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Pragmatic Factors of Nationally Ranked NCAA Division II Men's Golf Teams: A Grounded Theory Inquiry

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**Pragmatic Factors of Nationally Ranked NCAA Division II Men's Golf Teams:
A Grounded Theory Inquiry**

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A Dissertation Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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Dedication

To all my advisors, committee members, and dedicated MSUM Ed.D. faculty: thank you for encouraging me toward this goal. You have helped to pull me across the finish line. You have always been friendly, responsive, professional, and true intellectuals.

To all the coaches with whom I have worked: thank you for the competition and brotherhood along the way. Thank you especially to the coaches who made this research possible.

To my parents: thank you for showing me the value of education and all the love and support. Thank you for believing in my path. Especially in honor of my late father, who passed away during this writing, and was so proud of the undertaking.

To my wife Kari: I cannot thank you enough for taking on extra duties to give me time to write and research. You have encouraged me every day to complete this goal. I must have married an angel.

Most of all, thank God who inspired and sustained me for this task. I know that with God all things are possible.

Matthew 19:26

Abstract

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) added Division II men's golf in 1963. Since then, teams in the South/Southeast (S/SE) NCAA Region have been dominant, with the last nine of 11 national champions from schools in Florida. What are the pragmatic factors that make a top 50 nationally ranked team or an elite team in the top 25? This study had 14 head coaches of nationally ranked teams (or previous national rank) and included three former national champions in the participant sample. These coaches were interviewed individually or set into focus groups within the S/SE and Central/Midwest NCAA Regions. From these qualitative data, 12 codes formed the basic factors of discussion: scholarship, facilities, recruitment, coach leadership, schedule, team culture, climate, NCAA portal, history of winning, D2/D1 stigma, staffing, and administrative support. From these axial codes formed four selective codes of resources, coach control, external factors, and politics. Once the data became theoretically saturated, it produced a grounded theory, the Theory of Coach Control. Coach Control covers the aspects of recruitment, coach leadership, scheduling, and team culture. The most significant feature of Coach Control is recruitment. The data defines this as "actively recruiting at a high level". This is the most dominant factor that can overcome climate, facilities, scholarship, or administrative support. Closely behind this factor is coach leadership, which is the philosophy and priorities of the head coach. On its own, the Theory of Coach Control can produce a nationally ranked team.

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Pragmatic Factors of Nationally Ranked NCAA Division II Men's Golf Teams:

A Grounded Theory Inquiry

Chapter 1 Introduction

Background of the Study

Over 1200 schools offer men's intercollegiate golf in the United States today, but only 5.9% of all high school male golfers will play on a collegiate team (Scholarship Stats, 2023). For two-year collegiate men's golf options, there are 172 schools and three levels of National Junior Collegiate Athletic Association (NJCAA) within Division I, II, or III. The National Athletic Intercollegiate Association (NAIA) has 250 four-year schools, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has three divisions of four-year schools that offer collegiate men's golf programs. Division I has 292 programs nationwide, and it is seen as the highest level of skill (NCSA, 2023). Division II has 207 schools, and Division III has 300 schools (NCSA, 2023).

Athletic scholarships exist in most collegiate organizations and divisions, defined as grant-in-aid scholarships in which a 'full ride' is the full amount of tuition, books, fees, room, and board combined for one academic year (NCAA Manual, 2023). Different associations and divisions can offer maximum amounts of grant-in-aid scholarship equivalencies as follows for men's golf: NJCAA—eight, NAIA—five, NCAA Division I—four and one-half, and NCAA Division II have 3.6 equivalencies allowed. NCAA Division III does not offer athletic scholarships. This is not to suggest that all schools have the maximum amount to offer, but they would be permitted to offer the maximum amount.

Both the NCAA and NJCAA compete every year for a national rank and national title. Only 50 of those teams will receive a national rank, based on Golfstat software and algorithms for the NJCAA and the NCAA. Better players make a team succeed above the rest, and some

collegiate programs have a nationally ranked team year after year due to the quality of their team. This research plans to explain why perennial national rank occurs in NCAA Division II, but the research outcome could be applied to other divisions and sports.

Golfstat was the official statistical software to calculate a national rank with algorithmic comparisons until Summer of 2023. These were head-to-head (H-T-H) wins and losses, relative win and loss percentage (RWLP), H-T-H standings calculations, and relative rank (Golfstat, 2023). Though multiple teams may have a national rank, they still need to have H-T-H wins within their respective NCAA region to advance to the NCAA Regionals. The only other way to advance to the NCAA Regionals is for a team to win its conference championship or be the top point leader in the conference. Each conference determines this in its own by-laws of competition (NCAA Pre-championship Manual, 2022).

Even though Golfstat is the official record keeper of statistics for NCAA golf, a committee of coaches and administrators oversees the decisions made from statistical results. They make the final vote about which teams will be voted for postseason regional play and the national tournament. Golfstat itself recommends never putting full decision making into the sole decision of a computerized system of statistics (Golfstat, 2023). Post-season participation is determined by the Regional Advisory Committee (RAC), which, from the author's experience, relies heavily on the Golfstat statistical data.

Almost all teams belong to a conference, unless they are independent, awaiting entry into a conference. Independent teams are not eligible for post season play. The NCAA, in its decision of regionalization in Division II, updated annually, divides conferences into regions. There are eight regions: Atlantic, South, Central, South Central, East, Midwest, Southeast, and West (Regionalization Map, 2022).

At the start of post season, these regions play each other in a 'super regional' which the NCAA calls Regionals, of which there are four Regionals Nationwide. At Regionals, there is a pre-determined number of teams and individuals from each Regional who will be selected for the Nationals. This is dependent on the success of the previous years' teams at Nationals. An extra berth is given to an NCAA regionally advancing team if a team from the region makes it to national match play. The minimum number of regional teams selected is three, and the maximum number of teams selected is six (Championships Manual, 2022).

The same principles of scholarship and rank can also be applied to NCAA Division I. The difference with NCAA Division III is not as easily comparable because athletic scholarships are not officially a part of the recruitment process. Part of the NCAA Division II philosophy is partial scholarship model, and teams are not given as many scholarships as Division I schools (NCAA Division II Philosophy, 2023). A maximum of 3.6 full ride scholarships are granted at the Division II level versus 4.5 full rides at the Division I men's level. It is a potential of the study that the competitive advantage principles may be applied to other sports in Division II.

Of the last 11 years of national champions in NCAA Division II men's golf, since match play finals were instituted in 2011, nine of the last 11 titles were won by Florida schools in the Sunshine Conference (NCAA History, 2023). The 2020 championship was cancelled due to Covid-19. In six of those 11 years, the runner up was a Florida school. Five times in those years the individual national stroke play champion has been from the Sunshine Conference which is only Florida Schools. This is a phenomenon that coaches should be able to explain in this research study as to what makes a nationally ranked team and potential champion.

Theoretical Framework

The paradigm chosen for this research uses an interpretivist lens with a pragmatic focus due to the practical nature of winning, losing, and national rank. The interpretive framework is interpretivist because the focus group will give their answers based on experience. While there is some numerical and factual background for participants, the study will be qualitative and not mixed methods. This will not be purely phenomenological interpretation as there are some basic principles that all coaches must follow such as the NCAA Bylaws. Therefore, grounded theory is best used for this study, as the “purpose of grounded theory is to build a theory about the phenomenon being studied” (Briggs et al., 2012, p. 190).

Specifically, the grounded theory design will be systematic to “allow research questions, literature searches, and heuristic frameworks to be considered before data collection” (Creswell, 2005). This design is most associated with Strauss and Corbin (1990) assuming that reality is subjective for the research subjects as they describe their experiences and their own theories for why a team holds a national rank.

The most dominant theoretical framework for college golf recruitment is under the topic of strategic management and the implementation of competitive advantage (Won & Chelladurai, 2016). Golf coaches want competitive advantage to be the best team possible to win a conference, regional, and even national title. As much as the NCAA sees this term as negative, even giving punitive violations for it (NCAA Infractions, 2018), it is precisely the reason for the many NCAA Bylaws to keep things fair from team to team across the nation. It is under these By-Laws of NCAA recruitment that teams can still gain competitive advantage. Barney (1991) noted that a resource is only a competitive advantage if it is “valuable” to the organization’s success and/or “rare” among competitors.

Won (2004) also noted the strong correlation between tangible resources and athletic success for competitive advantage. If a university can increase its tangible resources, this is a strong indicator of improvement. The explanation of sustained athletic success as proposed by Smart and Wolfe (2000) is sustained resource with a cycle of feedback affecting success and recruiting. In simple terms, increase resources and get better players. Better players lead to success. Success attracts better players, and the cycle continues (see Figure 1.1), much like the theory of circular success proposed by Langelett (2003).

Figure 1.1

Cycle of Sustained Athletic Success



Although coaches are not proven to be the source of effective outcome compared to the players (Smart & Wolfe, 2003), the coaches are still in charge of recruitment, player development, and scholarship management. There is also the argument proposed by Won and Chelladurai (2016) that intangible resources, such as school success and history, are important just like tangible resources, such as human resource and finance. However, tangible resources are found to have the most direct effect on a team's athletic performance (see Figure 1.1). When resources can be increased such as scholarship, the likelihood of getting more talented players increases.

Beyond recruitment of players, there are tangible issues, such as operational finances, institution-owned practice facilities, and human resources such as coaching staff. Won (2004) also implied the importance of intangible resources to athletic success including coaching continuity, historical success, and for outdoor sports even the weather is a factor.

Statement of the Problem and Need for the Study

The problem at hand is figuring out how NCAA Division II men's golf teams can become more competitive and achieve a higher rank with the resources they have. Certain teams have a track record of success and a national rank almost every year. Other teams have never been nationally ranked. By examining the factors that make a nationally competitive team, the commonality should show what factors make a nationally ranked team. The less successful teams will not have the common factors of better ranked teams. Beyond scoring average, coaches will be able to report what makes their team better or what they see in other nationally ranked teams.

This study is needed for coaches and athletic administrators who want to increase the competitiveness of their men's golf programs. Won and Chelladurai (2016) referenced a Resource Based View (RBV) that has become more popular in the last 30 years in collegiate athletics. Coaches are given a budget each year, in addition to fundraising, and they may not have a clear idea how to be regionally competitive, how the scholarship money should be spent, or how to properly manage a team to be regionally or nationally competitive. This study will inform that process.

This topic of competitive advantage in athletics has been discussed for programs, for example, Penn State football in the 1990s (Smart & Wolfe, 2000), or professional baseball with the Oakland A's (Wolfe et al., 2006) leading to the *Moneyball* effect with statistics driving recruitment. However, the topic has not been explored specifically relating to collegiate golf.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that make up nationally ranked NCAA Division II men's golf teams. This study will also form a theory as to why teams are nationally ranked. Objective factors are scoring average by individual and team, plus head-to-head relative wins and losses. Subjective factors may include coaching, player ability, player development, recruitment strategy, facility access, and even weather, as golf is an outdoor sport. Very little has been published and peer reviewed on competitive collegiate golf, so this study aims to illuminate the common factors that make a nationally ranked NCAA Division II men's golf team.

Won and Chelladurai (2016) called this success over time in sport a sustained competitive advantage, which is what coaches work for as an outcome. An incredible amount of financial and personal resources is invested in a collegiate sports program, and coaches will look for a way to run a better program. It is safe to say that most coaches and athletic departments are looking for sustained competitive advantage in NCAA men's Division II golf.

Significance of the Study

The importance of the study is that it will contribute to research of sport-specific collegiate success. While some articles have been written on resources and winning, no articles have been found specifically on collegiate golf and winning methodology. This study is not how to conduct practices to improve golf skill, but rather to strategically recruit, manage, and formulate high skill teams to compete at the national level. While golf is an individual sport, it takes a team result to advance to a regional and national level. The study does not aim to discuss how individual players advance to regionals or nationals or become nationally ranked, but rather, teams.

Feasibility

This study is clearly feasible for the author who has insider access for purposive sampling to the top 50 ranked coaches in NCAA Division II men's golf. A focus group of four to seven coaches should be attainable for participation in each focus group. Being able to understand the coaching world helps the author to ask informed questions, which may also be a source of bias.

The positionality of a white middle-class coach is evident, but it does not limit the outcome of the study, as the study is not racially categorized. Bias could limit the research as the author is in direct competition with some of the coaches for regional competition. Research questions could be framed to have coaches (within the region of the researcher) discuss what they know about other programs. This could allow more disclosure to not have data limited by sharing information with a competitor. Also, when participants sign a participation agreement, they agree to take part in the study and discuss what factors make a nationally ranked team. Coach contact information outside of personal contact is easily accessible from the respective athletics website. If a coach fails to respond, there are many other coaches in the top 50 nationwide who would find this study of interest.

Scheduling a focus group of coaches should not be difficult in August or late October as this is the time that no teams would be practicing (middle or end of August) or ending the competitive fall season (late October). Some coaches may not be on contract in August, but coaching is the type of profession that does not have months "off" from coaching duties.

Attractiveness

The uniqueness of this study is that over 200 coaches nationwide are working toward the ultimate goals of a national rank in Division II men's golf, a berth in the National tournament, and even the chance to play for a national title. Many coaches are working as best they can, but they do not know the methodology to make their team improve. Interviewing the top ranked

coaches should provide clear data as to what factors and process makes nationally ranked teams. This research should be highly sought-after information for collegiate golf programs and athletic departments. Coaches want competitive advantage, especially when their job depends on it.

Research questions

RQ1 What factors make perennial nationally ranked teams? (Only coaches who have coached nationally ranked programs for multiple years can answer this question.)

RQ2 How much scholarship equivalency do nationally ranked teams have? (The maximum NCAA scholarship of grant-in-aid cost of attendance is 3.6 equivalencies. A 1.0 scholarship is considered a “full ride.”)

RQ3 How do coaches describe their own success or competitive advantage? (Coaches may or may not be privy to what other coaches have in terms of scholarship money, which is institutionally determined.)

RQ4 What is a winning recruitment methodology? (Each player eligible for competition either came from high school, a two-year transfer, or a four-year transfer domestic or international player. All eligible players are final certified academically and with amateurism. No previous or current professional is allowed in an NCAA sport.)

RQ5 What is the player development methodology of nationally ranked teams? (Is there a collegiate golf program so robust as to develop their players into a nationally ranked team? It is a given that teams have strength and conditioning programs, but do they have a sports psychologist or statistical tracking software available? Do these add-ons make a difference? Each program will show through a survey of descriptives, which is the “footprint” of their team.)

Research Design

The research design chosen for this study is qualitative. Creswell and Poth (2018) define common characteristics as a natural setting, the researcher as a key instrument, using multiple methods, complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic, participants' multiple perspectives and meanings, context-dependent, emergent design, reflexivity, and holistic account (pp. 43-44). Coaches will be in their environment of choice for the research on a remote video Zoom call. The researcher plays a major part to move the discussion forward during data collection. Data analysis will use inductive and deductive logic with various coaching points of view, and coaches will be empowered to speak on this subject of reflection.

Specifically, this research will involve two separate focus groups, made up of four to seven current or previously nationally ranked coaches, chosen by purposive sampling. By this design, a multitude of coaches can weigh in on this phenomenon of being nationally ranked. Coaches seldom discuss in groups the process of being nationally ranked. This symbolic interactionism will be recorded as coaches "act on the basis of the meaning of phenomena" (Briggs et al., 2012) to define through interaction with one another. It is conceivable that coaches have never reflected with other coaches on why their programs are nationally ranked.

The advantage of a qualitative research design is the dynamic of multiple coaches in a discussion producing a common theory that would not be met with a quantitative survey. These answers from coaches will be coded and themed to form a grounded theory for the phenomenon of being nationally ranked.

In essence, the truth of this research method is contained in the person. A grounded theory methodology can be explored and discussed, as a qualitative method will seek to bring out the qualitative data in discussion. The fact of becoming nationally ranked is a qualitative data

piece found in the unique articulated experiences of each coach. The data has yet to be discovered and could produce general “trade secrets” of collegiate golf.

Grounded theory will help explain the experience of being nationally ranked, which will be self-described by coaches of nationally ranked teams. Grounded theory is also appropriate for this study as stated by Briggs et al. (2012) to offer a theory of “complex interactive situations” involving humans in their organizational situations (p. 189). Coaches interact with prospective student athletes and parents in the recruitment process, with players when they are on the roster, school administrators, other coaches, and alumni boosters. It is almost as if a head coach is a mini-CEO of an athletic organization.

Assumptions and Limitations

An assumption of this study is that coaches will eagerly discuss this topic and provide data. The author assumes that each coach is familiar with the terminology used in the coaching world. Another assumption is that coaches are available at certain times requested for this research and on contract. Coaches may consider this a work task as it relates to their duties.

A limitation of the study is that coaches may not discuss the ‘secrets’ of coaching success in front of their competitors, refuse to respond, or refuse to participate. Also, since the author is also an NCAA Division II men’s golf coach, there exists the risk of non-disclosure. The answers to the research questions may be more truthfully informed from individual interviews, which would be a different time requirement than focus groups. The timing of the focus group in the calendar year may also limit some participants depending on their schedules.

As the strength of focus groups, it will lead to a discussion of disclosure instead of non-disclosure. Geographically limited, most coaches will only understand their region and how it works to be competitive. Only coaches who have competed at the national level will understand

what it takes to be a top 20 team at the national tournament, which is the number of teams at Nationals.

Definitions of Terms

Keywords:

Ranking: NCAA Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) has selected this team to be top 10 in the region in any of the four selection calls during the Spring NCAA playing season, or top 50 national rank as determined by Golfstat

Super Regional: combination of Central and Midwest regions of the NCAA designation, whereby the top 10 teams ranked from each region combine to form the Super Regional

Top 5 player: player who is on varsity squad and considered one of the best players to contribute to team score.

Play 5 count 4: format of NCAA Division II men's golf tournaments required by the NCAA for scoring and ranking, meaning to compete with or 'play' five players and count 4 scores.

Bid: selection by NCAA RAC

Automatic Qualifier (AQ): Team who automatically qualifies to the NCAA Super Regional who wins their conference tournament.

Outside Bid: selection for NCAA regional top 10 to advance to super regionals who did not win a conference tournament. Not an AQ.

Program: short for 'golf program' which is used as the term for the entity of each team

Prospective Student Athlete (PSA): Student Athlete who has not yet signed a National Letter of Intent with an NCAA Division II institution.

National Letter of Intent (NLI): Binding agreement that signing institution will pay athletic scholarship dollar amount stated to prospective student athlete for one academic year (only signed once).

NCAA Division I: highest level NCAA amateur category of sport with highest amount of institutional funding from the NCAA and scholarship equivalent allowed.

NCAA Division II: second only to Division I, second level NCAA amateur category of sport with second highest amount of funding from NCAA and scholarship equivalent allowed.

NCAA Division III: Lowest level of NCAA amateur category in terms of institutional funding by the NCAA and zero athletic scholarship is allowed. There is no NLI signing with athletic scholarship.

Regional Advisory Committee (RAC): NCAA committee that determines regional ranking every spring season and the eventual 10 teams plus individuals who will participate in the NCAA Super Regional.

Sabermetrics: Statistical based view of professional baseball player ability theorized by Bill James

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Introduction

Collegiate sports in the United States started in the late 1800s on the East Coast (McDonald, 2021) with the first intercollegiate golf champion from Princeton in 1897. Men's golf was added to intercollegiate athletics in the NCAA in 1939. At the beginning of granting scholarships for sports, there was not a limit if the university could afford it, as there were no limits. Eventually, the NCAA limited the dollar amount of collegiate scholarships per institution and division. The NCAA formed Division II men's golf in 1963, and no team north of Tennessee (Lee University in 2022) has ever won a national championship since Southern Illinois was an NCAA Division II national champion in 1964 (NCAA Men's Golf, 2022).

Fast forward to today, NCAA Division II men's golf has 201 men's teams as of the 2022-23 season (Golfstat team ranking, 2023). There have always been winning and recruiting methodologies in place over the years to formulate championship teams. Coaches need to recruit and manage collegiate teams which change every year. The literature for this management is theorized from business leadership in the areas of strategic management and competitive advantage, which are then applied to collegiate athletics based on resources.

Search Methods

Methods used for the retrieval of scholarly articles and books include online library searches from Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM), Bemidji State University (BSU) and Google Scholar. Other books include those from the Doctor of Education in Leadership (Ed.D.) program at MSUM. In some cases, for example, Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL), the phenomena are so new that scholarship research has not been published on the topic and it needs to be covered from blogs and websites. Collegiate coaching is a rapidly changing profession,

with the NCAA Bylaws changing every year. This affects how a coach can manage or recruit for a collegiate program.

