 variables. The choice of the variables to enter into the subsequent DA was
23 determined by rank-order magnitude of these correlations. To meet the recommended 5:1
24 subject to variable ratio (Cooley & Lohnes, 1971), only the top 8 variables were considered.
25 This resulted in the introduction of the following variables: somatic and cognitive anxiety,

1 attentional and emotional control, performance-approach goal, relaxation strategies,
2 performance-avoidance goal and self-talk.

3 DA showed that the two groups could be distinguished significantly: Wilks $\lambda = .55$, χ^2
4 (8) = 21.15, $p < .01$. The discriminant function had an eigenvalue of .83 and a canonical
5 correlation of .67. Overall, 80.5% of the total sample could be correctly classified, which is
6 superior to a random assignment based on prior group membership probabilities (50%;
7 Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Since in DA, loadings $> |0.30|$ are considered to be substantial,
8 the discriminant function represents six variables that substantially contribute to
9 differentiating the two groups. Players who made the cut are characterized by higher
10 performance-approach goal, somatic and cognitive anxiety, relaxation strategies and
11 emotional control strategies. They also tended to have lower performance-avoidance goal (see
12 Table 3).

13 *Predicting Performance*

14 Regression analysis was used to test whether variables that discriminated players who
15 made from players who failed the cut could predict their ranking. The six variables that were
16 significant in the DA were regressed on performance. The regression was significant²: $F(6,$
17 $34) = 8.28$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .59$ (see Table 4). Cognitive anxiety ($\beta = -.57$, $p < .001$) and
18 emotional control strategies ($\beta = -.44$, $p < .05$) significantly predicted performance, relaxation
19 strategies ($\beta = -.28$, $p = .07$) had a marginal significant effect. The higher the scores on those
20 variables, the better was the performance.

21

22 Discussion

23 The goal of this study was to provide information on an under-explored population:
24 professional golfers. Players completed a questionnaire the day before the beginning of an
25 official competition of the French professional tour. Performance indicators (i.e., cut

1 success/failure, ranking) were then collected at the end of the competition. These variables
2 were subsequently used to see which types of psychological characteristics were related to
3 performance. An examination of the cut result on the variables assessed was first conducted.
4 Discriminant function analysis was then used to examine which variables contributed the
5 most to differentiate players who made the cut from those who failed to. Lastly, a regression
6 analysis was used to predict players' ranking.

7 Investigating the cut effect revealed significant differences between players who
8 competed for the whole tournament and players excluded after two days of competition. Most
9 successful players presented higher scores on performance-approach goal, cognitive and
10 somatic anxiety, emotional control and attentional control. The results of the discriminant
11 function analysis revealed that six variables significantly discriminated successful from
12 unsuccessful players. Successful players were characterized by higher scores on performance-
13 approach goal, cognitive and somatic anxiety, relaxation strategies and emotional control
14 strategies and lower score on performance-avoidance goal. Lastly, regression analysis
15 highlighted three predictors of performance among the six variables identified in the
16 discriminant function analysis. The more athletes presented high levels of cognitive anxiety,
17 frequent use of relaxation strategies and strategies of emotional control, the better their
18 performance was. This regression accounted for 59% of the variance of players' ranking.

19 With regard to motivational characteristics, the finding that the best performing
20 players have higher performance-approach goal is consistent with our hypothesis, as well as
21 with the achievement goal literature which posits that high level athletes present high scores
22 on the performance-approach goal (e.g., Mallett & Hanrahan, 2004; Pensgaard & Roberts,
23 2000). Hence, trying to demonstrate his/her competence to others seems to constitute a
24 powerful source of motivation for elite athletes. The results also show that the players
25 excluded after two days of competition tended to have higher performance-avoidance goal.

1 An excessive focus on avoiding the demonstration of normative incompetence seems to be
2 inimical for performance, a result conform to achievement goal literature (e.g., Elliot &
3 McGregor, 2001) and a past study (Elliot, Cury, Fryer, & Huguet, 2006).