Theoretical Orientation of the Study

The theoretical orientation of the study fits under the interpretivist lens. This is due to the subjective reality that coaches will articulate as they are interviewed. They do not all see the world the same way. There is a unique way these coaches see the world to experience the phenomenon of being nationally ranked. The outcome of grounded theory will show pragmatic factors which are useful to coaches and athletic departments. It will also produce a theory of what makes nationally ranked golf teams in NCAA Division II men's golf.

Review of the Literature

Penrose (1959) stated that a firm was a bundle of productive resource. During the 1960s, the subject of strategic management was theorized and studied academically. Lamb (1984) took the current studies of the day and applied them to outside forces, competitors, and markets. Barney (1991) was one of the first to discuss strategic management with a Resource-Based View (RBV) and the Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threats (SWOT) assessment.

In this same era, but collegiate golf-specific, Mark Laesch and Golfstat started keeping statistics for Oklahoma State University men's golf in 1985. The NCAA later conscripted his services in 1992 (Golfstat history, 2023). A breakthrough methodology occurred with Bill James, *sabermetrics*, and *Moneyball* (Lewis, 2003) that combined statistics, human resource management, and professional baseball.

According to Wolfe et al. (2006), sabermetrics is defined as a statistical-based approach to developing and applying objective knowledge about baseball. It is derived from SABR, which is the acronym for Society for American Baseball Research. This method relies on past

performance to indicate future success instead of the previously held view of recruitment by favoring future potential (p. 113). Past performance is measured purely with statistical data.

Bill James kept statistics for decades, but this was the initial undertaking of professional baseball players recruited from their ability to get on base. Since this implementation of player recruitment using past statistics, professional sports have all adapted this method to some extent. With the success of the Oakland Athletics (A's) franchise, multiple MLB teams implemented this strategy. Numerous employees from the Oakland A's front office went on to manage other MLB teams. Some argued that once the secret strategy was released about how to build a statistical winning team, there was no longer a competitive advantage (Wolfe et al., 2006).

The application of sabermetrics to recruiting professional baseball players is attributed to Billy Beane, the general manager of the Oakland A's. With a salary cap far below other teams (\$40 million compared to the New York Yankees having \$115 million), he took the advice from James and started to recruit players based on one single statistic: if the player gets on base, which is known as On Base Percentage (OBP). This percentage has been an official statistic in Major League Baseball since 1984. From there, it was conceived that players who get on base, drive in more runs, and more runs win games. While the franchise did not win the World Series with this methodology, they set the MLB record at the time of 20 consecutive wins in 2002 and became a top performing team in their division with a much smaller budget.

Smart and Wolfe (2000) discussed competitive advantage in categories theorized by Jay Barney (1991) whether a resource is rare, valuable, or immutable, and applied it to collegiate athletics. Won and Chelladurai (2009) wrote extensively about the relationship between resources, Resource Based View (RBV), and athletic success. Caro (2012) has written about the relationship between recruitment and winning and further explores the inequalities that lead to

athletic outcomes (Caro, 2023). With more measurable outcomes recorded, statistics and comparisons have become more readily available. Junior college rank, scoring average, and state and conference rank are all used to recruit high school students to collegiate programs.

Recruitment

The most literature and research found on the topic of athletic recruitment relates to the broader topic of college and university recruitment. Like an admissions department, coaches are recruiting prospective student athletes (PSAs) from high schools, two-year colleges, and four-year universities. According to Johnson (2009), coaches can embody the “spirit” of the college or university more at a private school than a public school due to dependence on non-public sources of revenue. Private schools can favor and fund athletics as much as the administration allows. This may not hold true logically as many of the Power-5 conferences are public institutions.

Established program factors are in place before a student athlete commits/signs to a program. A coach is already hired with their full-time equivalency percentage and salary, perhaps with benefits, along with any assistant coaches. Next, budget parameters are set from the university administration for use by the program. Coaching methods are also in place for recruiting in NCAA Division II men's golf with a maximum 3.6 “full rides” as per NCAA Division II scholarship equivalencies (NCAA.org, 2022). Most NCAA Division II men's golf programs are not fully funded to the 3.6 equivalency, following the philosophy of the NCAA Division II partial scholarship model. To compare, Division I men's golf is allowed 4.5 equivalencies. The philosophy of NCAA Division II is a “partial scholarship model” where students can earn athletic or academic scholarships (NCAA Philosophy Statement, 2023), but the overall scholarship allotment is less than Division I.

Golf programs fit into a larger scale of budget for an athletic department, but it is possible to see how much is spent per player on average through the Equity in Athletics report put out by the U.S. Department of Education (Matheson, 2012). In one example, a clear discrepancy can be seen in two examples of NCAA Central Region teams Bemidji State (56th national rank in 2021) and Arkansas Tech (2021 National Champion), whereby \$2,468 was spent per men's golf participant at Bemidji State and \$4,556 at Arkansas Tech, respectively (Equity in Athletics, 2021). This is the institutional commitment of financial resources put toward each player. Clearly the institutional expenditures per player are varied, although they compete against each other in the same NCAA region.

Getting from high school to college golf is a feat as only 6.5% of high school golfers make it to any college level, and NCAA Division I is elite at only 1.5% (NCSA, 2021). If an estimated nationwide 200 Division II golf programs had 3 spots open per year on rosters, that would result in only 600 spots nationwide to play Division II college golf. Simply put, there are more players looking than spots available. Coaches must select from a plethora of players. Langelett (2003) suggested that there is evidence of a cycle whereby recruiting affects team performance in Division I football. In turn, team performance affects recruiting, especially for the top 25 ranked national teams, who clearly attract the elite players to their programs, whereby a team can maintain a national top 50 rank year after year.

In another study by Earley (2011), strong correlation was found between junior girls' golf ranking and collegiate ranking, with the strongest correlation found in the freshman and sophomore years. Rank is determined by the Junior Golf Scoreboard Ranking system based on scoring differential, strength of field, and finish (AJGA, 2023) While using high school ranking is one factor of recruitment, only fully or nearly fully funded scholarship teams with high

national rank in the Central and Midwest NCAA region would be able to sign a top-ranked junior player. Top ranked junior players expect a full ride offer to Division I schools, and only a few schools in the Central and Midwest NCAA region NCAA Division II could afford a full ride offer. Division I schools can offer 4.5 full rides in men's golf, which is an increase of 0.9 full cost-of-attendance scholarships over Division II.

Top players are recruited heavily for different schools, and the process and methods are complex. Some coaches even call the recruiting process "mysterious" (Bauman, 2014), and some top recruited players have 25 or more offers from different universities (BLOG, 2014). It is very competitive to recruit top prospects, and much has been done to equalize northern to southern schools with the development of indoor facilities and simulators, even calling it an "arms race of facilities" (Herrington, 2002). Some players that were thinking 'south' for collegiate golf may stay closer to home if there are quality indoor facilities available. In a NCAA Division I example, since their Demirjian indoor facility was built in 2007 at the University of Illinois, the men's program has produced two individual national champions, ten straight NCAA National tournament appearances, won eight Big-10 titles, and advanced to six NCAA National match play, which is advancing beyond the stroke play at the national tournament (Fighting Illini Athletics, 2017).

Beyond recruitment, this research aims to reinforce the hypothesis that teams with more resources, whether time or budget, have a higher regional rank. Smart and Wolfe (2006) theorized that sustained resources are the only way to keep winning teams. Resources must be in place for current players and prospects, whether tangible or intangible.

A similar study of competitive advantage was conducted by Smart and Wolfe (2000) whereby the factors were examined of winning, educational strength, ethical methods (or lack of

violations), and financial factors. Coach tenure is mentioned in this study which is also a hypothesized factor of success. Player resources were found to have a 67% impact on program success, whereas coaching leadership only 2% (Won & Chelladurai, 2016). This study showed a minimal percentage of athletic success is produced by coach tenure or experience.

Other collegiate sports have been analyzed for their factors of success, most notably football, such as Penn State in the 1990s. Won and Chelladurai (2016) addressed tangible and intangible factors of success. Examples of intangible factors are athletic and academic reputation, coaching relationships, and history, while tangible factors could be facilities, or human and financial resources.

NIL Endorsement

Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) is a new concept in the world of collegiate athletics. Only since July 1, 2021, have student athletes been able to sell their name, image, or likeness in exchange for financial payment. The rationale behind this is that the NCAA could be profiting greatly, even millions of dollars, from an athlete's amateur status, when that athlete may have been able to leave the institution early to sign a professional contract. The NCAA profits from televised performances, mainly in Division I football and men's basketball. Once an athlete signs a contract or receives payment for their athletic ability, they are considered professionals, and they are no longer able to compete at the collegiate level (NCAA Amateurism Bylaws, 2023).

Contracts that involve NIL are one of the fastest growing areas to understand in collegiate sports, however, coaches are not supposed to arrange setting them up (NCAA Bylaws, 2023). It is a violation for a coach to arrange an NIL for a player in addition to the academic or athletic scholarship. This is a tricky arrangement because players are known to have an NIL in hand, often before they sign a National Letter of Intent (NLI), which is when a player 'signs' with a

school. An example would be the top ranked Junior player in the US in 2021, Caleb Surratt, who signed an NIL partnership with Transcend Capital Advisors (Status Rules, 2022). This marketing move was seen to “get a name out there to target markets” for a newly established investment firm with “an audience that is beneficial to our services” (p. 1). Surratt’s NIL contract was part and parcel to the factor of his collegiate signing with Tennessee. The actual dollar amount contained in the NIL is undisclosed, but it is not limited, as the NCAA does not govern the amount of money in an NIL contract. NIL money does not contribute to the total dollar equivalency limits of an institution.

In another recent change to non-professional golf, the governing bodies of amateur golf worldwide, the United States Golf Association (USGA), and the Royal and Ancient (R&A) changed their definitions of amateur status to allow for up to \$1,000 cash winnings for tournaments and a declaration that any “sponsorship, promotional, advertising, and expense related restrictions are eliminated” (Status Rules, 2022). These two examples of NIL and the changing rules of amateurism show how amateurs, and specifically collegiate golfers, are able to accept more money in their amateur careers, especially while playing collegiate golf.

Retention

Not only is recruitment a part of getting players to a team, but also the retention of players to stay on a team. The NCAA portal, started in 2019, has made it easier for the student athlete to switch schools. Multiple conferences are now nullifying their transfer rule to give student athletes the full right to transfer. As of June 2023, there were over 600 NCAA men’s golfers looking to transfer schools, posted in the 2022-23 school year (NCAA apps, 2023).

Tinto (1993) studied college retention for decades and documented that students leave college due to lack of integration into academic and social systems. Adler and Adler (1985)

reported that the demands of being a student athlete can be overwhelming, and student athletes often become “disillusioned” with academics (p. 241) when compared to the demands of athletics. This agrees with a non-published study by Rivera (2004) that the most important factors in retention of student athletes were related to time constraints. Weiss and Robinson (2013) found specifically at the NCAA Division II level, that the top three self-reported factors that affect whether a student athlete will transfer are relationship with the coach, team success, and playing time.

Retaining top players can be just as difficult as recruiting top players as there is almost always a better-quality school for an athlete to “play at the next level”. Any kind of interpersonal conflict with the team or coach could lead to potential transfer. “Playing time” for college golf would generally be defined as the number of tournaments the player is participating in. Usually, the top players on a team get plenty of playing time, as demonstrated by the number of competitions. The conflict is often the coaching decision whether a player makes a tournament team which can lead to disgruntled players who do not qualify into the tournament.

Weiss and Robinson (2013) identified academics and social integration as other factors that related to student transfer, while financial reasons led to leaving the university altogether (p. 86). Perrelli (2004) found that the top reasons athletes leave a team were related to academics or injury. Overall, high school grades and rank are a strong indicator of college success (Schwartz & Washington, 1999), and the indicator is evident of academic ability from previous grade point average or class completion rate.

Competitive Advantage and Sustained Competitive Advantage

Research in strategic management from the 1960s relied heavily on the analytical framework of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis (Barney,

1991). This research discussed internal analysis of strengths and weaknesses and external analysis of opportunities and threats. In the 1980s, analytical methodology changed to include analysis opportunities and threats to more of a competitive environment (Lamb, 1984), comparing the competition.

Competitive advantage can be defined as “creating a value-creating strategy not being simultaneously used by other competitors” (Barney, 1991). This becomes a sustained competitive advantage when competitors are unable to duplicate the benefits of the strategy. There is some discussion whether the advantage is sustained depending on the likelihood of future competitors’ duplicity of strategy or whether a calendar year is the best way to compare a sustainable advantage. Regardless, there are common principles in place to have an advantage over competitors.

Resource and Resource Based View

According to Penrose (1959), a firm or organization can be seen as a bundle of productive resources, broken down into productive resources and productive services. Kor et al. (2004) stated that unused productive services are a source of competitive advantage. Penrose (1959) further argued that resources must be maintained, and the firm must “expect in time it will be overtaken if it fails to continue to develop its advantage” (p. 137).

Many factors are considered a resource and can be classified as tangible or intangible (Won et al., 2016). Examples of tangible resources are financial, human resources, and facilities. Intangible resources could be classified under coach longevity, student athlete loyalty, or history of athletic success at the institution. Smart and Wolfe (2000) reported that the decades-long success of Penn State football was from “history, relationships, trust, and organizational culture” (p. 133).

A Resource Based View (RBV) has to do with resources that are within control of the organization and how those resources are used (Barney, 1991). It therefore encourages the organization to obtain and utilize critical resources while developing proactive strategies to use those resources. Won and Chelladurai (2016) stated that RBV includes “critical resources that do not comply with mathematical formulas of economics” (p. 12). Those factors are not listed in budget sheets and can be “difficult to observe” resources.

In RBV theory, an organization has resource heterogeneity and imperfect mobility (Barney, 1991), which can make a resource rare, valuable, imperfectly imitable, and unable to substitute (see Figure 2.1). A competitor would face cost or quality disadvantages to try to produce the same resource (Smart and Wolfe, 2006). These are known as “costly-to-copy” attributes (Conner, 1991). These attributes have set the standard for evaluation in RBV theory.

According to Anderson and Birrer (2011), RBV rests on two key assumptions that 1) resources vary across organizations, and 2) resources not currently possessed are not easily acquired or developed by other organizations (p. 13). This could be in the form of patents for physical objects, secret recipes in the food industry, real estate scarcity, or unique human resources. In athletics, this could be coaching staff, facilities, financial resources, or player resources.

Figure 2.1

Relationship Between Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage, (Barney, 1991)



Strategic Management

Strategic management seeks to take all the resources needed to make a competitive advantage, whether tangible or intangible. Once the resources are obtained in the RBV and utilized, strategies can be formed with future resources. The goal of strategic management is to “achieve and sustain competitive advantage” (Teece et al., 1997). Thereby, the study of how to achieve competitive advantage is best suited for how to implement strategic management.

Penrose (1959) argued for isolating mechanisms that could give an organizational advantage. Divided into five categories, they are: path dependencies of resources, firm-specific knowledge, shared team experience, entrepreneurial vision by managers, and capacity to learn and diversify. Specifically, firms with an entrepreneurial spirit are more likely to sustain superior returns, which Barney (1986) also supports. An organization must adapt in some ways to maintain competitive advantage. To best utilize or even “exploit” the competitive advantage would be called “organizational capability” (Teece et al., 1997).

Berman et al. (2002) argued that tacit knowledge was a source of RBV. Divided into individual or team tacit knowledge, it cannot be codified, nor is it observable. Therefore, to measure it, years of experience are calculated. In this study, dependent variables were measured in season wins and regular season team assists. Independent variables included years of shared team experience, draft positions of incoming players, age of players, and years of coach experience with the team. The most important result of this study was “support for non-monotonic relationship between levels of shared group experience and group performance” (p. 26). Berman et al., (2002) further found that shared experience leads to short-term returns but over time can lead to rigidity. Core competencies that used to lead to competitive advantage can become core rigidities “with the ossification of knowledge” (p. 27). Some aspects were found to

be positively correlated to the winning percentage, such as tenure of a head coach or higher levels of player quality.

Statistical Software in Collegiate Programs

Statistics were not highly tracked for collegiate golf until they could be compiled and computed electronically. Golfstat started as a small service to Illinois State University in 1984, with only one school signing up for the service in 1985. That school happened to be Oklahoma State University and they won national titles in both men's and women's Division I golf, leading to future conscripted success of statistic-tracking. The NCAA needed help with computerized statistical ranking in 1989 (women) and 1992 (men) and Golfstat was born (Golfstat History, 2023).

Golfstat is hired by the NCAA for all official ranking for the NCAA post-season committees. It is also the official scorer for all NCAA Championships. As a service to schools, Golfstat requires results from each official tournament. When hosting tournaments, coaches can now use paperless live scoring for tournaments where anyone with internet can check live scoring of any tournament. Of course, all these services come at a cost to the institution and for greater compensation, Golfstat will provide more statistical information regarding each tournament result.

Seeing a highly valuable and lucrative market for statistical software, multiple companies have now started offering statistical software and apps as they relate to player ability. The most prominent is called Decade. Founded by Scott Fawcett, he has compared his strategy as the "*moneyball* of golf" (Decade, 2023). Decade considers shot dispersion and percentage-based shot selection to achieve score. Over 200 college teams are using Decade now (Decade college,

2023), which uses Google Earth and statistical software that can be personally utilized through their application.

Other statistical software has sprung up such as Anova Golf, which has a comprehensive approach to collegiate teams. Other statistical tracking apps are used in the golfing world, while not specifically for college teams, for example: 18birdies, Golfshot, TheGrint, Golf Stats Coach, and Swing by Swing, which were the top-rated apps in 2023 (Jooste, 2023). These apps will track scores and tendencies, but they will not provide individual or team practice plans based on need for skill development that Decade or Anova Golf would offer.

NCAA Selection and Calculation of National Rank

Golfstat uses multiple factors to determine a team's national rank with the end goal to produce statistical information for NCAA Regional Advisory Committees (RAC). Over a series of weeks, with each RAC publishing the schools under consideration during the spring season, the RAC makes the decision about who advances to the NCAA regional tournament. Outside of a conference-winning team is an outside bid to the NCAA Regional. A team that wins the conference is considered an Automatic Qualifier (AQ). Both the AQ and the RAC-selected teams advance to an NCAA Regional. From there, teams play in the national tournament determined by athletic results and berths from the regional events. Therefore, the information provided to the RAC is vital to the selection for the NCAA Regionals.

Teams must be eligible for post season selection, which in NCAA Division II men's golf is 12 tournament rounds, including at least three tournaments in the Fall season and four in the Spring (Pre-Championship Manual, 2022). Of this competition, at least 50% must be with NCAA Division II opponents. Strength of schedule is another factor in National Rank determined by the "team adjusted scoring average of a schools' opponents" (Golfstat, 2023)

Relative ranking, which specifically sets the top 50 national teams, is a bit more complicated. A team is given a percentage value for every Head-To-Head (HTH) win or loss. This is called the Relative Win Loss Percentage (RWLP). Golfstat advises in the Coach Corner section (Golfstat, 2023) for coaches to look at the change in RWLP every week in competition against other schools. The ranking is relative because it depends on who you have played. The data available only runs in that year of competition, so there is no previous data from other years in the equation. Overall, coaches should “think of each event as a series of duals” (Coaches Corner, 2023).

Critique of Previous Research Methods

Research to determine competitive advantage was first theorized with firms and corporations, often with RBV. Smart and Wolfe (2000) looked at competitive advantage in athletics, namely Big-Ten football. Success was defined by a win-loss record, graduation rate, ethical quality (lack of NCAA violations), and financial surplus.

Other researchers have looked at multiple Division I football conferences to understand the relationship between recruiting and success. Caro (2012) found that between 63% and 80% of on-field success is due to recruiting. The signed recruits, using their star rating, were the independent variable and the in-conference winning percentage was the dependent variable. It is estimated these teams spent over \$500,000 a year per recruiting class (p. 140).

Omondi-Ochieng (2018) used a binary logistic regressive model of quantitative methodology to predict NCAA Division I football teams' competitiveness, finding that coach experience, total revenue, and home attendance were the top predictors of competitive advantage (p. 834). The dependent variable was competitiveness (win-loss records) and independent variables were physical (home attendance and total revenue), human (coaches' salaries and

experience), and organizational resources (conference rank and number of sports). This result contradicts the research done by Smart and Wolfe (2003) whereby coach leadership was found to only have 2% variance in team performance in Major League Baseball.

In NCAA Division I collegiate basketball, Anderson and Birrer (2011) did an RBV qualitative analysis of Gonzaga men's basketball after being a mid-major program who advanced to the sweet 16 of the NCAA tournament for three consecutive years 1999 to 2001. This was unprecedented for a small school of 2,800 students to have that kind of success. Up to that time, only Duke University and Michigan State University, from Power-5 conferences, had achieved that feat. The head coach at Gonzaga left after the first year after the Sweet 16 but the assistant coach stayed in the program for the other two years, which provided coaching continuity. Team culture and school resources with facility improvements added greatly to future sustained success. Gonzaga advanced to the NCAA tournament 11 straight seasons with 10 WCC championships (p. 11). Annual donations to men's basketball went from \$60,000 to over \$1,000,000 per year in this time.

Poppo and Weigelt (2000) used RBV in a quantitative study to analyze professional baseball player free agents with salaries and individual performance to indicate coefficient returns to predict future potential. Their results were "disappointing" (p. 609) that factor-market imperfection could not determine a resource-based competitive advantage. Without previous historical benchmarks, they "could not determine whether owners purchase free agents at a value less than their economic worth" (p. 608). However, they did suggest that teams may be able to incur competitive advantage by "strategic use of asymmetric information and complementary assets" (p. 598). For example, a known entity such as a free agent is unknown by another firm, which results in the previous firm having a potential advantage. They concluded that the

conceptual value of RBV is “unquestioned”, but the empirical value is “fragile” (p. 607), “relatively untested”, and “likely to be difficult (to apply) in business settings” (p. 609).

Many research methods such as Won and Chelladurai (2016) have been quantitative to demonstrate that intangible resources contributed to tangible resources in the form of financial and human resources. Their result was that athletic and academic reputation explained over 83% of the generation of tangible resources in collegiate sports. Tangible resource was “significantly predictive of the amount of athletic performance” (p. 11). One source used to compare sport could be the Learfield Cup ranking, which would highlight overall institutional athletic success. In collegiate athletics, football is often researched as it is the largest dollar sport at the NCAA Division I level.

Kavekar (2010) surveyed the top 50 NCAA Division I softball teams for factors related to recruiting. She found the largest desired recruit characteristic was being ‘athletic’ whereas the most important tangible recruiting characteristics were “power, speed, skill, or athleticism” (p. 2). One of the top three statistics that coaches looked for was on-base percentage, which is supported by the previous philosophy of Bill James and sabermetrics. Coaches also reported in the majority that the top need for a program to be successful in recruiting was “financial resources and budget.”

From the student-athlete perspective, Jordan and Kobritz (2011) surveyed NCAA Division II softball teams to determine university selection factors. These were generally grouped into the categories of family and friends, location of institution, academic characteristics, athletic programs, coaching staff, and financial aid (p. 429). The top reported factor was the honesty and sincerity of coaching staff, with five of the top nine factors related to coaching staff. Academic offerings and the influence of family/parents were also in the top ten

reasons for university selection. This result shows heavy emphasis on the influence of coaching staff.

Very little to no research has specifically addressed collegiate golf competitive advantage, although there has been some research on how junior rank leads to college rank in women's collegiate golf (Earley, 2011). Statistically, Golfstat could give numerical outcomes as to why teams maintain a national rank, but they could not explain how a team recruits or retains its players. Golfstat could give the output of "what", but not the "how."

Selection of Grounded Theory

Previous studies have used qualitative interviews, RBV theory, and quantitative metrics to achieve data for competitive advantage comparisons in athletics. Grounded theory has been chosen less, but an example of a grounded theory study in athletics was used by Long et al. (2011) in personal food systems of NCAA Division II football athletes. Little is found on grounded theory being applied to formulate competitive advantage in athletics.

The strength of grounded theory is moving beyond descriptions to form a theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which is supported by Howard-Payne (2016), who stated the goal was to produce novel theory. This outcome of the research methodology best equips coaches with what to do and how to succeed. A defining feature to identify the pragmatic factors of being nationally ranked is found in the characteristic goal of grounded theory. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), it is to focus on a "process or an action that has distinct steps or phases that occur over time" and the theory itself has "movement" that the researcher attempts to explain (p. 83).

Summary of the Literature

To summarize the literature review, the concepts of firm advantage (Penrose, 1959), expanded to compare other organizations (Lamb, 1984). Combined with strategic management (Barney, 1991), this led to the theory of sustained competitive advantage explained in more detail (Teece et al., 1997). The examples of firm advantage, competitive advantage, sustained competitive advantage, and strategic management were first applied to the business world.

In the sport world, Mark Laesch with newly formed Golfstat in 1992, was asked by the NCAA to provide collegiate statistical service for golf. Statistician work like Bill James (2001) led to the implementation of sports statistics in professional sport recruitment, in his case, baseball. Smart and Wolfe (2002) took a resource-based view (RBV) to apply to collegiate athletics. Later, authors Won and Chelladurai (2016) used RBV to theorize the importance of tangible and intangible resources in collegiate athletics. As the scope of college athletics changed, Caro (2023) recently published an article on the inequalities of college athletics and recruitment.

Furthermore, many aspects are considered in the background of college golf and why teams are successful. Recruitment and retention of student athletes is of utmost importance as there is no team without them. Recruitment depends on resources and allows for sustained competitive advantage, which could include NIL contracts in the agreement. As far as how a program is run by the coaching staff, can be examined through the lens of RBV and what factors are rare, valuable, imperfectly immutable, and sustainable in the organization. Grounded theory is applied in this study to hear from coaches themselves and churn data to produce a theory on a nationally ranked methodology of managing an NCAA Division II men's golf team.

Chapter 3 Methods

Introduction

The research design used in this study is grounded theory, and the ontology lens is interpretivist. According to Sebastian (2019), with interpretivist grounded theory (IGT), the researcher is engaged and actively interprets data. From a pragmatic stance, this study will be a qualitative inquiry with two focus groups and interviews of nationally ranked NCAA Division II men's golf coaches. A list of topics will be projected during the focus group for data discussion points. This outline will suffice for talking points about the demographics of a program. Often this information is not public information, such as scholarship equivalency amount. The institutional scholarship amount will be kept anonymous in the focus group unless a coach self-discloses that information.

Coaches will be invited to participate in the study via e-mail or phone call and confirmed with a text or e-mail. The focus group will be a carefully crafted set of semi-structured questions that ask how the team became or remains one of the top 50 programs nationwide. Since coaches are from all over the United States, a Zoom call will be the official platform, which is also easily recorded with transcription. From the edited transcriptions, the information can be put into themes and codes using NVivo, which is a qualitative research software. Inductive reasoning will be used to formulate axial and selective coding from the specific to the general to form a grounded theory.

Grounded Theory

As a research methodology, grounded theory is credited to Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser from the 1960s. This was in response to the logico-deductive theories which claimed there was only one theory for an area (Glaser & Strauss, 1965, p. 35), and it also aimed to close

the “embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Howard-Payne (2016) said the strength of grounded theory abandons *a priori* theorizing and charts the course to a novel theory. The formulated theory is thus “grounded” in data from participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Furthermore, Glaser and Strauss parted ways from classical grounded theory in the 1980s to form two categories of 1) a post-positivist paradigm from Glaser and 2) a constructivist approach formed by Strauss. This study does not follow extreme traditional methods of grounded theory, whereby a literature review cannot be conducted until the research is conducted. Both Glaser and Strauss categorized data, although the method of “constant comparison” is credited to Glaser (Marjan, 2017). This is where the data are constantly compared with the categories created. This study follows a research paradigm closer to Glaser, although some methods of coding by Strauss and Corbin (1998) are systematically and categorically helpful. While highlighting Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin, this study does not utilize methodology from Charmaz (2006, 2014) in constructivist grounded theory, nor Clarke (2005) who relies on postmodern perspectives such as the political nature of research or questioning legitimacy and authority (pp. xxvii, xxviii).

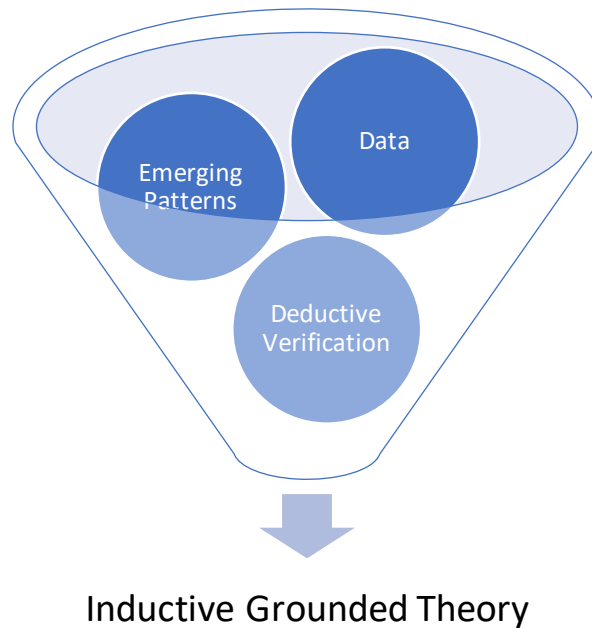
This study follows a closer paradigm to Glaser. The epistemology viewpoint is realism and findings are revealed in the data. Answers are grounded in the reality and constraints of recruiting and managing a collegiate golf program. Data would not be interpreted outside the traditional resources available to each institution as limited by the NCAA. Examples of this would include the scholarships of 3.6 full grant-in-aid equivalency amount which is the only NCAA limiting factor. Theoretically, an institution could have transportation such as a private jet, unlimited travel and equipment budgets, and multiple coaches. Realistically, NCAA Division

II men's golf teams do not fly on private jets like Division I teams to keep up with other teams (Golfweek, 2017).

As Cooney (2010) stated, the key word is “systematic” to form into a system the coding, collection of data, and analysis. This results in two key techniques in grounded theory of theoretical sampling and constant comparison (p.19). In the Glaser method, inductive reasoning is used throughout the process, although deductive reasoning is only used in the data analysis process and verification. As Marjan (2017) stated, that grounded theory uses inductive logic in its initial steps (p. 33). As probing continues in the data collection phase, deductive logic can be used on the responses (i.e. a certain resource was used to define success and not another specified resource). Combined with data and emerging patterns, then inductive grounded theory can be formed (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1

Glaser Model of Grounded Theory Analysis, adapted from Heath and Cowley (2004, p. 144).

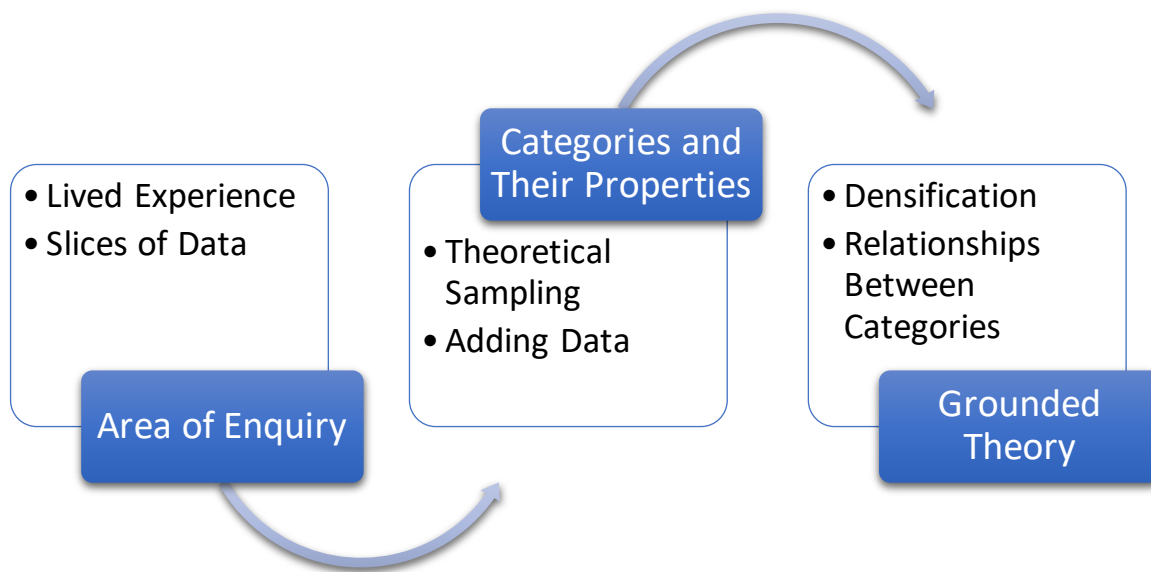


Theory Creation

According to Sebastian (2019), in IGT, the creation of formal theory is essential to the completion of a finished study. Multiple perspectives will confirm the same data and lead to verification (p. 4). According to Urquhart et al. (2010), theory generation starts with the hunches, lived experience, and/or anecdotal evidence. From the area of enquiry arise the first “slices of data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data set itself has a process of theoretical sampling and adds further data to saturate the categories. The final product is a “densification” of relations between categories. The outcome is a grounded theory based on the relationship with categories (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2

The Cycle of Data Collection and Analysis in Grounded Theory (Urquhart et al., 2010).



Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to find the pragmatic factors of what makes a nationally ranked team in NCAA Division II men's golf. These are the top 25% of golf teams in the nation

for NCAA Division II. Out of the 200+ teams competing every year, a national rank is within the top 50 teams. This result will also provide an inductive grounded theory on what factors have made these teams earn a national rank. A Resource Based View (RBV) lens can also be used to determine which resources produce the most result for recruiting top players. Focus group questions can be framed in RBV to discuss resource competitive advantage (see Table 3.1). Figures (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4) are also included in the research discussion to show the relationship between scholarship amount in team post season appearances.

In an unpublished survey by the author (Miller, 2022), 38 of 62 teams in the NCAA Central/Midwest region reported on their scholarship amounts. The 19 teams that have not received a top-10 regional rank with post season appearance since 2017-18 are labeled Post Season Years = 0. The findings are as follows in equivalencies given (Figure 3.3): two programs have 2.6 to 3.5 (10.5%), three programs have 0 to .5 and three programs are 3.6 fully funded, (15.8% respectively), five programs are .6 to 1.5 (26.3%), and the majority of 6 programs are 1.6 to 2.5 “full rides” or equivalencies given (31.6%). Therefore 26.3% of these teams have 2.6 or more scholarships.

In contrast, the reported data shows a much different breakdown of equivalencies for the Post Season Years = 6 group (expressed in Figure 3.4), which is a combination of teams who have gone postseason four of the last five years and all five years (2020 NCAA tournament was canceled, thereby combining four and five years is a more accurate report). Of 10 teams, no program was .6 to 1.5, one program was 0 to .5 and 1.6 to 2.5 (10%), four programs were 2.6 to 3.5, as well as four programs were 3.6 fully funded (40% each, respectively). That is to say, 80% of this group has 2.6 or more scholarships. By comparison of Figures 3.3 and 3.4, teams with increased scholarships have more post-season appearances (Miller, 2022).

Table 3.1

Focus Group Questions and Probes

Demographic Information	
1. How many years have you been an NCAA Division II head men's golf coach?	
2. How many years of experience do you have being nationally ranked (top 50 teams)?	
Focus Group Questions	Follow-Up or Probe Questions
3. How big a factor is player development/improvement? (RQ5)	Do players really improve? Do you use a statistical improvement software? (only use to clarify if coaches do not understand the question) Or is it better to depend on quality recruited players to contribute instead of developing players?
4. How many full rides do nationally ranked teams have? (RQ2)	Comment on this post-season appearance in relation to scholarship (see Figures 5a and 5b)
5. How do you think the top 50 teams recruit? (RQ4)	Do teams get really talented foreign players or transfers?
6. What factors make nationally ranked teams? (RQ1)	Is it money, facilities, coaching, history of program, weather, or anything else you can think of?
7. How can you describe your own success of being nationally ranked? (RQ3)	Which factors most apply to your program and experience?

Figure 3.3

Equivalency Amounts for NCAA Central/Midwest Region Post Season Years = 0 Group

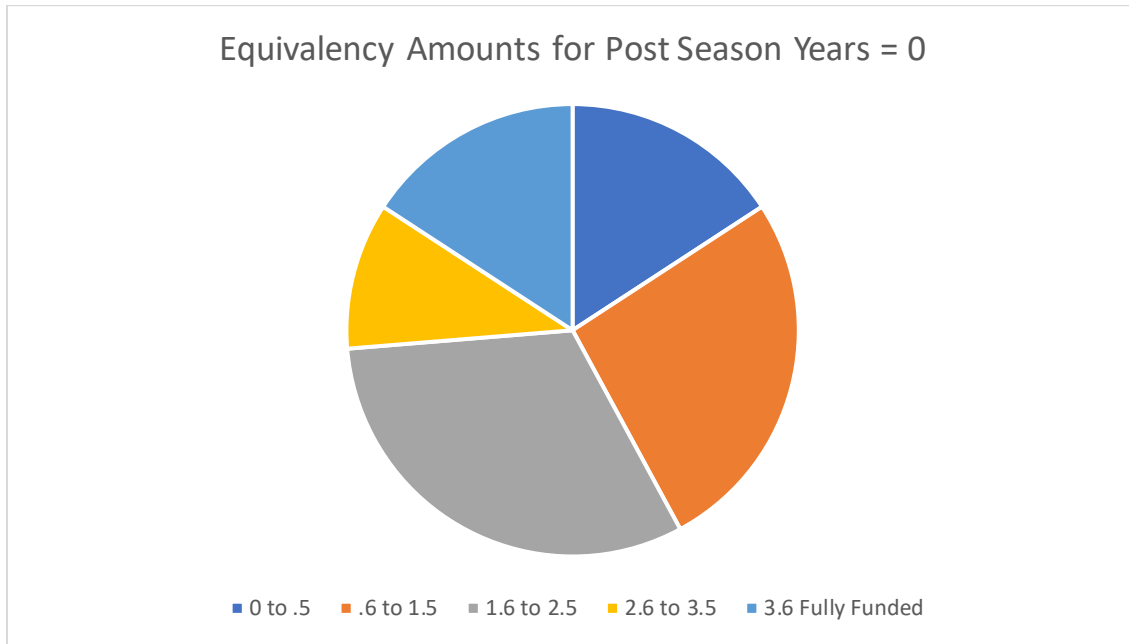
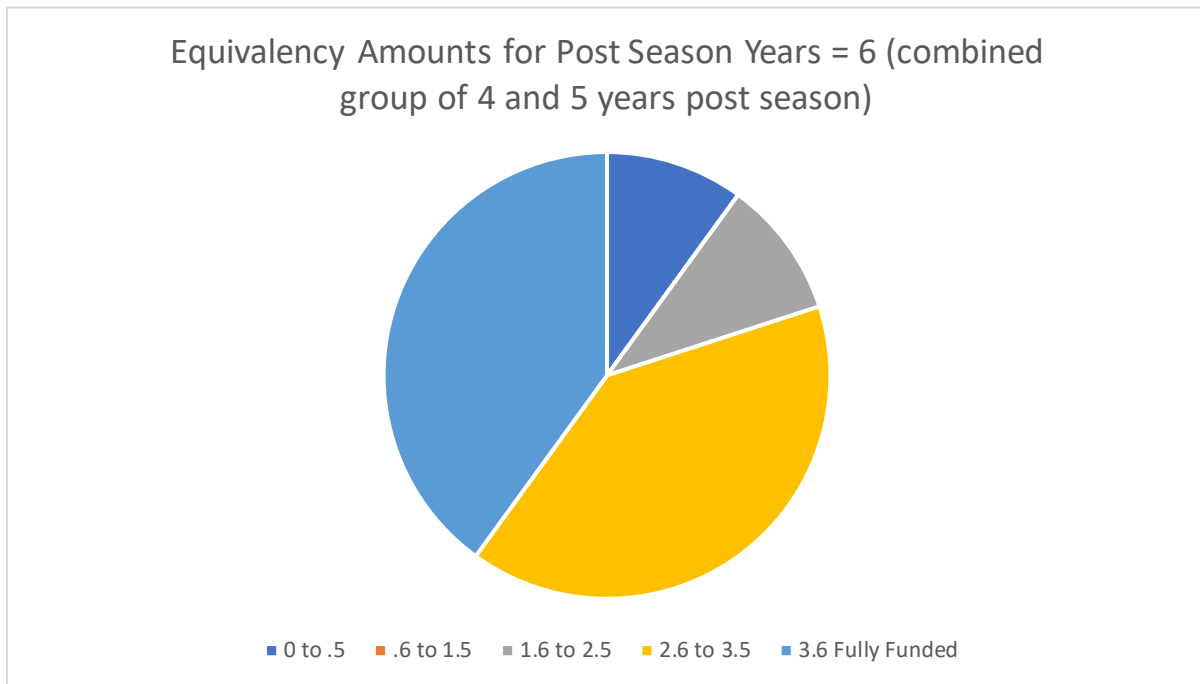


Figure 3.4

Equivalency Amounts for Central/Midwest Region Post Season Years = 6 Group



Research Questions

RQ1 What factors make perennial nationally ranked teams? (Only coaches who have coached nationally ranked programs for multiple years can answer this question.)