4 Conversely, the results concerning perceived competence are rather unexpected. This
5 variable neither varied in relation to the cut success/failure nor discriminated those two
6 groups. This is surprising because perceived competence is likely to affect the type of goal
7 pursued by athletes, with high perceived competence related to performance-approach goal
8 whereas low levels of perceived competence are more associated with avoidance performance
9 goal (Cury & Da Fonséca, 2001). It might be that our sample was quite homogenous since all
10 the participants were professionals, and the instrument used was not appropriated to this
11 population. Specific tools for elite athletes such as the one used by Marsh and Perry (2005)
12 should be used in future studies. Moreover, Mallet and Hanrahan (2004) also stressed the
13 mediator role of perceived competence in the motivational process, in understanding the type
14 of motivation that energizes elite athletes. In our study, performance-approach and
15 performance-avoidance goals significantly appeared although perceived competence did not.
16 Hence it might be that performance goals vary in this study depending on other processes or
17 variables.

18 Our results regarding anxiety do not support our hypothesis and are inconsistent with
19 the golf literature since those studies generally failed to find a link between pre-competitive
20 anxiety and performance (Hassmen et al., 2004; McAuley, 1985; McKay et al., 1997). They
21 are also rather inconsistent with studies on elite athletes' characteristics that either found no
22 specific differences regarding anxiety between successful and less successful athletes (Gould
23 et al., 1981) or indicated lower levels of anxiety for the best athletes (Highlen & Bennett,
24 1979; Meyers et al., 1979). In the present study, players who made the cut were cognitively
25 and somatically more anxious before the beginning of the competition. This result contradicts

1 the MAH that propose an increase in cognitive anxiety is always deleterious for performance
2 (e.g., Martens et al., 1990). They nevertheless support findings by Jokela and Hanin (1999;
3 Individual Zone of Optimal Functioning hypothesis), by Hardy (1996; Hardy et al., 2004;
4 Catastrophe Theory) and by Hanton and Jones (1999), who found that increases in cognitive
5 anxiety did not necessarily lead to impaired performance. They are also in agreement with
6 qualitative studies showing that among elite swimmers higher levels of anxiety could be
7 related to higher performance if they interpreted the intensity of their anxiety symptoms as
8 facilitative (e.g., Hanton & Jones, 1999). One has to note that the mean scores of cognitive
9 and somatic anxiety were not very high in our study, since the maximum value approximated
10 4 with a scale ranging from 1 to 7 (see Table 1). The intensity of the most performing players
11 is therefore only “moderate”. Perhaps very good golfers do not want to feel too relaxed prior
12 to performance and want to feel moderately worried, and interpret these symptoms as
13 facilitative. Future studies should consider this eventuality by assessing both intensity and
14 direction of anxiety.

15 The results regarding self-confidence do not support our hypothesis and are not
16 consistent with the existing literature (e.g., Gould et al., 1981; Highlen & Bennett, 1979;
17 Meyers et al., 1979). Nevertheless, the correlation ($r = -.27, p = .09$) between self-confidence
18 and performance (i.e., players’ ranking) is consistent with the literature although it does not
19 reach significance. The size of our somewhat limited sample may explain why the correlation
20 does not reach significance. Moreover, it might be that self-confidence does not discriminate
21 successful and unsuccessful players because it is correlated with more proximal variables of
22 performance (e.g., relaxation, emotional control, see Table 2) that are more powerful in this
23 function.

24 Players who completed the cut selection also reported higher use of certain
25 performance strategies. In particular, the best achievers in this competition used more

1 relaxation strategies, attentional control and emotional control which is consistent with our
2 hypothesis. This result is of great interest and seems to indicate that even elite golfers are
3 discriminated by the use of those strategies that could reflect better competencies to manage
4 emotions and anxiety. Consistent results were found by Hanton and Jones (1999) with elite
5 swimmers. Using in-depth interviews these authors demonstrated that elite swimmers used
6 relaxation strategies (either physical or mental) as well as other forms of mental skills (i.e.,
7 internal focusing, thought and feeling control) that could be related to emotional control and
8 relaxation strategies. Although the terms are labeled differently, Gould et al. (2002) in their
9 study of Olympic champions also reported an ability to cope and control anxiety. The notion
10 of “handling with distractors” proposed by Orlick and Partington (1988) also supports the
11 competence of emotional and attentional control. In summary, although the terms are often
12 different, previous studies on elite athletes support the findings of this study in relation to
13 relaxation, attentional control and emotional control strategies.