RQ2 How much scholarship equivalency do nationally ranked teams have? (The maximum NCAA scholarship of grant-in-aid cost of attendance is 3.6 equivalencies. A 1.0 scholarship is considered a “full ride.”)

RQ3 How do coaches describe their own success or competitive advantage? (Coaches may or may not be privy to what other coaches have in terms of scholarship money, which is institutionally determined.)

RQ4 What is a winning recruitment methodology? (Each player eligible for competition either came from high school, a two-year transfer, or a four-year transfer domestic or international player. All eligible players are final certified academically and with amateurism. No previous or current professional is allowed in an NCAA sport.)

RQ5 What is the player development methodology of nationally ranked teams? (Is there a collegiate golf program so robust as to develop their players into a nationally ranked team? It is a given that teams have strength and conditioning programs, but do they have a sports psychologist or statistical tracking software available? Do these add-ons make a difference? Each program will show through a survey of descriptives, which is the “footprint” of their team.)

Research Design

The research design chosen for this study is qualitative. Two separate focus groups will be formed from the NCAA Division II men's golf coaches who are or who have been nationally ranked. They are the only coaches who understand firsthand the phenomenon of carrying a national rank of top 50 in the nation. Using focus groups, data will be recorded using a single

Zoom meeting and transcribed. Once validated by the participants, the data can be entered into a qualitative software called NVivo. This data will be analyzed with axial coding and themes. The results will allow the researcher to formulate a theory, which is why the research methodology is also grounded theory.

Procedures

Procedures will cover the participant selection, protection of participants, data collection, data analysis, and instruments used. Ideally, the selection process and data collection will take no longer than a month, although, due to coaching schedules, it is best to ask coaches for time after the competition season is complete from October through January for the actual research focus group meeting.

Participant Selection

Participants selected will only be NCAA Division II men's golf coaches who have received a national rank in their tenure. This is a purposive sampling, which is intentional, to choose coaches who have a shared experience of being a top 50 golf program in the nation. Coaches will be selected from two NCAA regions, the Central/Midwest, and South/Southeast, with at least four coaches per region and focus group. Coaches will be asked in order of previous the previous year rank. A follow up question will be asked of the coaches who respond if they have experience with coaching a nationally ranked team for multiple years. With purposive sampling, the author has personal access to Central/Midwest coaches. The South/Southeast regions are selected for the numerous highly ranked teams. Nine of the last 11 national championship teams have come from the South/Southeast regions (NCAA Men's Golf history, 2023).

Since coaches have the freedom to decline, getting coaches to agree in the research could prove problematic, specifically in the South/Southeast region. It will depend on the coach's professional discretion and time constraints if they are willing to commit to the study. The top ten coaches may not respond, however, getting eight total coaches out of 50 to respond is a reasonable request for a 16% return rate. If necessary, a coach from a previously nationally ranked NCAA Division II team may be selected. In some cases, success at the Division II level has opened doors for coaches to accept Division I positions, and they are no longer with Division II programs. This would not limit a participant's participation in this study.

Description of the Sample

In all, 14 nationally ranked head coaches, who are currently, or have been previously in the top 50 teams nationally, participated in this study. Three of the coaches were previous National Champions. 100% of the sample was male, with ethnic identity or racial background were not disclosed in the data. Nor was it necessarily the purpose of the study to analyze outcomes based on racial background. Two of the coaches had reported years living abroad, even foreign in origin, and thus brought more international elements into their recruiting methodology. In an estimated age range, these coaches were ages 25 to 60, with head coach experience anywhere from two to over 25 years in a head coaching position.

Geographically, these coaches are currently based in four-year colleges and universities in the Midwest and Southeastern United States. In NCAA Regionalization, these are categorized as the Central/Midwest and South/Southeast Super Regions. The Central is one region, and Midwest is another. Combined, the top 20 teams from these regions will compete in the NCAA Super Regional (called NCAA Regional) each year in April, to advance to the NCAA nationals. Although some nationally ranked coaches are outside of these regions, zero coaches in this

research represented programs outside of the NCAA regions stated. This was for consistency of sample and that two regions could even talk about each other. Coaches discussed teams in both geographic and ranked categories.

Twelve coaches were invited via e-mail from the Central/Midwest region and eight responded to participate, which was a 60% response rate. Specific conferences that participants are from are not disclosed due to the logical deduction of whom participated in the study. Total years of head coaching at the sampled institutions in the Central/Midwest were 110 years with an average of 13.75 per coach. The minimum was two years and maximum 33 years as head coach.

In the South/Southeast region, 10 coaches were invited to participate via e-mail and six responded, for an identical 60% response rate to the Central/Midwest region. Total years of head coaching experience at the current institution were a combined 43 years for an average of 7.16 years per coach. The minimum was two years and maximum 15 years as a head coach at the participating institutions.

All of the coach participants were head coaches of men's golf programs. All but one were full-time at the college or university that participated. Eight total participants were men's only full-time coaches and 13 of 14 coaches were full-time at the institution (seen in Table 2). Six of the coaches coached both men's and women's programs, with five of those from the Central/Midwest.

Table 3.2

Sample Breakdown of Nationally Ranked Coach Participants

NCAA Region	Participants	Full Time Men's Coach	Full Time at Institution
Central/Midwest	8	3 (37.5% of region sample)	7 (87.5% of region sample)
South/Southeast	6	5 (83% of region sample)	6 (100% of region sample)

Total	14	8 (57% of total sample)	13 (92.9% of total sample)
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Source: Interviews and Focus Groups of Nationally Ranked NCAA Division II Men's Golf Coaches

Roster sizes varied from institution with a minimum of nine and maximum 20 players. Some schools, mostly private, have a minimum roster requirement for enrollment purposes. Some schools do have volunteer or paid assistants.

Protection of Participants

Protection of participant data is essential as a matter of ethics. Individual coaches and school programs will not be named in the results. Coaches will want to keep their discussion confidential as it could discuss certain aspects of competitive advantage, whether for their own team, or another team they have observed. Coaches will be protected in the release form with regards to anonymity and confidentiality in the reporting.

Data Collection

Data will be collected digitally with audio and video recordings through the Zoom application. Using a Zoom discussion, the spoken transcript can be transcribed. It is known that Zoom transcriptions do not produce a perfect result due to mumbled words or misunderstood text. Therefore, it is the duty of the author to correctly transcribe the one hour to one and one-half hour of discussion. This will need to be done for each discussion group. Standard use of Zoom through a MN State account will allow for the full one hour to 1.5 hours of recording necessary to capture all of the focus group data.

Once data is collected it will be edited for proper English relative to the research and sent to participants for validation. Assuming the triangular validation is correct, data can be analyzed from audio, visual, or written form. The advantage of visual recording could allow for non-

verbal agreement or disagreement, and even emojis to be displayed for what is discussed. This could give an indicator of stronger support or disagreement than just the text.

Once the research is complete and data compiled, the link to the Zoom recording can be deleted and destroyed. In this way confidentiality would be confirmed for the participants. Although the dissertation would be publicly available, any personal or institutional information would be hidden. The NVivo files used to analyze data will be stored externally to preserve confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Data are analyzed in this study using axial coding and theming. The text data can be entered into NVivo qualitative software to find commonly used words, phrases, and themes. Once coding and themes are formulated, the data can be addressed with the grounded theory method. The coding and themes will produce the evident pragmatic factors of nationally ranked teams, which can be formulated into theory of causation and resource. Locke (1996) argued that a Glaserian approach is best suited to formulate theory.

Specifically, data are analyzed using open coding to start. This codes the data for major categories while also using “memoing” notes during the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 84). Axial coding is the process where data are assembled to form the linkages of categories, finding the core phenomenon. Data analysis would follow the Glaserian approach of comparison of occurrences to reveal broad patterns that emerge as categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A visual model will be created called the axial coding paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, selective coding will utilize the axial coding paradigm and develop propositions that will lead to a grounded theory visual model.

Since the study aims to provide pragmatic factors of national rank, these would be common factors. A Straussian approach would consider and even highlight single reported incidents or factors (Howard-Payne, 2016), although Sebastian (2019) stated that in IGT, single occurrences can be coded and analyzed for significance (p. 4). If multiple coaches report on the same phenomenon and explanation, it is a common trait shared and thus should be recorded. To highlight a single factor mentioned once would only be taken note of an extremely dominant team, of which no other team could potentially replicate. In RBV terms, this factor would be labeled “inimitable” (Barney, 1991).

Instruments

Specific instruments used will include a cell phone, laptop, Zoom and NVivo software, and Microsoft Word. A personal cell phone will be used for texting or calling coaches who decide to contact the researcher personally. It can also be used for an audio recording backup for the research Zoom calls. The laptop is a MN State issued Dell Latitude 5500 with Windows 10 Education edition operating system. Zoom software is used to connect the participants virtually, while being able to broadcast audio and video in real time. Zoom can also record this meeting, which will be the essential data capture software. NVivo can take the written script from Zoom to Microsoft Word and analyze the patterns of speech to formulate the axial coding and themes.

Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis

As the participant sample relates to data-capture methodology, for all intents and purposes, it was not possible to gather two focus groups of four to seven coaches at once due to scheduling conflicts. Coaches have many duties and to coordinate times, it was best for some coaches to interview individually. Thus, two focus groups were still achieved; one from the

Central/Midwest and one from the South/Southeast, but with only a three-coach maximum in each of those groups. This led to eight individual interviews overall.

Each focus group and interview were recorded to the Cloud using Zoom software. Transcription mode also had to be indicated on the preference for recording. Once the transcripts were recorded, the file could be imported to NVivo 14 and edited for the proper word translation. The transcripts were about 90% accurate to speech with the most difficulty of translation with proper names or coaching terminology. Transcripts could then be printed, annotated, and reviewed with highlighters.

Grounded theory is then applied with the steps similar to Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Glaser, with those transcripts to form a multi-dimensional conceptual theory (Glaser, 1999). A conditional matrix used by Strauss and Corbin (1990) is a helpful tool to address the phenomenon of national rank. Since a constructivist approach such as Charmaz (2006) is not taken, Howard-Payne (2016) suggests the only other method is Glaserian with a post-positivist paradigm (p. 52). Theories are embedded into history (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) and there is an agreed-upon reality and constraint of coaching resource.

Broad patterns of similar data can be categorized (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) but it is also important to document the unique answers, such as Strauss (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) who used open coding and documentation of solitary answers. The strength of a single response is that elite coaches think differently and thus their solitary answers should be taken into consideration.

Axial coding, which is data that is re-assembled to highlight linkage of categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), is necessary to review categories and see how they connect to ultimately generate a theory, which Locke (1996) argues is best to use Glaserian methods. Scott and Howell (2008) state that it is not intuitive to understand the relationship between categories

and a reflective coding matrix is necessary to explore those categorical relationships (McCaslin, 1993). Open coding is the initial phase of data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), followed by axial coding using constant comparison methods.

A Resource-Based View (RBV) is also useful to determine factors that contribute to reported success in terms of what is rare, valuable, and unable to duplicate (Barney, 1991). The factors discussed are tangible and intangible, but still understood in terms of competitive advantage to form a grounded theory.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is central to the qualitative study. The researcher will recruit and confirm the applicants. The researcher will send the proper paperwork to ensure confidentiality. The researcher also sets up and conducts the research date and time, while recording the live meeting on that date. The researcher will then moderate the entire discussion and follow up with all participants to validate the written data. The researcher is the sole keeper of the data information which can be stored in the Minnesota State Cloud storage or on an external jump drive. The researcher will analyze all of the data, formulate coding categories, design an axial coding paradigm, and formulate a grounded theory visual model or models.

Previous Knowledge and Bias

The author presents previous knowledge and bias to the study. With 13 years' experience as an NCAA Division II head men's golf coach, there is a certain degree of experience. According to Sebastian (2019), prior knowledge is used to strengthen research and data collection. This is called "sensitivity" and allows insight into the research (p. 3). The author's experience is also limited, having coached teams where the highest rank ever has been 56 (in 2021), which is just outside of the national rankings of top 50. The author does not have

experience coaching a nationally ranked team. The author has experience competing against nationally ranked teams every year.

The author's bias is evident in the experience of phenomena studied, but also the desire to understand why teams are nationally ranked. The author's current role could diminish the robust data reporting, as coaches would hesitate to reveal their competitive advantage. The bias of the author presents a risk to the data discussed. At the same time, the author's experience and bias allows for an insider's perspective of the situation and ability to ask poignant questions. Bias can be limited by refraining from interjecting personal experiences in the research discussion. The researcher is conducting the study, not participating in the discussion to add to the data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations must be made when it involves focus groups as no specific coaches can be named in the study, nor can an institution be named. Protection and anonymity of participants is essential. Another consideration is the position and bias of the author as a current NCAA Division II head men's golf coach. The researcher is a fellow competitor. It could follow that the author would use the research result to improve the author's strategy in coaching. This is a potential risk for the participants, just as revealing any competitive advantage of one's own coaching situation. The questions may best be framed discussing *other* nationally ranked programs and their resources.

In true ethical fashion, the researcher should not disclose the results of the study until it is submitted and published. It would be very easy to discuss details or what a current coach said about the factors of being nationally ranked, but this is not ethical to the research process. No data can be released until final publishing, to maintain confidentiality in the study.

Summary

To summarize the methodology chapter, a purpose of the study was stated with research design and discussion of the grounded theory approach needed (IGT) to best summarize codes and themes in the qualitative data. Analysis would follow the Glaser method in its traditional method of constant comparison. Elements of the Strauss and Corbin coding procedures will also prove valuable to formulate open and axial coding categories. These themes will combine with reflection on the research questions to create a grounded theory explanation and visual diagram of why teams carry a national rank in NCAA Division II men's golf.

Procedurally, this section explained how to select and protect participants while maintaining total confidentiality throughout the study. Next, data collection, analysis, and instruments were discussed on how the study data will be handled. Finally, the role of the researcher with previous knowledge and bias is evident, along with the ethical considerations. There are some research reporting concerns being that the researcher is in direct competition with the coaches who have agreed to discuss the phenomena of being nationally ranked. Regardless, the author is confident that data can be researched with the researcher engaged in the same field of study, which is a strength of IGT (Sebastian, 2019).

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to report the findings that led to a grounded theory. Through the analysis of data in the form of focus group and interview transcriptions, using the grounded theory approach as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the researcher coded and grouped data toward “densification”. Through the utilization of open, axial, and selective coding, and the constant comparative method until theoretical saturation was reached, the researcher arrived at the Theory of Coach Control, regarding what makes a nationally ranked team.

Researcher's Role

The researcher's role in this study is paramount to conducting the study. As a current NCAA Division II men's golf coach with over 13 years of experience, the topic is of immense interest. Some of the top national coaches in this profession contributed to this study. In fact, three former National Champions participated in this study.

The author was originally drawn to this research problem during a specific regional competition whereby the researcher's team was paired with a nationally ranked team. There seemed to be a threshold of skill level in the regional competition that was honestly hard to defeat for a northern golf team. This phenomenon was observed for years that this team was a benchmark for how to recruit a skilled enough team to compete at the national level.

The personal stake for the author was to learn from the best, why those teams are the best, and how these teams became the best. Moreover, there was an element of how these teams continue to stay nationally ranked year after year. There was also a significant personal and unpaid time committed to conceive of the research phenomenon, expound on a literature review, coordinate and conduct interviews and focus groups, entrench the mind into grounded theory,

and embark upon the writing of the dissertation with countless hours of edits. Without a desire for self-improvement as a coach and program, perhaps none of this would be possible.

The background of the author adds weight to the study. The author has an established understanding of this competitive profession for over a decade. As a colleague and insider to the participants, the researcher-participant relationship is competitive but not estranged, congruent, but not directly threatening. Thus explains the willingness of coach participation as the author's team does not currently pose a direct threat to the national rank of other teams.

At the same time, the author as a current coach, could interfere with objectivity, not so much in the data collection as the preconceived ideas of how tangible resources work within athletic departments. The author will also need to fight through preconceived subjective opinions about why teams are nationally ranked.

The author has been trained in both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interview) inquiry, which helped to shape the research on the best methodology for research design. Surveys to coaches, while informational, did not receive the best return rate and were impersonal data collection. Qualitative interviews were very personal and allowed participant reflection, even a "debrief" of the experience of national rank or even a national championship team. Coaches were also allowed to "share their burdens" in focus groups in factors such as how the NCAA transfer portal affects team quality and the challenges of retention.

Presentation of Data

The researcher used the constant comparison method while utilizing open and axial coding to analyze data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). From axial codes, selective codes were grouped to form themes. These themes formed the core category to produce a grounded theory about nationally ranked teams.

Thematic Categories

From open coding, twelve thematic categories (axial codes) emerged from the focus groups and interviews. Those categories were: scholarship, facilities, recruitment, coach leadership, schedule, team culture, history of winning, the NCAA transfer portal, climate and weather, the D2/D1 stigma, staffing, and administrative support (see Table 4.1). Of those categories, four primary selective codes (themes) emerged: resources, coach-control, external factors, and politics (as seen in Table 4.2, which will be how the data are explained in order).

Table 4.1 Open Code to Axial Code

Open Code	Axial Code
Equivalencies Fully Funded Money Offers Stacking	Scholarship
Simulator/Launch Monitor Putting Green Chipping Area Golf Course Access Outdoor Range On Campus/Off Campus	Facilities
International Players Domestic Players Transfer Players Sales Pitch Methodology Junior Events	Recruitment
Philosophy Priorities Checklist One-on-one time Team mantra Relationship	Coach Leadership
Strong Tournaments Playing a deep field Travel Fundraising coverage NCAA Regionalization	Schedule
Internal Competition	Team Culture

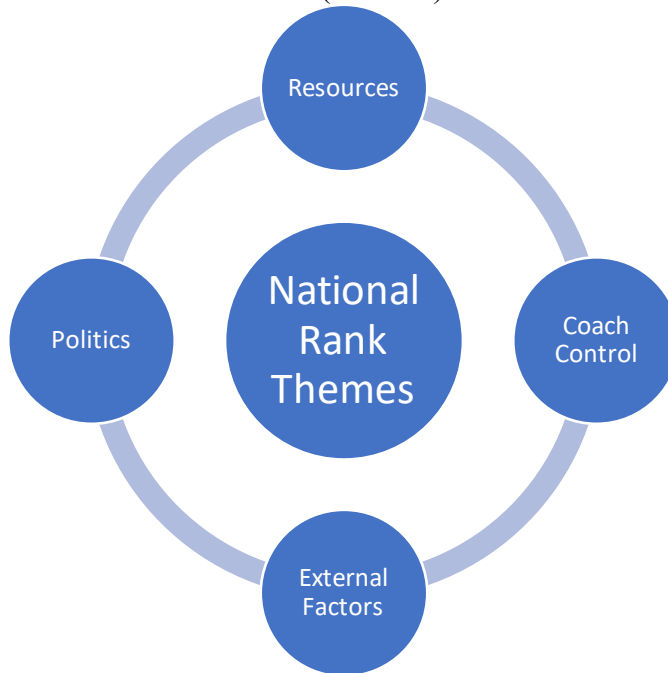
Love Discipline United goal Roster size Chemistry	
Post-season Appearances Playing for a National Championship Notoriety Winning Tournaments Elite S/SE Region Teams	History of Winning
Player Subtraction Player Addition Protocol for Player Departure Coach Attitude	NCAA Portal
Sunshine State Months of Outdoor Play Northern Climate Drawback Travel Grass Type	Climate/Weather
D2 Lesser D1 Greater Transfer Downs Playing Time Quality of Golf	D2/D1 Stigma
Coach Salary Assistant coach Graduate Assistant (GA) Volunteer assistant(s)	Staffing
Athletic Director (AD) University president Alumni International student office Admissions office Profit centers	Administrative Support

Table 4.2 Axial Code to Thematic (Selective Code) Categories

Axial Code	Selective Code
Scholarship Facilities	Resources
Recruitment Coach Leadership Schedule Team Culture	Coach Control
History of Winning	External Factors

NCAA Portal Climate/Weather D2/D1 Stigma	
Staffing Administrative Support	Politics

Figure 4.1 National Rank Selective Codes (Themes)



Resources

The first of the four themes (see Figure 4.1) to explore is **Resources** (see Table 4.3), which were classified as tangible and intangible by Won & Chelladurai (2016). The axial codes of scholarship and facilities were considered tangible in this study. The *scholarship* code covers the open codes of equivalencies, fully funded programs, money, offers, and stacking scholarships (see Table 4.1 and 4.3). *Facilities* cover simulators, launch monitors, putting greens, chipping areas, golf course access, outdoor ranges, and what is on or off campus for player use. This could be arranged by the institution as Participant 8 disclosed, “The school put in a short game area for us,” or even a golf course owned by the University. The institutional may be exclusive to the players, as Participant 1 stated, “Nobody is allowed on our facility outside our players.” Facility

access can also be off-campus and selective, like Participant 11 commented “All the kids get memberships at multiple (golf) courses.”

Scholarship

Scholarship money is one of the first things discussed in the research findings. The NCAA permits 3.6 full-ride equivalencies per school in Division II men's golf. Clearly supported by Participant 1, “it's the number one factor” and Participant 8, “equivalencies are number one,” added by Participant 14 that “money is the number one factor,” while Participant 3 stated it “helps the depth of your program.” It is so powerful, in fact, that it can be the downfall of the team, as Participant 1 explained:

“If you don't have scholarship, it's tough. . .absolutely tough. I tell my players (the reason) this team's not competitive, not that they don't have a good coach. They may only have one scholarship to offer. . .you can't sustain it without proper funding, scholarship-wise. . .you can hardly make it work if you're not funded properly.”

Some coaches also explained the ability to “stack” scholarships. This is done by adding an academic scholarship or an international student scholarship, which does not count toward the 3.6 equivalencies that the institution has allowed (if all scholarships are funded). For example, if a private school in Florida costs \$60,000 a year and the international student office offers \$20,000 plus admissions offers another \$20,000 in academic scholarship. This leaves only \$20,000 more that athletic scholarship must cover to offer a full ride. Of the total \$216,000 allowed, only \$20,000 was spent on a full ride offer. Participant 10 stated, “I think we've been super successful because of (stacking) and how much more competitive we can be with that.”

Not all nationally ranked teams have a 3.6, but it is safe to say that elite teams have over 3.0. There was one reported anomaly school in the top 50 that had less than 1.0 scholarship to offer, but the other 13 programs had at least 2.0 scholarship. With more scholarships, a team can be more competitive, as stated by Participant 14, "If I had half of this scholarship money we would not be as good. . . doesn't matter what else we did. . .we would be struggling to be super competitive." As it relates to money, "It's a humungous advantage to be fully funded," reflected Participant 2.

Another take on scholarship is that it may be important, but it's not everything, as proposed by Participant 7, "Scholarship is in no way a guarantee that you're going to be one of the top teams. You can operate at 1.5 and 2.5 (full rides) and still be very competitive."

Overall, there is a baseline equivalency of at least 2.0 to be a top 50 national team. This is the majority finding from data comparison.

Facilities

The next tangible item under the theme of **Resources** is ***facilities***. This includes both outdoor and indoor, on-campus and off-campus. The overall sense of facilities is "they're huge" stated Participant 2, "a really big factor" said Participant 13, and "our biggest recruiting tool" is how Participant 6 described it. Some elite teams in the S/SE region were seen to have facilities that were "remarkable," said Participant 2, or even "better than a mid-major Division 1," noted Participant 6.

Some schools have university-owned golf courses, but that seems to be in the minority. The most popular option was reported to be a mixture of quality golf courses nearby and school-owned facilities. College golf is an outdoor sport, so every school has some access to a golf course nearby. Remarkably, multiple nationally ranked teams did NOT have indoor facilities due

to outdoor facility availability. One coach from the S/SE region stated they were building an indoor facility just to keep up with other schools.

While rare to have a university-owned golf course, on-campus facilities were the norm among nationally ranked teams with simulators, launch monitors, and putting and chipping greens. This could be indoor or outdoor depending on the school and geographic location. The most impressive indoor/outdoor on-campus combination discussed by Participant 12 had “a full driving range on campus, practice greens, clubhouse, locker rooms, putting lab, player’s lounge, simulator, and roller bays.”

Coaches also discussed their partnerships and access with other golf courses, whether public or private. Many schools had championship golf courses within 10 minutes of campus, some having exclusive use of private clubs during certain days and times. Another school had their own private range with Titleist ProV1 golf balls (not low-quality range balls), for use by only players and coaches. A key factor found was the relationship with quality golf courses for player accessibility. Nationally ranked teams have close access to high quality practice facilities.

Table 4.3 Open Code to Axial Code in **Resources** Theme

Open Code	Axial Code
Equivalencies Fully Funded Money Offers Stacking	Scholarship
Simulator/Launch Monitor Putting Green Chipping Area Golf Course Access Outdoor Range On Campus/Off Campus	Facilities

Coach Control

The next theme is categorized as **Coach Control** (see Table 4.4). These aspects are under a head coach's authority and duty. This includes the axial codes of *Recruitment*, *Coach Leadership*, *Schedule*, and *Team Culture*. A *Recruitment* code has the open codes of international, domestic, and transfer players, a sales pitch and methodology of recruitment, and junior event connections. Under *Coach Leadership* are codes of coaching philosophy, priorities, a checklist approach, one-on-one time, team mantra, and relationship between the coach and players. Under *Schedule*, open codes were playing strong tournaments, playing a deep field, travel, fundraising coverage, and NCAA regionalization. Finally, the axial code of *Team Culture* covered internal competition, love, discipline, united goal, roster size, and team chemistry.

Recruitment

The axial code of *Recruitment* is about obtaining players to join a team as Participant 1 remarked "It all rolls down to the players." New players can be international, domestic, or transfers from other divisions or amateur collegiate organizations like NCAA Division I, NAIA, or the divisions of NJCAA. Participant 8 stated, "Recruiting, if you're trying to be competitive, is your life blood. . .everything stems from recruiting. . .success is 80-85% recruiting."

High power nationally ranked teams are made up of both international and domestic players. No majority showed an advantage. Coaches who had an international background seemed to prefer international players. Perhaps it is the ability to relate as an international person. Domestic background coaches would recruit both types of player background. Each coach does things their own way. Participant 9 summarized it best:

"Find out your niche recruit. . . but also, what is your recruiting advantage? Find your target recruiting pool. You can't miss on those players (in-state) because

that also is. . . your reputation with all the people you are around. Recruit the right people that can get into that mindset (of your school climate).”

Coach Leadership

In the realm of **Coach Control**, it is ***Coach Leadership*** that surfaced in multiple data discussions. Participant 3 summarized this:

“The coach is the program. You create the culture, you put in the work, you do everything. You, your talent level, and your work ethic and your skill set is what’s gonna determine the success of a program.”

Division II men’s golf may not have assistant coaches, so it is up to the head coach to make the difference. The head coach is the baseline that can make or break a program. In the one case of a nationally ranked team in a northern climate without many resources, it is clearly the coach leadership that made the program prominent. Participant 7 stated, “The coach is the floor and all the other stuff we’re talking about . . . determines what the ceiling is. If you have the right person leading the program, you’re going to be competitive.”

A head coach can also ruin a program by negative leadership as Participant 14 said that “bad coaching destroys a program.” This is mostly due to negligence of duty, and it was further clarified as “lazy recruiting”, just “taking kids who email you” and “not looking under every rock.”

Coach and player relationship is also covered in this axial code. Some coaches talked about loving their team and creating connections. One coach stated about the players “they’re like my kids.” Others discussed how their team has struggled to get along. A current player or recruit needs fit in with what the coach and team are trying to accomplish, stated by Participant

12, "They (recruits) have got to fit into your philosophies and ideals, where the team is, and where you're trying to go."

Some coaches talked about a checklist to improve their leadership and quality of golf program and others discussed how it is a matter of building relationships with the community over the years. Sometimes a coach will come up with a mantra for their team to set the tone as Participant 8 reflected, "I told my team to be calm, tough, closers," meaning they should be competent to close out a round of competitive golf.

Schedule

Multiple coaches talked about the importance of a strong schedule. This means going to tournaments with a deep field. Participant 9 noted that playing for championships and the strongest schedule possible "attracts a certain type of player." In the ranking sense of trying to get head-to-head team wins, this is called "chasing" teams. Teams with the strongest head-to-head records against their region will be voted into the post-season by the NCAA Regional Advisory Committee (RAC). Those teams will have a chance to advance beyond regionals to the national tournament. Coaches set up schedule to "chase" teams to try and get a winning head-to-head record. Unlike other sports, men's golf coaches are allowed to select entry to tournaments. The conference office does not mandate a conference-only schedule.

Coaches talked about working with administrators and fundraising to get to a financial operations level to play strong schedules. Participant 14 noted "fundraising was initially for increasing our operating expense" to get to a level of full dates of competition with a strong schedule. The S/SE region does not have this problem, as they are already in the region with the most nationally ranked teams. Specifically in Florida, those teams may not have to travel much outside their state for a full competitive schedule against nationally ranked teams.

The NCAA regionalization is another factor that only two coaches brought up, but it speaks to a national issue. The inclusion of regional teams by mandatory minimum regional berth allows other teams outside the S/SE get to nationals. Previously, it was only the national rank teams being voted into regional play, there was not previously guaranteed spots at nationals for all regions of the NCAA. Now teams from each regions get a chance to compete for a national title.

Team Culture

The last axial code in the **Coach Control** theme is *Team Culture*. Some coaches gave insight into what made their team strong. Firstly, there is internal competition, which could be seen as divisive, but it must take place to qualify into tournaments. A team can even compartmentalize this as Participant 2 noted, “they all go out and try and beat each other but after it’s over they love each other.” It is a paradox dynamic as stated by Participant 2, “I recruit players to go out and whip their tail, and it’s the job of current players to whip their tail.”

Table 4.4 Open Code to Axial Code in **Coach Control** Theme

Open Code	Axial Code
International Players Domestic Players Transfer Players Sales Pitch Methodology Junior Events	Recruitment
Philosophy Priorities Checklist One-on-one time Team mantra Relationship	Coach Leadership
Strong Tournaments Playing a deep field Travel Fundraising coverage NCAA Regionalization	Schedule

Internal Competition Love Discipline United goal Roster size Chemistry	Team Culture
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External Factors

The next theme proposed is **External Factors** (Table 4.5). There are numerous factors that are mostly outside of a coach's control. With an axial code of *History of Winning*, coaches discussed post-season appearances, playing for national championships, notoriety of programs, winning tournaments, and the elite S/SE Region. The *NCAA Portal* is another strong theme of discussion with the most polarized views of any topic. This could be player additions, subtractions, protocol for player departure, and coach attitude. Under *Weather/Climate*, coaches described this in terms of the sunshine state, months of outdoor play, a drawback in northern climate, travel, and grass types. Finally, under the *D2/D1 Stigma* axial code, this discussed Division II as less and Division I as greater, transfer downs to Division II, playing time, and quality of golf.

History of Winning

A coach may or may not have been at the current school to experience a history of winning. The history of a school and athletic result precedes the current coach. Most of these schools have a track record of success. Participant 3 stated, "we've been postseason the last 29 seasons in a row." At another school, Participant 13 said, "we expect to play for a national championship each year." Some coaches build on a past of winning tournaments, as Participant 14 stated,

“We’ve been to Nationals six times. We used to recruit a lot with swag, really good tournaments, and winning (tournaments). That was enough to recruit some good players on the men’s side.”

The biggest draw in the ***History of Winning*** code is the elite teams in the S/SE region which account for 13 of the last 15 national championships. As Participant 10 elaborated, “You say it’s the last 13 of 15? I tell recruits it’s the last 26 of 30 national championships have been from our region.” Coaches described this due to the strong competition of regional teams.

Participant 11 noted, “Our program has been at the top for years. We’re fortunate (in the S/SE region) to be at really good top tier programs.”

Once top programs are in a winning cycle, they seem to remain there with solid recruiting.

Participant 2 explained, “the better we’ve gotten, the easier it is getting attention.” This process can take years, as Participant 13 elaborated:

“This school had to establish it; it took time. It took time to get players to come in and convince them. . .we’ve got a winning tradition here. You kind of see a cycle of success and a history of winning once you have that recruiting story.”

The caliber of player that the S/SE region is often elite to NCAA Division II. Participant 6 illustrated this:

“There are probably 6 kids that have a PGA Tour card from down here and there’s probably another 15 more that have held a Korn Ferry card. They’re unbelievable players.”

It also attracts a different type of player as Participant 7 observed:

“You have more Latin guys that have played for team and country championships before, which is a completely different energy than what U.S. golfers bring to the table. They just have great international players. . .solid American groups too.”

The physical environment is very attractive for an outdoor sport, with great connections to championship style golf courses, “one coach, one program” full-time head coaches, fully, or close to fully funded programs. Florida teams also have great exposure to recruiting winter junior events as many fall and winter global junior events are in the S/SE region, specifically Florida.

Participant 3 made the case:

“Where are all the big Junior events from October through March? The coaches (there) are getting access to these kids down there all year long. Our budgets aren't gonna allow us to fly to Florida. . .3-4 times a year, so they get to see a lot of these foreign kids that come in to play in the wintertime. . . A lot of the AJGA tournaments are there. Those kids head to that area because that's where they are seen, and they're not dumb. They figure out the weather's better there.”

Florida itself has an advantage as Participant 7 stated, “for whatever reason Florida holds a different spot in golfers' minds.” It especially draws attention from international players as Participant 14 stated, “International kids know Florida. They all want to go to Florida to play.” This is not a novelty. Participant 1 argued, “The South region has always been phenomenal. Very international, (with) appeal to foreign (players).”

The conditions are excellent for coaches with high level budgets and salaries, supported by Participant 9:

“One thing I noticed from the Florida schools is I just don't see a ton of coaching turnover. They put in 10-12 years and then they take that Division 1 job to end

their career. It leads me to believe things are pretty good down there in terms of funding or coaching. (A coach I knew) had multiple national titles and could've left every year for the last 15 years and taken a really good Division I job."

NCAA Portal

The next axial code in the **External Factors** (Table 4.4) theme is the most polarized and controversial among coaches. The open codes discussed on this topic relate to player subtraction, player addition, protocol for player departure and coach attitude. The NCAA Transfer Portal, incorporated in 2018, has made it easier for players to transfer to another team without coach consent. The process is simple. A player makes a written request to the director of NCAA compliance at the institution and within seven consecutive days the student athlete must be on the portal (NCAA Bylaw 13.1.1.2.1).

Coaches overall have reflected how the portal has hurt Division II men's golf. Participant 4 commented, "I'm a farm club. . .it's more hurtful for us (in D2)." In personal experience, Participant 13 was crushed:

"My top two players went. I think the portal is an absolute mess. It's teaching nothing about loyalty or commitment or integrity. . .we're just a minor league system. Kids don't understand how heartbreaking that is as a coach, when a kid leaves. . . what about my dreams (as a coach), what about the dreams of the team you're leaving? You're just coming in and using them and jumping. My experience on the portal has been nothing but lousy. Yeah, I'm not a fan of it at all."

Due to the allure of Division 1 options, there is certainly more movement from D2 to D1.

Participant 1 commented: "It's pretty difficult at our level to get kids from the portal. We are certainly not seeing it go the other way very often (D1 to D2)."

In a separate interview, Participant 3 was in full agreement:

"It's difficult to get a kid from a D1 program to come to our program, especially (from) a Power 5. It's really made our Division kind of a junior college. . .it's given it a junior college feel . . .where's the loyalty and all? I have to recruit to replace . . .they can really screw you."

This is right in line with the author's experience and Participant 14 added:

"The portal's not easy on schools. If you want to be a really good Division 2 school the portal's gonna be really hard on you. After 1 or 2 years if your kids have any success, everyone they know is gonna tell them "why aren't you going? You need to go!" and then they all feel like they're missing out on something."

Participant 5 had the same sentiment, "A kid that's too good, and you may have trouble keeping him. You're gonna be pillaged by some of the programs that are looking for instant help. We're gonna be a farm system for the bigger schools."

The S/SE region had the same experience as other regions as Participant 11 noted, "All of our (top) programs (here) have lost multiple guys to power 5 conference teams. It's a big struggle to keep them (the top players). I've lost a lot in the last couple years." It is not certain how the NCAA transfer portal will affect recruiting, but Participant 7 stated "I don't think we've seen the full effects of it yet."

Aptly described by Participant 1, the NCAA transfer portal is "a double edged sword. . .if you're not using it, you're at a disadvantage." Participant 11 said, "you're crazy NOT to use it."

Many programs have been bolstered by additions from the NCAA portal in Division II, like Participant 7 stated, “our portal transfer drastically changed our national presence (rank).”

Coaches are learning how to use the portal and how it has affected recruiting. It has put D2 coaches in the bigger picture next to Division 1 athletics as an option to develop and advance.

Participant 10 reflected:

“It’s started to shift in this transfer portal era, with guys having success early and finding a place to go. You use our facilities and our schedule as something to, you know, springboard you to the next level. Some kids have come to my school that wouldn’t normally come if they didn’t think they could play well quickly and move on.”

On the other side of it, some coaches are very positive about it and have fully embraced this option, as stated by Participant 6, “I’m OK with that (transfer option). I’m not gonna hold a kid back. I’ve been a big portal guy. I’m a big fan of the portal. I love it. I think it’s great for kids.”

Most of the data suggests the NCAA transfer portal must be utilized positively as Participant 8 said, “I think you have to be willing to take some chances, you know?” and Participant 11 projected, “I think you have to take risks. I’ve brought in kids every year from the portal. 3 of the 4 have been good additions. You just have to take risks because you’re gonna lose guys.” The best coaches are using the NCAA transfer portal to their advantage even when “every semester you are fighting and praying for those guys to stay,” as stated by Participant 11.

Weather/Climate

The most obvious of **External Factors** (Table 4.5) which coaches do not have control over is the weather and climate. Although the sport of golf originated in Scotland, migrated to

Europe and the rest of the world, the United States attracts the largest population of young talented players from around the world to college golf. It is the largest competitive network of collegiate golf in the world. The climate and draw specifically affects the S/SE region where Participant 12 noted “75% of our players want to play professionally.” Plainly stated by Participant 11, “it’s a massive advantage to be in warm weather year-round.” Participant 8 said the weather “is pretty critical.” When recruiting internationally, Participant 6 pointed out, “It’s the weather, you know. Any European or South American. . .they’re not gonna go to Ohio to play golf.”

While that may be true (Findlay in Ohio won the national women’s title in 2022 with all domestic players), the climate is a huge draw.

As much as golf is an outdoor sport, climate is not everything, said the data. While still a major factor, the weather and climate were referred to by Participant 7 as “kind of like a glass ceiling” and “teams can outperform their climate.” Participant 9 also stated “team culture can overcome your own weather or climate.”

The message of climate and weather is a big part of the recruiting message and coaches talked in terms of how many months of the year can be for outdoor golf, whether year-round, 10 months, or maybe only seven to eight months. Clearly the non-year-round nationally ranked programs have solid indoor facilities to attract recruits and continue player performance throughout the year. Participant 14 made it clear about Northern teams:

“You could put the greatest recruiter in the world in a snow climate, and they’re gonna struggle. It’s hard to find (great players) and even harder to hold on to them if you’re in a snow-covered climate. It’s harder the further north you go, the

number of people that will be successful gets smaller and smaller. A Northern school that has success is super impressive.”

Grass types can also affect a national rank outcome. Most northern schools are on a combination of bent grass and poa annua golf courses. Towards warmer climates in Missouri and Oklahoma fairways can be zoysia grass. In the warmest climates only Bermuda grass can withstand the heat. The NCAA rotates the National Championship with a bid process initiated by schools willing to host, so the final championship could take place on any types of these grasses.

D2/D1 Stigma

The final axial code in **External Factors** (Table 4.5) are the Division II and Division I demarcations. Some open codes to discuss this were the quality of golf at each level, playing time, and the stigma that DII is not as good. The fact is that there are more highly skilled players at the Division I level. Institutions receive more money from a NCAA for Division I. Budgets, salaries, and player benefits are larger at most Division I schools. It is the structuring of the NCAA to allow less scholarship equivalency at the Division II level. Men's golf is allowed 3.6 full rides at Division II and 4.5 at the Division I level. This translates to an average benefit of \$18,015 per player per year in Division I and \$6,495 per player per year in Division II (Bold, February 5, 2024).