14 Imagery, self-talk, and negative thoughts neither were found to discriminate successful
15 and unsuccessful players nor predicted performance. For negative thoughts this may be due to
16 the selection procedure in the discriminant analysis because its correlation with performance
17 (see Table 2) is consistent with our prediction and indicates that less presence of negative
18 thoughts is associated with better performance. This is in line with previous studies (Gould et
19 al., 2002; Nicholls et al., 2005, Nicholls, Holt, & Polman, 2005). For imagery strategies and
20 self-talk, the results do not support previous findings (e.g., Mahoney & Avenier, 1977; Meyers
21 et al., 1979). As proposed above, this might be due to shared variance with other strategies
22 more correlated with performance: once the effects of these strategies are controlled, the
23 influence of imagery and self-talk cannot explain more variance. However, the relatively high
24 score of the players (respectively 5.14 and 5.25 for imagery and self-talk on a scale ranging

1 from 1 to 7) indicate a rather frequent use of these strategies consistently with other studies on
2 elite athletes (e.g., Orlick & Partington, 1988).

3 Due to the design of the study, some limitations have to be mentioned. The goal of the
4 study was to focus on a population that is difficult to explore: professional golf players.

5 Although we managed to access this under-explored population, the sample size is somewhat
6 limited, from a statistical point of view, and therefore the results must be interpreted

7 cautiously. Secondly, we used a cross-sectional design that did not enable us to shed light on
8 the consequences of goal performance. A field study using a longitudinal design should be

9 used in the future. Another limitation concerns the absence of a variable in this study:

10 mastery-approach goal. Although it was assessed, the low internal consistency observed

11 resulted in its exclusion from subsequent analysis. This was unfortunate because some studies

12 (Mallett & Hanrahan, 2004) propose that elite athletes are motivated both by performance-

13 approach and mastery-approach goals, a result we were unable to replicate. Similarly, it was

14 decided not to use all the dimensions assessed by the Test of Performance Strategies, to keep

15 the length of the questionnaire reasonable. Hence, dimensions such as goal setting,

16 automaticity or practice strategies were not assessed. Lastly, some dimensions presented low

17 internal consistencies and therefore some results have to be interpreted cautiously.

18 In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that among professional golfers, the best

19 achievers can be discriminated from lower achievers on the basis of their psychological

20 characteristics. Our results indicate that most successful athletes were more cognitively and

21 somatically anxious, used more frequently relaxation strategies, attentional control and

22 emotional control and pursued more performance-approach goal and less performance-

23 avoidance goal. It was also found that 59% of the variance of players' ranking could be

24 explained by some of these psychological factors. It appears that anxiety could be beneficial

25 for performance to the extent that players possess the competencies to manage the affects

- 1 related to this anxiety. In terms of application, this result contributes to the identification of
- 2 the most efficient mental skills.

Footnotes

1
2

3 1. The attentional control dimension actually comes from the practice part of the TOPS. It
4 was decided to include this variable since certain specificities of golf, and especially the
5 length of the game, clearly demands a rigorous management of attention, in practice but also
6 during competition. This is why this concept was added and adapted to the initial dimensions
7 of the questionnaire coming from the competition context.

8 2. As suggested by Craft et al. (2003) we added somatic anxiety to our regression analysis as
9 a quadratic term in order to test the non-linear hypothesis proposed by the multidimensional
10 anxiety theory. The somatic anxiety quadratic term influence was not significant and did not
11 modify the remaining results which were therefore presented without this variable. To test for
12 the robustness of the results obtained in this analysis, we re-run the regression after dropping
13 out the insignificant predictors. The regression was significant $F(3, 37) = 16.46, p < .001, R^2 =$
14 $.57$ as were the effects of the predictors: cognitive anxiety ($\beta = -.60, p < .001$), relaxation
15 strategies ($\beta = -.31, p < .05$) and emotional control strategies ($\beta = -.52, p < .001$).

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1 Table 1: Means, Standard deviation and Cronbach Coefficient of the variables.