It is not as common to have players transfer down to D2 for playing time as Participant 13 explained, “You don't see guys coming back to say, “I want the playing time.” The stigma is amazing (D2 versus D1).”

The quality of golf has also improved on a national level over time. Participant 12 stated in the early 2010s a 74 average would advance to the next tournament on a high nationally ranked team. That is no longer the case.

Table 4.5 Open Code to Axial Code in **External Factors** Theme

Open Code	Axial Code
Post-season Appearances Playing for a National Championship Notoriety Winning Tournaments Elite S/SE Region Teams	History of Winning
Player Subtraction Player Addition Protocol for Player Departure Coach Attitude	NCAA Portal
Sunshine State Months of Outdoor Play Northern Climate Drawback Travel Grass Type	Weather/Climate
D2 Lesser D1 Greater Transfer Downs Playing Time Quality of Golf	D2/D1 Stigma

Politics

The final selective code theme of **Politics** (Table 4.6) covers axial codes of *staffing* and *administrative support*. Under staffing, open codes were coaching salary, use of assistant coaches, graduate assistants (GA's), and volunteer assistant coaches. With administrative support, this is from the Athletic Director (AD), University President, alumni base, and admissions offices. There is also the mention of golf teams being profit centers for the schools.

Staffing

Data suggest that top ranked national teams have a majority of, as Participant 14 stated, "one team, one coach" staffing situations. That means there is one full time head coach for men's golf only. The next level would be full-time at the university. The least desirable, is that only one of the nationally ranked coaches was a part-time coach. It would be a rare case to have a full time

paid assistant coach. Participant 9 stated, "you have to be full time at the university." Even more clearly Participant 1 argued, "there's nobody at a high level doing this part-time."

Administrative Support

Coaches are under the authority of a University President and Athletic Director, except for the rare case that a coach is the Athletic Director. Coaches partner with the offices of Alumni and Admissions. The business office is also involved as golf teams are usually profit centers for the schools. All of these offices and positions fall under the axial code of *Administrative Support*.

This factor is tremendous in being nationally ranked. Participant 2 explained: "It's absolutely key. . .they want us to become a golf school. We're not an afterthought. My AD asked me, 'What can I do for you as a Director of Golf?'"

This is echoed by Participant 7:

"I would put institutional support as probably my highest priority. . .then you probably have a decent scholarship and travel budget, and a decent salary. If you have admin support, they're going to get you as much of everything else that you need, that they physically can get for you. Even if you feel like we were evenly looked at, like proportional. . .we can't be an afterthought. Let the coach do what they're capable of. It's the #1 factor (of importance)."

Sometimes a coach must fight for this to take place, like Participant 3 experienced, "I asked our admin: do you want this program to be a contender or do you just want it to exist? They said, 'we want you to be a contender.'"

On elite teams, this has already been in place. Participant 11 said their administration supports them to “take care of business as we see fit to win a National Championship.”

Participant 12 explained the best-case scenario:

“From an admin standpoint, we’re extremely well taken care of. In terms of administration, we’ve had people that have been highly involved with the program now, on the other side, kind of advocating for us. The support and expectation is there, that you’re gonna be a nationally ranked program, or you’re gonna compete for championships.”

Over and again, the top ranked teams have strong **Administrative Support** for salary, operations, scholarships, and attention. Admissions offices, both domestic and international, are helpful to process applicants. An unsaid piece of this is the NCAA compliance office reviewing eligibility of all incoming players.

Table 4.6 Open Code to Axial Code in **Politics** Theme

Open Code	Axial Code
Coach Salary Assistant coach Graduate Assistant (GA) Volunteer assistant(s)	Staffing
Athletic Director (AD) University president Alumni International student office Admissions office Profit centers	Administrative Support

A numeric indicator was frequency of response to a certain factor of national rank. Coaches reported on the following factors of axial codes (Table 4.7), whereby the number indicated was the number of coaches out of 14 who commented. The most reported axial codes were recruiting (13), facilities (12), and team culture (10).

Table 4.7 Frequency of Response by Axial Codes

Scholarship	8
Climate	9
History of Winning	9
Recruiting	13
Facilities	12
D2/D1 Stigma	4
NCAA Transfer Portal	9
Team Culture	10
Administrative Support	9
Schedule (of tournaments)	3
Coach Leadership	6
Staffing	6

Synthesis

From this data collection, various propositions start to form, linking the relationship between categories. Coaches discussed a wide range of topics in the focus group and interviews, with some data falling completely outside the scope of the study (i.e. disgust of D1 coaches recruiting D2 events, or side discussion of school economic structure comparisons). The following propositions (PR) can be summarized:

PR 1 Not all factors need to be at 100% capacity for a nationally ranked team.

PR 2 Clear authoritative link between coaching and administrative support.

PR 3 Numerous factors are beyond a coach's control.

PR 4 Just as many topics emerged post data-collection as topics theorized.

PR 5 A key relationship to examine is between coach and players.

PR 6 Coaches are convinced in different ways of the most important factors for success.

PR 7 The NCAA portal has become a major factor in team success, by addition or subtraction.

PR 8 The S/SE regions analysis gives insight into what makes an elite ranked team.

In PR 1 we see a different team DNA that could look like:

Small roster size—maximum funded—strong team culture—international—warm climate—
incredible outdoor facilities—no indoor facilities

Or

Large roster size—adequately funded—homogenous team culture—international—semi-warm
climate—adequate outdoor facilities—incredible indoor facilities

Or

Average roster size—not fully funded—domestic—average admin support—semi-warm
climate—decent facilities—incredible coach recruitment/leadership

Or

Small roster size—maximum funded—international—exceptional admin support—warm
climate—excellent outdoor facilities

PR 2 developed during data collection, and this was a key topic of discussion. A coach is not autonomous but is accountable under institutional and administrative authority for the entire professional experience. Administrative and institutional support can greatly enhance opportunities or resources for coaches.

PR 3 shows that a coach cannot control everything. The weather, history of winning, scholarship allocation, salary, and international student admissions are not in control by a coach.

Some parts can be collaborated on or negotiated but other parts are completely outside a coach's operational control such as weather, D2 stigma, player and recruit decisions.

PR 4 is an expected outcome of research as in grounded theory approach goes from more specific to general as data is categorized. More data and themes emerged as coaches were discussing the topic. Some topics were presented as a guide in a semi-structure format, but coaches were free to discuss what they wanted to in any way.

PR 5 at the core of nationally ranked teams is the player-coach relationship. Only some coaches ventured to speak about it but it is an objective truth that exists whether it is discussed or not. While a professional relationship, some words to describe the relationship were "loving" or "love each other" much like a family experience, others seemed to have a business relationship.

PR 6 as stated in PR 1 not all teams look alike. Some coaches put scholarships first and other put schedule as a top goal of their program to be successful.

PR 7 relatively new to college golf since 2018, the NCAA portal is an essential piece of navigation for college golf coaches.

PR 8 gives insight into elite teams and everyone in the business can talk about it because they know what it takes to compete at the national level. Having three former national championship coaches gave exceptional insight into how this is possible.

Grounded Theory Framework

The data are now at a point of theoretical saturation by constant comparison. Steps toward a grounded theory of a nationally ranked team can be explained like a financial credit score. As Gogol (2024) explained:

There are five weighted credit scoring factors that contribute to every credit score.

They include:

1. Payment History (35%)
2. Credit Utilization (30%)
3. Length of Credit History (15%)
4. New Credit (10%)
5. Types of Credit Used (10%)

A general formula for determining credit score would read like this:

$$\text{Credit Score} = (\text{Payment History} * \text{Weight}) + (\text{Credit Utilization Ratio} * \text{Weight}) + (\text{Length of Credit History} * \text{Weight}) + (\text{New Credit Applications} * \text{Weight}) + (\text{Types of Credit} * \text{Weight})$$

A golf program would be calculated with the four themes of **Resources**, **Coach Control**, **External Factors**, and **Politics**. The most weighted is **Coach Control**. Within this theme the axial code of *Coach Leadership* is the strongest. The data has shown that a team can be nationally ranked with a minimal resource, cold weather, and lack of administrative support. This is only by strong characteristics of **Coach Control**. It is the only logical explanation to this phenomenon.

The next category to indicate success in national rank would be **Resources**. A team can have mediocre *Coach Leadership* with strong **Resources** and be nationally ranked. Obviously having both would lead to more chance of success.

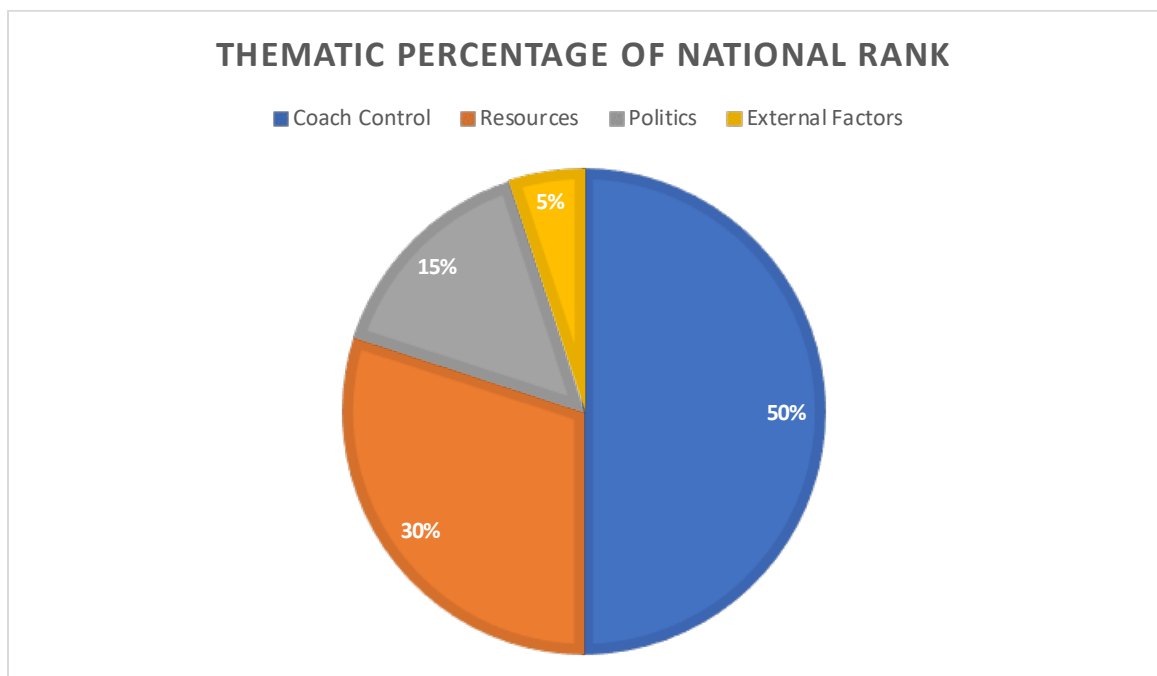
The **Politics** theme is not always prominent but incredibly helpful. Every school will have a baseline of staffing and administrative support. The exceptional schools may have maximum staffing, but the elite schools have maximum administrative support or a combination of the two. The AD or President is working toward a National Championship for that team. Elite teams are staffed with “one coach, one program,” paid well, and have additional staff support.

External Factors matter the least of the four themes. How a coach uses the transfer portal is still important. However, a coach cannot control the weather, a history of previous

winning, or the stigmas of D2/D1 to recruits. A coach can rectify the **External Factors** by applying appropriate use of the NCAA portal or improve the team schedule by **Coach Leadership**.

Elite teams in the top 25 can be identified with a high score in all four themes. The most successful teams have strong **Coach Control**, a plethora of **Resources**, excellent support in **Politics**, and helpful **External Factors**. A percentage of importance could be ascribed to each selective code: Coach Control: 50%, Resources 30%, Politics 15%, External Factors 5%.

Figure 4.2 Thematic Percentage of National Rank



Grounded Theory Definition

The result of this study was found to be the **Theory of Coach Control**. The pragmatic factors of a Nationally Ranked NCAA division II men's golf team in order of the most essential

are: Coach Control, Resources, Politics, and External Factors (see Figure 4.2). The elements of Coach Control, being the most important, are: *Coach Leadership*, *Recruitment*, *Scheduling*, and *Team Culture* (see Figure 4.3). *Recruitment* and *Coach Leadership* are the most critical factors of the Coach Control selective code. Table 4.7 further supports the Theory of Coach Control, that *recruiting* was the most discussed factor, which is under the selective code of Coach Control.

Figure 4.3 Grounded Theory Definition Model: Essential Factors

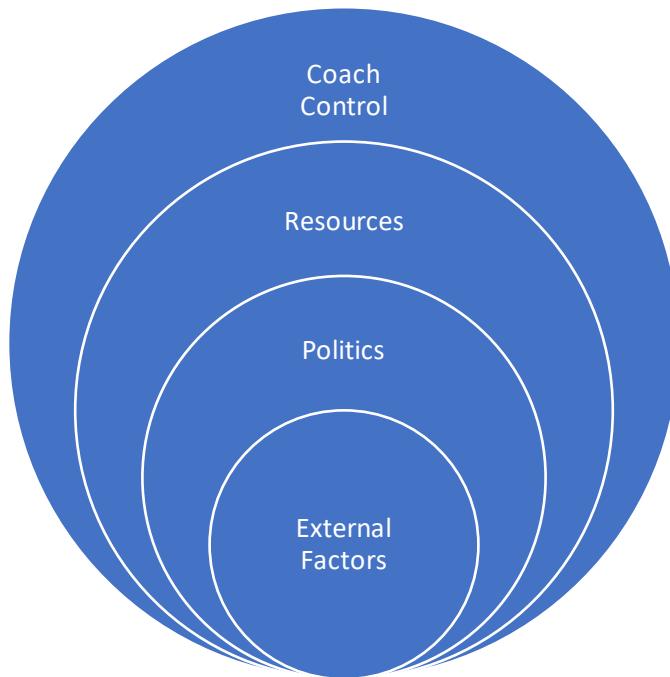
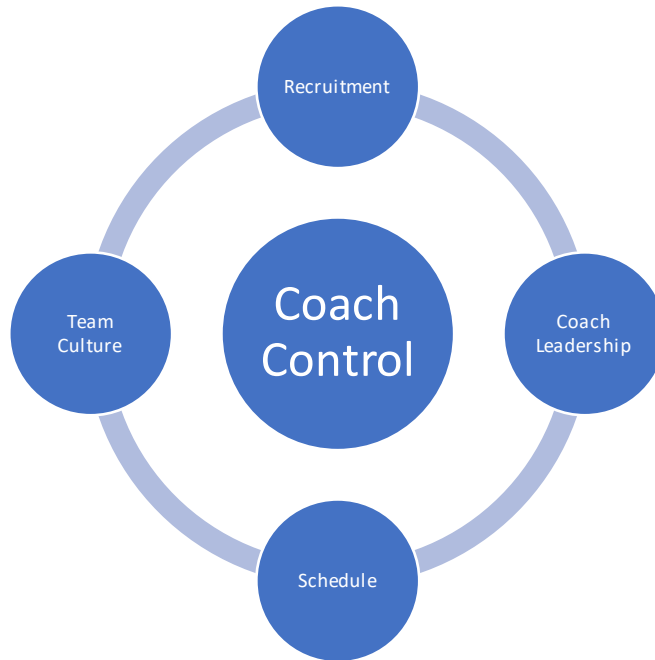


Figure 4.4 Elements of Coach Control



To further unpack the **Theory of Coach Control** and summarize, in Recruitment, the task is *actively recruiting at a high level*. In Coach Leadership, it is the *philosophy, priorities, relationship, and administration* of necessary tasks. In Scheduling, it is *setting up strong competitive schedules* that attract top players. In Team Culture, it is *a united effort with a competitive environment*.

Summary

Chapter 4 disclosed the findings of the research completed by interviews and focus groups of 14 nationally ranked coaches. The role of researcher was discussed with insider information critical to questions of poignancy.

To answer RQ1 the factors of nationally ranked NCAA Division II men's golf teams are climate, recruitment, scholarship, administrative support, history of winning, coach leadership, D2/D1 stigma, NCAA Portal, facilities, schedule, staffing, and team culture. The NIL is not a factor as previously theorized.

To answer RQ2, how much scholarship equivalency do nationally ranked teams have, there is one outlier example of a team with less than 1.0 equivalency. The rest of the teams have at least 2.0 of the 3.6 equivalencies allowed. The majority of elite S/SE teams who participated are fully funded.

In RQ3, how do coaches describe their own success or competitive advantage, this is best viewed in Appendix B.10. Coaches describe funding, staffing, climate, coach leadership, team culture, and history of winning. It is unique and personal to their own teams.

To describe RQ4, a winning recruitment methodology, Appendix B.12 reports coaches who discuss their own recruiting niche and finding players that fit into their team culture and chemistry.

Finally, in RQ5 to describe the player development methodology of nationally ranked teams, found in Appendix B.13. This may be the use of statistical software, but coaches mostly talked about how they treated players, further defined as team culture.

Moving along to Chapter 5: Discussions, these data will be discussed, analyzed, and compared to previous literature and research results. It will address the need that precipitated the study and recommend directions for further study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Chapter Five sets out to accomplish two primary objectives. 1) assess how the dissertation addresses the need that precipitated the study, while interpreting the study's results considering existing findings in the field, and 2) make recommendations for future study. The author will present what the study means to the field of coaching and college golf, to the line of previous research, and to the communities interested in the topic. This will be explained through the summary of results, discussion of the results, conclusions based on the results, comparison of the findings within the framework and previous literature, interpretation of the findings, limitations, implications of the study, recommendations for future research, and a final conclusion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find the pragmatic factors that make a nationally ranked (top 50) team in NCAA Division II men's golf. The research questions included the following with the primary question at the end:

- How much scholarship equivalency do nationally ranked teams have?
- How do coaches describe their own success or competitive advantage?
- What is a winning recruitment methodology?
- What is the player development methodology of nationally ranked teams?
- What factors make perennial nationally ranked teams?
 - What makes elite teams in the S/SE region?

Summary of Results

To refresh the understanding of the overall study, the need for this research is to inform coaches and athletic administrators what it takes to be a top 50 national team in NCAA Division II men's golf. It is novel to the world of college golf in scholarly qualitative format.

Determining the factors that make a nationally ranked NCAA Division II men's golf team is a baseline curiosity and striving goal for coaches. The significance of the study is that it is the end goal that coaches are working toward in collegiate competition. While specific coaches disclosed what makes a nationally ranked team or what gives their team a competitive advantage, the naming of actual teams remains anonymous.

The largest change during the writing process and research is the departure from Golfstat as the official ranking tool of college golf. It was transferred to *Spikemark* the summer of 2023 and now it is on Scoreboard powered by *Clippd*. This massive change affected all divisions of college golf. It is now a Strokes Gained to Points ranking system (Scoreboard FAQs, 2024).

The methodology used for this research study was qualitative to allow a conversation style semi-structured interview or focus group. Fourteen coaches of national rank participated in the study with three former NCAA Division 2 men's golf national champions. Coaches were given a list of potential topics to discuss based on hypothesis: climate, recruiting, scholarship, history of winning, Name—Image—Likeness (NIL), and NCAA transfer portal. After the first interview, it became clear that other factors needed to be added for all to discuss: administrative support, facilities, coach leadership, team depth, and why the South/Southeast region has been so dominant in National Championships.

Due to schedule conflicts, eight coaches participated in individual interviews and six coaches participated in focus groups. Eight of the participants were from the NCAA Central/Midwest Super Region (what the NCAA calls regionals), and six were from the NCAA

South/Southeast Super Region. By using purposive sampling, specific coaches were targeted and invited to participate in the study. An identical response rate was achieved with 60% of coaches responding positively to the email invitation. 100% of coaches responding participated in the study. Interviews and focus groups were conducted by Zoom, with interviews lasting no more than 40 minutes and focus group sessions lasted no more than 55 minutes. Once the interviews were recorded to the Cloud, previous preference options allowed for a transcript recording. Those transcripts were recorded and verified for accuracy.

Participant responses were categorized by reading and comparing memos to form open codes. Categories were further coded into axial codes with constant comparison. To briefly recapitulate the findings of 12 axial codes: climate, recruitment, scholarship, administrative support, history of winning, coach leadership, D2/D1 stigma, NCAA Portal, facilities, schedule, staffing, and team culture. These help to answer the RQ1 of what factors make a nationally ranked team. Previously hypothesized categories were: climate, recruitment, scholarship, history of winning, NCAA portal, and facilities. New categories were added based on data response of administrative support, coach leadership, D2/D1 stigma, schedule, staffing, and team culture. The axial codes were further categorized into four selective codes (themes) which are: coach control, resources, politics, and external factors.

The axial codes were grouped to make up the selective codes which were themes. Once themes and axial coding were completed, the specific data was deduced to a densification in order to form a grounded theory. Those themes became the basis for the Theory of Coach Control for nationally ranked teams. Recruitment and facilities are the essential axial codes of this theory.

Literature Review Recap

To briefly highlight the literature reviewed, there are a few angles to discuss this topic. One is that of a Resource Based View (RBV), theorized by Jay Barney (1986, 1991), which built on the work of Penrose (1959) on how to grow a “bundle of productive resource”. Barney discussed key factors of advantage being resources that are rare, valuable, immutable, have imperfect imitability, and are able to implement (see Figure 2). Those key resources are unique if possessed, and are very hard to obtain or “costly to copy” (source).

Won and Chelladurai (2016) identified resources in athletic settings using RBV, while categorizing them as tangible or intangible. Examples of tangible resources would be scholarships, salaries, personnel, and facilities, while intangible resources would be a history of winning or player and coach relationships.

In other sports like baseball, Smart and Wolfe (2003) looked at the *Moneyball* concept to build Major League Baseball (MLB) teams based on statistical gains, specifically on-base percentage. This took the statistical work of Bill James and was applied in real life to the Oakland Athletics in 2002, who set the all-time wins in a row record at that time in the American League under the implementation from General Manager Billy Beane. The method was used to help the Boston Red Sox win the World Series two years later in 2004, which snapped an 86 year drought. Also in baseball, Poppo and Weigelt (2000) used RBV to determine a method to recruit professional baseball players based on trajectory of past performance instead of perceived future ability, using coefficients of salaries. While RBV was validated as useful, the results were seen as disappointing due to market imperfections.

In college basketball, Anderson and Birrer (2011) described the success of the Gonzaga men's basketball team using RBV, specifically 1999-2001, where a series of runs in the NCAA tournament led to elite recruitment of players, facility improvements, and dramatic increase in

alumni donations. Berman et al. (2002) used RBV in professional basketball to argue winning teams have a tacit knowledge among the teammates. Tacit skill and team relationship, while important, were found to be hard to measure.

Comparison of Results to Previous Literature

Not surprisingly, the results of this study line up with Won and Chelladurai (2009) stating that more resources, whether tangible or intangible, leads to more athletic success. Tangible resources are scholarships, facilities, salaries, and coaching staff. Intangible resources are history of winning, player/coach relationship, team culture, and coach recruiting ability. Those resources are “significantly predictive” of athletic success as reported (Won and Chelladurai, 2016). Both categories of resources are in the Theory of Coach Control. This is a similar result that the Smart and Wolfe study (2000) that found 67% of athletic success is due to resources for players. In this case, scholarships and facilities would be for student athletes.

This also lines up with Smart and Wolfe (2006) who stated that sustained resources lead to a competitive advantage. The majority of teams in the S/SE region have “one coach one program” men’s golf teams with generous coaching salaries, a history of success, fully funded scholarships, strong administrative support for winning national championships, favorable climate, and connections to championship style golf courses. Teams that can “exploit” this competitive advantage have “organizational capability” (Teece, et al, 1997).

From a SWOT analysis (Barney, 1991) a northern golf team does not often pose a competitive threat to an elite team in the S/SE region. Northern teams lack the climate, history of success, scholarships, recruiting base, and often have minimal administrative support. Northern teams may have one or two players that can match a top 25 national team but the depth of the team into players four and five is rarely matched.

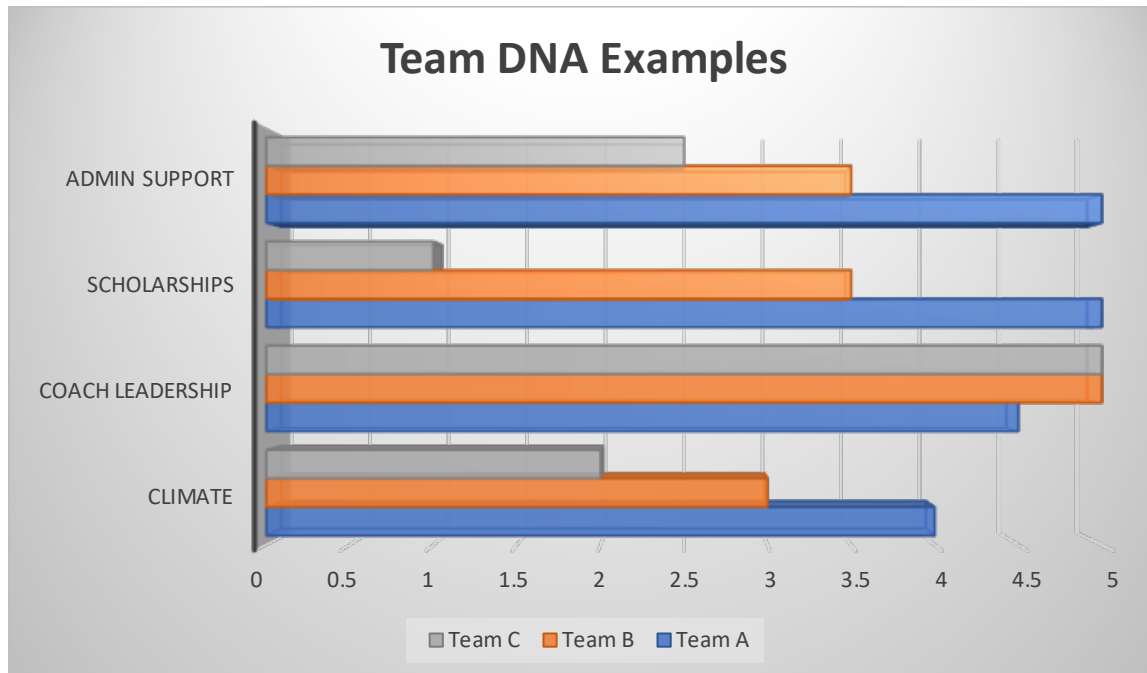
Reported data from this study line up with Caro (2012) who reported that recruiting makes up 63% to 80% of variance in conference winning percentage in Division I football. He suggested the “importance of making a significant investment in recruiting budgets to drive success on the field” (p. 151). This is similar to Participant 8 who stated that being nationally ranked is based on “80-85% recruiting.” Recruiting is also the strongest axial code in the Theory of Coach Control and the most talked about factor of this research with 13 of 14 coaches commenting (Table 4.7).

This study disagrees completely with the Won and Chelladurai study (2016) that athletic success has only a 2% indicator from coach leadership. The Theory of Coach Control is quite opposite to this finding. However, that study looked at a different sport and division.

What Elite Teams Look Like

In a visual representation (Figure 5.1), a Likert scale is used to rate team categories from 1 to 5, with 5 being outstanding. Team A is an elite team in the S/SE region, and they have high scores in all categories. The climate is excellent for an outdoor sport, coach leadership is outstanding, both administrative support and scholarships are as strong as possible. Team A is similar to what all elite teams look like in the S/SE region, thus they carry an impressive rank. Compared with Team B, where the climate is not as warm, neither scholarships nor admin support is very strong, but there is outstanding coach leadership. They can still be competitive and a top 25 team. Another example of a nationally ranked team, though rarer, is Team C with a colder climate, low scholarship, average admin support, average facilities, but exceptional coach leadership exemplified in recruiting.

Figure 5.1 Visual Comparison of Nationally Ranked Teams



Logical Deduction in Factors of National Rank

Conditional statements may also be helpful to use deductive logic in factors of national rank. Nowhere in the data suggests absolutes of Team DNA. For example, a conditional statement (from Figure 5.2) can be attempted: if a team is nationally ranked, they have a warm climate. The data is not absolute on this. Also, the converse is NOT true. Not all teams with a warm climate are nationally ranked. Nor do all nationally ranked teams have a warm climate. To examine the inverse, if teams are NOT nationally ranked it does not mean they do not have a warm climate with year-round golf.

The only certainty with factors of nationally ranked teams in conditional statements is that excellent coach leadership must be in place. If a team is nationally ranked, there is clearly outstanding coach leadership. It is the only factor that can overcome climate, scholarships, and admin support. If a team is nationally ranked, it has outstanding coach leadership. However, the

inverse is NOT true. Outstanding coach leadership does not guarantee a national rank team. The other factors may be too difficult to overcome, like climate, scholarships, or facilities. A contrapositive is also true, if there is not excellent coach leadership, then a team is not nationally ranked. The Biconditional is also true that a team has national rank if and only if there is excellent coach leadership. It is helpful to remember that multiple factors are out of control for the coach.

Figure 5.2 Deductive Logic and Conditional Statements

Conditional Statement	If A, then B	$A \rightarrow B$
Converse	If B, then A	$B \rightarrow A$
Inverse	If not A, then not B	$\sim A \rightarrow \sim B$
Contrapositive	If not B, then not A	$\sim B \rightarrow \sim A$
Biconditional	A if and only if B	$A \leftrightarrow B$

Taken from <https://www.cuemath.com/data/conditional-statement/>

Coach Control Theory Analyzed in RBV

The Theory of Coach Control can also be examined through a lens of RBV qualities (see Figure 2 of Chapter 2). Of the 200+ schools that host NCAA Division II men's golf it would be considered both *rare* and *valuable* to have full scholarship, full administrative support, and top-notch indoor and outdoor facilities. Combined with a head coach that "consistently recruits at a high level" is the resource that is *imperfectly imitable*. All of these factors mentioned are in place are what give the S/SE teams a sustained competitive advantage to produce elite teams.

An RBV analysis only makes sense when both tangible and intangible resources are counted. Scholarships and facilities are not enough on their own. There must be a history of winning and a quality coach/player relationship. The fact that two teams outside of Florida have

won National Championships in the last five years shows that some schools are catching up with resources. Eight of the last 11 National Champions were Florida schools (NCAA History, 2024).

Recommendations for Further Study

This research only looked at one athletic organization (the NCAA), one division (II), one sport (golf), and one gender (male). The reason for this was to make an isolated study project manageable, with an experienced author in the field and profession of coaching this exact selection. Personal relationships also made purposive sampling easier to conduct.

This methodology could easily be applied to NCAA Division II Women's golf to see if there is the same response. This would likely yield similar results due to the constraints and function of NCAA Division II sports. Factors that make a nationally ranked Division I men's team could be slightly different as many more players leave to play professionally, facilities are often in the multi-millions of dollars to be built, scholarship money is increased (4.5 full rides), coaching salaries are higher, and it is the highest level of amateur competition in the world. The least likely result would be to apply this methodology to other sports and divisions such as Division I women's ice hockey. This would change the division, gender, and sport.

A further study could measure sport programs by their staffing and measurement of success. More staffing leads to more duties being done and more individual attention to student athletes. This study did not examine the staffing factor to winning outcomes.

An interesting study would be which Division I men's or women's golf program has produced the most PGA or LPGA tour participants/winners and why, which could be phenomenology or grounded theory. This would show what collegiate programs prepare amateurs for their professional career.

Another research direction more specific to recruitment is that metrics could be studied for further insight as to what coaches look for and how they recruit, down to the detail. This would include scoring averages, tournament finishes, junior rankings, character of player, and even family background.

Following recruitment, another study could be based on the foreign player recruiting base. For example, are the top international players from Spain? Is there an emerging market on quality players from Central and South America? To get actual recruiting amounts from coaches may be difficult, but getting the metrics on recruiting methodology would be feasible. This study contained some of that methodology, but not into the details of rank, scoring average, or country of origin for foreign players.

The flipside of this study could also look at what makes teams unsuccessful. There are teams consistently ranked from 150 to 200 nationally. Is it climate, budget, scholarship, coaching leadership, lack of facilities, poor administrative support, and terrible recruiting? Participant 14 stated it just takes a "lazy coach who does not actively recruit. . .to add in any player that emails the program." It could also be an ethical factor as Smart and Wolfe (2006) noted as one of their evaluation criteria, that a school has too many NCAA violations and mismanagement.

Impact on Collegiate Golf

The impact of this study on collegiate golf is conclusive and immediate. Coaches and administrators are now made aware of factors that make a nationally ranked men's golf team in NCAA Division II. Coaches have had their theories on why other golf programs are continually successful or struggling. Clearly, it is not an equitable playing field between school resources. It is a competition to have the most, get the most, and win the most. Not that it has ever been anything different than that, but it is now clear to coaches a direction to take to improve.

Final Conclusion

To conclude a discussion on Chapter 5, this study was revealing and valuable. Fourteen committed and high-quality nationally ranked coaches contributed to this research study to reveal some things hidden, but other factors confirmed as self-evident. Teams in the S/SE region are elite for good reason and have been that way for decades. However, in the advent of NCAA Regionalization, it has allowed teams from across the country to enter national rank consideration. The improvement of indoor facilities has allowed domestic and international players a multitude of collegiate golf options.

The NCAA portal has been a contentious issue, but it is here to stay. Coaches who can add and utilize this fare better in team operations. Recruitment by national rank teams who utilized the portal fared better than coaches who ignored the portal. The best news from this study is for underdog teams to realize that there is a pathway to national rank from any climate and location. Multiple coaches stated that a team can “outperform their climate.” By the Theory of Coach control, with consistent recruitment at a high level, coaches can utilize resources and administrative support to enter and maintain a national rank.

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Appendix A

Open Codes by Participant

P1	<p>Scholarship #1</p> <p>Climate #2</p> <p>History of Winning</p> <p>Keeping pace with other programs</p> <p>International recruits</p> <p>Facilities #3</p> <p>Depth of team</p> <p>Quality of golf over last decade</p> <p>Portal</p> <p>Administrative support</p> <p>Elite teams S/SE region</p>
P2	<p>Administrative support</p> <p>Scholarship</p> <p>Local talent</p> <p>Fully funded</p> <p>Facilities</p> <p>Climate</p> <p>Grass advantage</p> <p>History of winning</p> <p>Full time coaches</p> <p>Elite teams S/SE region</p>

P3	<p>Fully funded scholarships</p> <p>Admin support</p> <p>Depth of team</p> <p>Golf teams as institutional profit centers</p> <p>Portal</p> <p>D2 stigma</p> <p>History of winning</p> <p>Weather/climate</p> <p>Jr. events in the South</p> <p>Elite teams S/SE region</p> <p>NCAA Regionalization</p> <p>NIL</p> <p>Travel and safety</p>
P4	<p>International vs Domestic players</p> <p>Golf program funding per institution</p> <p>Portal</p> <p>Facilities</p> <p>Admin support</p>
P5	<p>Recruiting</p> <p>Portal</p> <p>NCAA Regionalization</p> <p>Facilities</p> <p>Weather</p>

	<p>NIL</p> <p>Money</p> <p>Human capital</p> <p>Coach leadership</p> <p>Admin support</p>
P6	<p>Relationship</p> <p>Small roster</p> <p>International</p> <p>Weather</p> <p>Facilities</p> <p>History of Winning</p> <p>Coach Leadership</p> <p>Player development</p> <p>Alumni and admin support</p>
P7	<p>Admin support</p> <p>Coach leadership</p> <p>Climate</p> <p>Recruiting</p> <p>S/SE elite teams</p> <p>Coaching retention and salary</p> <p>Portal experience</p>
P8	<p>Recruiting</p> <p>Culture of team</p>

	<p>Admin support</p> <p>Climate #2</p> <p>Scholarship #1</p> <p>Schedule #3</p> <p>Facilities</p> <p>Portal experience</p>
P9	<p>Schedule</p> <p>Recruiting</p> <p>Notoriety/history of winning</p> <p>Facilities</p> <p>Relationship with coach</p>
P10	<p>Facilities quality</p> <p>Portal experience</p> <p>History of winning</p> <p>Paying player for TV appearances</p> <p>International vs Domestic players</p> <p>Coach leadership</p>
P11	<p>Weather/climate</p> <p>History of winning</p> <p>Scholarship/resources</p> <p>Strength of competition/depth of field</p> <p>Recruiting</p> <p>Portal experience</p>

	<p>D2 stigma</p> <p>Retention of players</p> <p>Staffing</p> <p>Facilities</p> <p>Roster size</p> <p>Coach leadership</p> <p>National skill level increase</p> <p>Team depth of talent</p> <p>Complimentary of other coaches</p>
P12	<p>Travel</p> <p>Strength of competition</p> <p>History of winning</p> <p>Staffing</p> <p>Roster size</p> <p>Recruiting</p> <p>Team chemistry/culture</p> <p>Facilities</p>
P13	<p>Coach leadership</p> <p>Scholarship</p> <p>Team depth</p> <p>Recruiting and character</p> <p>D1 stigma</p> <p>History of winning</p>

	Facilities
P14	Climate Money D1 stigma Portal experience Team depth Alumni and Admin support Schedule and equipment Recruitment Facilities Staffing

Appendix B

Participant Comments by Code

Appendix B.1 Participant Comments on Climate

P1	<p>I think it's a big factor.</p> <p>Close behind (the #1 factor) is weather.</p>
P2	<p>We have an advantage over Northern schools.</p> <p>Weather is very important.</p>
P3	<p>Obviously, the weather.</p>
P4	
P5	<p>The weather's a big reason.</p> <p>Weather (is a factor).</p>
P6	<p>It's the weather, you know. Any European or South American. They're not gonna go to Ohio to play golf.</p> <p>It's the location.</p>
P7	<p>Location and weather, especially when you start recruiting international kids.</p> <p>Tell me you're gonna complain about college golf in Florida.</p> <p>It's the #3 factor.</p> <p>Teams can still outperform their climate.</p> <p>Climate is probably a kind of like a glass ceiling.</p>

P8	<p>I think climate. . .is pretty critical.</p> <p>If it's just, you know, a climate thing.</p>
P9	<p>If the weather is an advantage to you, talk about what the current temperatures are when you're communicating with recruits.</p> <p>Team culture can overcome your own weather or climate.</p>
P10	
P11	<p>It's a massive advantage to be in warm weather year-round.</p> <p>We are very fortunate to have the warm weather.</p>
P12	
P13	<p>Florida is a very attractive State because of the weather.</p>
P14	<p>Kids are afraid we don't have good weather.</p> <p>The American kids know the weather situation a little better.</p> <p>The weather becomes a factor with the internationals.</p> <p>You could put the greatest recruiter in the world in a snow climate, and they're gonna struggle. . . hard to find them and even harder</p>

	<p>to hold on to them if you're in a snow-covered climate.</p> <p>It's harder the further north you go, the number of people that will be successful gets smaller and smaller.</p> <p>A Northern school that has success is super impressive.</p>
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Appendix B.2 Participant Comments on Recruitment

P1	<p>It builds off itself.</p> <p>We recruit internationally.</p> <p>It all rolls down to the players.</p>
P2	<p>I recruit over my head a lot.</p> <p>I try to recruit local kids from my State.</p> <p>I'm a big team chemistry guy.</p> <p>Build from the bottom up.</p> <p>I know what works for us.</p>
P3	<p>You're only as good as your 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 players.</p> <p>You're looking under every rocky and cranny to find, you know, a diamond in the rough.</p>
P4	<p>I'm getting pretty lucky. . .looking under every rock.</p>

	I do better with international.
P5	It's not rocket science, it's recruiting. . . is number one.
P6	I spend more money on the internationals. I prefer the internationals. Facilities are our biggest recruiting tool. Internationals don't need a car here.
P7	You've got to get really good players who fit into your program and fit into your university. Florida schools have a leg up. I'm like 100% domestic (in recruiting). The message is getting out to players that the most important thing about going and playing college golf is playing (college tournament) golf. It's the depth and our top end.
P8	Recruiting, in terms of if you're trying to be competitive, is your life blood. Make decisions on "how does this help us in recruiting?" and if it doesn't, it just probably shouldn't be that high on the list. Everything stems from recruiting.