2

Variables	Mean (SD)		Range	α
	Cut succeeded (N = 17)	Cut failed (N = 24)		
Perceived competence	5.38 (0.45)	5.35 (0.71)	1-8	$r = .68$
Mastery-approach goal	5.51 (0.66)	5.60 (0.93)	1-7	.32
Mastery-avoidance goal	2.33 (1.74)	2.46 (1.43)	1-7	.91
Performance-avoidance goal	2.59 (1.51)	3.58 (1.99)	1-7	.82
Performance-approach goal	6.06 (1.43)	5.03 (1.62)	1-7	.88
Cognitive anxiety	3.71 (1.03)	2.83 (1.25)	1-7	.63
Somatic anxiety	4.06 (1.64)	2.81 (1.39)	1-7	.95
Self-confidence	4.94 (0.77)	4.76 (0.81)	1-7	.67
Relaxation strategies	5.14 (1.01)	4.54 (1.00)	1-7	.60
Imagery strategies	5.31 (1.13)	5.01 (0.89)	1-7	.59
Emotional control	4.73 (1.14)	3.96 (1.14)	1-7	.74
Attentional control	4.92 (1.17)	4.14 (1.00)	1-7	.74
Negative thoughts	3.2 (1.14)	3.64 (1.46)	1-7	.76
Self-talk	5.57 (0.95)	5.03 (1.34)	1-7	.80
Age	28.82 (3.70)	28.80 (6.93)	21-50	-
Performance	26.76 (17.74)	100.88 (28.34)	1-143	-

3

1 Table 2: Correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Perceived competence	-													
Mastery-av goal	.12	-												
Performance-av goal	.08	-.03	-											
Performance-ap goal	.10	-.28	.18	-										
Cognitive anxiety	-.15	.17	-.05	.05	-									
Somatic anxiety	-.15	.14	-.42**	.04	.52***	-								
Self-confidence	.24	-.05	-.10	.47**	-.04	.00	-							
Relaxation strategies	.37*	-.17	-.29	.14	-.36*	.00	.51***	-						
Imagery strategies	.27	-.45**	-.15	.40**	-.14	.12	.31*	.44**	-					
Emotional control	.22	-.43**	-.09	.50***	-.35*	-.18	.43**	.61***	.48**	-				
Attentional control	.40**	-.42**	-.30	.26	-.24	-.01	.28	.66***	.58***	.75***	-			
Negative thoughts	-.35*	.49**	-.04	-.43*	.37*	.29	-.47**	-.59***	-.56***	-.67***	-.61***	-		
Self-talk	.10	-.18	-.45**	.24	.15	.45	.27	.25	.42**	.06	.16	-.22	-	
Age	.02	-.10	-.10	-.13	.06	.03	-.02	.22	.14	-.08	.22	-.12	-.15	-
Performance	-.16	.17	.27	-.38*	-.31*	-.26	-.27	-.41**	-.25	-.50***	-.54***	.31*	-.23	-.03

2 *Note:* significant correlation are marked: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Mastery-av goal: mastery-avoidance goal, Performance-av goal:
3 performance-avoidance goal, Performance-ap goal: performance-approach goal

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1 Table 3 : Standardized canonical coefficient of discriminant analysis between players who
 2 made and players who failed the cut.

	Standardized canonical coefficient
Performance-avoidance goal	.29
Performance-approach goal	-.36
Cognitive anxiety	-.81
Somatic anxiety	-.33
Relaxation strategies	-.43
Emotional control	-.41
Attentional control	-.12
Self-talk	.23
Eigenvalue	.83

3 *Note* : Wilks $\lambda = .55$, $\chi^2(8) = 21.15$, $p < .01$.

1 Table 4: Multiple regression of player's ranking

2

	β	B	p
Performance-avoidance goal	.16	3.73	.25
Performance-approach goal	-.13	-3.47	.38
Cognitive anxiety	-.57	-20.36	.00
Somatic anxiety	.03	.83	.84
Relaxation strategies	-.28	-12.03	.07
Emotional control	-.44	-16.28	.02

3 *Note:* $F(6, 34) = 8.28, p < .001, R^2 = .59$.