	<p>An underrated aspect of recruiting is that they wanna go where they know someone.</p> <p>Similar backgrounds with one or two international guys.</p> <p>When you're just using recruiting services, you're at their mercy.</p> <p>I think there's value in looking where no one else is looking.</p> <p>It's 80-85% recruiting.</p> <p>Access to a better recruiting base (leads to success).</p> <p>I think you can do it up there (North), I think it has more to do with recruiting.</p>
P9	<p>Find out your niche recruit. . . but also, what is your recruiting advantage?</p> <p>Finding your target recruiting pool.</p> <p>Can't miss on those players (in-state) because that also is like your reputation with all the people you are around.</p> <p>Recruit the right people that can get into that mindset (of your school climate).</p> <p>We are another avenue for them to go play in the Big 12 and SCC.</p>

	<p>We were able to add one or two good international players.</p> <p>All (top 5) have to have the ability to win a tournament.</p>
P10	
P11	<p>To play in a strong region helps us continue to attract good recruits.</p> <p>Part of recruiting for me. . .you talk about playing against the best.</p> <p>I feel that international players may have a little less loyalty. . .they don't feel as much connection to all their teammates.</p> <p>We recruit mostly American kids</p>
P12	<p>The depth of the field is so strong it pushes everyone, and then that is part of your recruiting piece.</p> <p>It's a complete recruiting race, right?</p> <p>Recruiting the right types of people.</p> <p>We're heavily international.</p> <p>We try not to mix too many nationalities and cultures to build connectivity.</p> <p>Decent State kids are committed 2 years out.</p>

	<p>We can get as quality an international player later in the recruitment process.</p> <p>They've gotta fit into your philosophies and ideals.</p> <p>A player can be cancer and that takes away from a lot of the guys.</p> <p>You could have 5 guys that hate each other and still be successful, but I think the chemistry piece is important.</p>
P13	<p>The biggest hurdle in talking to kids and parents is they think everyone's getting a full ride.</p> <p>You have to look past talent and what kind of person are you getting?</p> <p>I recruit primarily for team chemistry.</p> <p>Recruiting to the area (Florida) is kind of a high-profile.</p> <p>Mainly recruiting out of JuCo, at least they most likely won't leave.</p>
P14	<p>We have to play defense to convince kids they got everything (here) to be successful.</p>

	<p>We recruit heavily international. 40% of our roster is global.</p> <p>How do you convince a kid who's good enough to play mid-level D1 that they wanna be with you?</p> <p>International kids want a competitive schedule and good courses to practice on. For us it's gotta be more about location. They're a local kid wanting to come back home (from D1 to D2). . .like a bounceback kid.</p> <p>You gotta find kids at lower levels or NAIA that are looking for a more competitive opportunity.</p> <p>It's gonna be really hard for those kids to swallow coming down (to D2), and frankly, a lot of those lower D1 kids aren't even good enough to help us. Those aren't even the kids I want. I need kids at good schools like Power 5 or upper level mid-majors that are the fringe 4, 5, 6. Those are the kind of kids that might come in and make a difference for us. It's just hard to find those kids.</p>
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	<p>If you're not actively recruiting at a quality level, you can run it (a top national program) into the ground</p>
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Appendix B.3 Participant Comments on Scholarship/Equivalency

P1	<p>Scholarship is the number one factor.</p> <p>I would have to imagine the top 25 teams are fully funded.</p> <p>If you don't have scholarship it's tough, absolutely tough.</p> <p>I tell my players: this team's not competitive, not that they don't have a good coach. They may only have one scholarship to offer.</p> <p>You can't sustain it without proper funding, scholarship-wise.</p> <p>You can hardly make it work if you're not funded properly.</p>
P2	<p>It's a humungous advantage to be fully funded.</p>
P3	<p>When we went on our run those years we were fully funded.</p> <p>A full scholarship amount helps the depth of your program.</p>

P4	
P5	
P6	\$10,000 more scholarship is another player that can take us into the next area (of rank).
P7	Scholarship is in no way a guarantee that you're going to be one of the top teams. You can operate at 1.5 and 2.5 (full rides) and still be very competitive.
P8	Equivalencies are number one. To get to 3.6, that was a big factor. It's super important to be fully funded again.
P9	
P10	If the school has international scholarships, you can stack scholarship. I think we've been super successful because of it and how much more competitive we can be with that.
P11	(success) due to having the 3.6 scholarships and we've never wavered from that.
P12	
P13	We're fully funded here, so yeah, that's nice.
P14	Good players want money. We're not fully funded (but close). Money is the #1 factor.

	<p>If I had half of this scholarship money we would not be as good. . .doesn't matter what else we did. . .we would be struggling to be super competitive.</p> <p>The next step would be a max 3.6 (scholarships) every year.</p> <p>It's a resources game and anybody that doesn't recognize that is kind of lying to themselves.</p>
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Appendix B.4 Participant Comments on History of Winning

P1	<p>Get to that level, it just makes the recruiting process easier.</p> <p>A good group of players. . .we've been able to build off that.</p>
P2	<p>The better we've gotten the easier it is getting attention.</p>
P3	
P4	
P5	
P6	<p>Once it gets established, if the coach stays there.</p>
P7	<p>Does it (your school) have the history?</p>

	Whether it's location, climate, or golf facilities, you have this history (to weather through rough times).
P8	
P9	The last 4 years we've made the National Championship which is more beneficial than if you play your conference tournament (at a mid-major) and your year is done. If you have some notoriety. If you are playing for championships, it attracts a certain player for sure.
P10	Men's golf is a flagship program for the athletic department, and I don't see it changing anytime soon.
P11	Our program has been at the top for years. We're fortunate to be at really good top tier programs.
P12	We are seen now as one of (the school's) flagship sports.
P13	We want to win a National Championship, you know. What makes the best teams is you have to have, you know, history.

	<p>This National Champion school had to establish it, it took time. It took time to get players to come in and convince them. .</p> <p>.we've got a winning tradition here.</p> <p>You kind of see a cycle of success and a history of winning once you have that recruiting story.</p> <p>Once you get there that ranking committee is gonna be, like, an automatic, that's the history you're talking about.</p>
P14	<p>Been to Nationals six times.</p> <p>You've got to sell winning.</p> <p>I was getting players with less scholarship money by selling really good tournaments and winning.</p>

Appendix B.5 Participant Comments on NIL

P1	It's not a thing yet.
P2	
P3	If we did do it, we'd try to distribute it to all players.
P4	

P5	That's no factor for us. We don't even drive it. We don't even try.
P6	Not so much on the male side of sports.
P7	It was never a factor as to why my guys came here.
P8	
P9	
P10	I have two players getting money but I don't think that affected whether they were coming or not.
P11	We don't have any (NIL).
P12	
P13	
P14	We've had kids do minor things like rep a product or discount, but we had a foreign player with an NIL and we were told as an international student that would be considered working in America which violated the terms of his student visa, that he would be deported immediately. . . we were basically told it can't happen. So it's out there.

	<p>We don't have the resources to line up our alumni consistently and deliver money to kids to keep them here.</p>
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Appendix B.6 Participant Comments on NCAA Transfer Portal

P1	<p>It's a double-edged sword.</p> <p>If you're not using it, you're at a disadvantage.</p> <p>Pretty difficult at our level to get kids from the portal.</p> <p>Certainly not seeing it go the other way very often (D1 to D2).</p>
P2	<p>Not a big portal guy.</p>
P3	<p>It's tougher on us (D2).</p> <p>It's difficult to get a kid from a D1 program to come to our program, especially a Power 5.</p> <p>It's really made our Division kind of a junior college. . .it's given it a junior college feel.</p> <p>Where's the loyalty and all?</p> <p>I have to recruit to replace.</p> <p>They can really screw you.</p>
P4	<p>I'm a farm club.</p> <p>It's more hurtful for us.</p>

P5	<p>A kid that's too good, and you may have trouble keeping him.</p> <p>We're gonna be a farm system for the bigger schools.</p> <p>You're gonna be pillaged by some of the programs that are looking for instant help.</p>
P6	<p>I'm OK with that. I'm not gonna hold a kid back.</p> <p>I've been a big portal guy.</p> <p>I'm a big fan of the portal. I love it. I think it's great for kids.</p>
P7	<p>I don't know that we've seen the full effects of it yet.</p> <p>Our portal transfer dramatically changed our national presence (for the better).</p> <p>Top coaches have probably lost more players to Power-5s.</p>
P8	<p>We added two players in the portal, 3 total, one was a big swing and a miss.</p> <p>I think you have to be willing to take some chances, you know?</p>

P9	<p>I don't think there were any major transfers that we added from Division 1 back to Division 2.</p> <p>They keep a 14 person roster and habitually have 4 leave and go to the portal, and then they're at 14 again next year. . .rotating guys and just seeing what sticks and giving more people an opportunity.</p>
P10	<p>It's started to shift in this transfer portal era, with guys having success early and finding a place to go.</p> <p>You use our facilities and our schedule as something to, you know, springboard you to the next level.</p> <p>Some kids have come to my school that wouldn't normally come if they didn't think they could play well quickly and move on.</p> <p>The bigger issue that we might get to is kids are gonna go in to go in to the portal and see what's out there.</p> <p>I've only used it twice, but one kid ended up being my best player.</p>

	<p>He's done it all (become nationally ranked) through the transfer portal.</p>
P11	<p>All three of our programs have lost multiple guys to power 5 conference teams.</p> <p>It's a big struggle to keep them (the top players). I've lost a lot in the last couple years.</p> <p>I think you have to take risks. I've brought in kids every year from the portal. 3 of the 4 have been good additions. You just have to take risks because you're gonna lose guys.</p> <p>The top 3 or 5 guys from our region are gonna be leaving every year.</p> <p>You're crazy not to use the portal.</p> <p>Every semester you are fighting and praying for those guys to stay.</p>
P12	
P13	<p>My top two players went. I think the portal is an absolute mess.</p> <p>It's teaching nothing about loyalty or commitment or integrity.</p> <p>As far as I see it, Division 2 is just a farm system for Division 1.</p>

	<p>We're just a minor league system.</p> <p>It allows the student to leave very easily.</p> <p>You don't see guys coming back to say, "I want the playing time". The stigma is amazing (D2 versus D1).</p> <p>Kids don't understand how heartbreaking that is as a coach, when a kid leaves, but what about my dreams (as a coach), what about the dreams of the team you're leaving? You're just coming in and using them and jumping.</p> <p>My experience on the portal has been nothing but lousy. Yeah, I'm not a fan of it at all.</p>
P14	<p>It's more of a hurt. I lost two guys, one to a Division 1 Power 5.</p> <p>It's much harder to get kids to come here, because every kid at a lower level that's played good goes into the portal. They think they're going D1.</p> <p>They have a hard time dropping down to D2.</p> <p>They want to go just laterally.</p> <p>The portal's not easy on schools. If you want to be a really good Division 2 school the portal's gonna be really hard on you. After 1</p>

	<p>or 2 years if your kids have any success, everyone they know is gonna tell them “why aren’t you going? You need to go!” and then they all feel like they’re missing out on something.</p> <p>They obviously ended up at lower level D1 because they wanted the status.</p> <p>The portal just kind of fills an occasional need.</p>
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Appendix B.7 Participant Comments on Administrative Support

P1	<p>They are supportive as well as any program on campus.</p> <p>I do know they care, they trust me.</p>
P2	<p>It’s absolutely key.</p> <p>Super supportive.</p> <p>They want us to become a golf school.</p> <p>We’re not an afterthought.</p> <p>The top schools are very well supported.</p> <p>Our administration’s huge for continuity.</p> <p>My AD (Athletic Director) asked me, “What can I do for you as a Director of Golf?”</p>

P3	I asked our admin: do you want this program to be a contender or do you just want it to exist? They said, we want you to be a contender.
P4	<p>If you don't have a football team, that's a great asset for a golf program.</p> <p>Anybody who's top-ranked and doing well, their Athletic Director's in the game. They wanna win and I'm sure their President is right behind.</p> <p>From the top down is a huge difference how good your team is.</p>
P5	(the coach's) president cares and athletic director cares.
P6	<p>They've committed hugely.</p> <p>Our new president understood sports.</p> <p>My support is way up there for sure.</p>
P7	I would put institutional support as probably my highest priority. . .then you probably have a decent scholarship and travel budget, and a decent salary.

	<p>If you have admin support, they're going to get you as much of everything else that you need, that they physically can get for you.</p> <p>Even if you feel like we were evenly looked at, like proportional. . .we can't be an afterthought.</p> <p>Let the coach do what they're capable of.</p> <p>It's the #1 factor.</p>
P8	<p>Administrative support is pretty critical.</p> <p>I just think, you know, have an administrative support.</p> <p>I never felt like I was raising money just to survive. If you're getting that kind of administrative support, you'll just be burned out.</p> <p>Do you have an administration that's gonna meet your basic needs and then is willing to help out on some bigger things?</p>
P9	<p>They weren't out to make us a golf school.</p> <p>You have to be full time at the University.</p>
P10	<p>We're one of the fully funded programs competing for a National Championship.</p> <p>We have full support.</p>

P11	<p>Take care of business as we see fit to win a National Championship.</p> <p>(some newer teams) in the last 10 years have become two of the best programs in the country because of that investment and commitment from those athletic departments.</p>
P12	<p>From an admin standpoint, we're extremely well taken care of.</p> <p>In terms of administration, we've had people that have been highly involved with the program now, on the other side, kind of advocating for us.</p> <p>The support and expectation is there, that you're gonna be a nationally ranked program, or you're gonna compete for championships.</p>
P13	<p>Budget-wise we're good. The emotional support isn't there. It would be nice if there was a little more of an emotional support.</p> <p>That's the model there when you have the administration (support) of the AD (Athletic Director).</p> <p>When you have the administration that supports the program and treats it as</p>

	<p>important as every other program, and the student athletes are as important as all the other student athletes, that's gonna be a huge factor.</p>
P14	<p>I feel like we've had great support, as we've had more success the budgets and scholarships have grown.</p> <p>They've been good about giving us what we need to compete. Fundraising initially was to . . .fill operating expenses. . .now it goes toward capital projects.</p> <p>My boss has always been willing to try to work with us.</p>

Appendix B.8 Participant Comment on Facilities

P1	<p>A combo of our weather and facilities helps us a lot.</p> <p>Something players can call their own.</p> <p>Nobody is allowed on our facility outside our players.</p>
P2	<p>Facilities are huge.</p> <p>The facilities of that National Champion school are remarkable.</p>

P3	
P4	
P5	
P6	<p>(after weather) it's facilities; a combination of both.</p> <p>It's our biggest recruiting tool.</p> <p>Their facilities are better than a Mid-Major (D1).</p> <p>Alumni now is a big part of what we're doing.</p> <p>. .helping us get a Mercedes van and TrackMan.</p>
P7	
P8	The school put in a short game area for us.
P9	And then it goes to facilities (#4 factor)
P10	The University owns the golf course.
P11	<p>It's all about resources.</p> <p>The quality of courses we are playing.</p> <p>All the kids get memberships at multiple courses.</p> <p>We're doing an indoor facility to compete with everyone else's indoor facilities. It's a chance to not fall further behind in that aspect.</p>

	<p>When you go to (these schools) they've got full access to an incredible practice facility and golf courses.</p> <p>Investing more into facilities, I think that's a huge part of it.</p>
P12	<p>We have a full facility on campus.</p> <p>We have a full driving range on campus, practice greens, clubhouse, locker rooms, putting lab, player's lounge, simulator, and roller bays.</p>
P13	<p>I would say facilities are a really big factor.</p> <p>We don't have an indoor facility, it would probably be easier to recruit if you had a facility that was yours. . .or access to a private club.</p>
P14	<p>We've got a really nice indoor facility.</p> <p>We did the indoor room, bought a sprinter van, looking to add a TrackMan.</p> <p>We have two golf courses right by campus, one is adjacent.</p> <p>We have a learning center about 20 minutes away with covered stalls and heaters.</p>

RQ2 How much scholarship equivalency do nationally ranked teams have? (The maximum NCAA scholarship of grant-in-aid cost of attendance is 3.6 equivalencies. A 1.0 scholarship is considered a “full ride.”)

From the interviews and focus groups, all golf programs but one are at 2.0 scholarships of the 3.6 equivalencies allowed. The majority are over 3.0 scholarships. One program is truly an exception with 0.5 of a scholarship. Some schools talked about “stacking” scholarship offers, for example, an international student gets in-state tuition plus a golf scholarship which would stack the aid offer to reach the full cost of attending.

RQ3 How do coaches describe their own success or competitive advantage? (Coaches may or may not be privy to what other coaches have in terms of scholarship money, which is institutionally determined.)

Some, but not all, coaches discussed their own success and/or competitive advantage. One common topic asked by the researcher is what makes the success of the S/SE region, noting that 9 of the last 11 national championships were won in that region. Some slight overlap exists between comments in the RQ1 tables. These answers could be categorized as what makes an elite team or National competitor.

Appendix B.9 What Explains 13 of the last 15 National Champions from the S/SE region?

P1	<p>When you get to that level it makes recruiting easier.</p> <p>They may have 3 or 4 of them (nationally ranked players) while we have 1 or 2.</p> <p>Clearly fully funded and (the) weather.</p>
P2	<p>Already shooting fish in a barrel.</p>

	<p>The types of grasses, Bermuda.</p> <p>The South region has always been phenomenal. Very international, appeal to foreign (players).</p> <p>Weather and very well supported by their administrations at these schools.</p> <p>Again, very well financially supported.</p> <p>Their own golf course, coaches are full time.</p> <p>They all coach just men (men's programs).</p>
P3	<p>Obviously the weather.</p> <p>Where are all the big Junior events from October through March? The Coaches are getting access to these kids down there all year long. Our budgets aren't gonna allow us to fly to Florida. . .3-4 times a year, so they get to see a lot of these foreign kids that come in to play in the wintertime.</p> <p>A lot of the AJGA tournaments are there.</p> <p>Those kids head to that area because that's where they are seen, and they're not dumb.</p> <p>They figure out the weather's better there.</p>
P4	<p>The weather is one, with a lot of international players.</p>

	<p>The kind of stuff they're sending (for recruiting), you know, hitting (golf) balls on the beach and stuff like that, showing off (a) facility. They get good facilities to work with.</p>
P5	<p>It's (golf) courses, the amount. . the condition. . .the access, and the weather</p>
P6	<p>There are probably 6 kids that have a PGA Tour card from down here and there's probably another 15 more that have held a Korn Ferry card. They're unbelievable players.</p> <p>It's our regional field. It's tougher than last year's championship field by far.</p> <p>Kids with recruiting companies are being told "I see you playing for a national championship" (there).</p> <p>Their location, and access to golf courses and instructors.</p> <p>He's got a guy who's won on the PGA Tour. They've won (the National Championship).</p> <p>Facilities are better than a Mid-Major.</p> <p>The South American connection is huge.</p>

P7	<p>They have a lot of benefits, weather, competition, international kids. It's a blend of all of these factors.</p> <p>For whatever reason, Florida holds a different spot in golfers' minds.</p> <p>They have a really good leg up (due to weather) when it comes to recruiting, either out of state or internationally.</p> <p>They have the history of being the most competitive region.</p> <p>Culturally, golf is really big in Florida.</p> <p>Coaches down there are well-compensated for the most part.</p> <p>One thing I noticed from the Florida schools is I just don't see a ton of coaching turnover.</p> <p>They put in 10-12 years and then they take that Division 1 job to end their career.</p> <p>It leads me to believe things are pretty good down there in terms of funding or coaching.</p> <p>He had multiple national titles and could've left every year for the last 15 years and taken a really good Division 1 job.</p>
P8	Primarily international teams.

	<p>It seems somewhat inevitable that location does matter depending on your sport.</p> <p>Access to a better recruiting base.</p> <p>There's no question that an outdoor sport being in Florida has built in advantages, right?</p> <p>Kids get to play more year round.</p> <p>Why are they gonna leave there to go up (north)?</p> <p>To win regionals is almost a bigger badge to outright win. . .a bigger badge of honor.</p> <p>What I think's cool is you've seen a rise of teams in the Southeast. . .so it used to be just the South.</p> <p>I think it's cool. . .the footprint. . .spreading a little bit.</p>
P9	<p>You have more Latin guys that have played for team and country championships before, which is a completely different energy than what U.S. golfers bring to the table.</p> <p>They just have great international players. . .solid American groups too.</p> <p>The quality of the schedule's really good.</p>

	<p>It's harder getting out of Regionals than playing at the National Tournament.</p> <p>They've retained their coaches too.</p> <p>At one area, they know their market.</p>
P10	<p>It's the location we're in.</p> <p>The competition as well.</p> <p>The quality of courses we are playing.</p> <p>The degree of difficulty that we set up our play pushes them. When we actually get to post-season they're more prepared for that type of golf.</p> <p>The number I've been using is 26 of the last 30 National Championships from our Region.</p> <p>Multiple National Championships at this school have come from men's or women's golf.</p> <p>The school wants international students, so they have another international scholarship.</p> <p>We are one of the few schools that are able to stack the scholarships like that. That's the school's decision. . .you know how much more competitive we can be with that.</p>
P11	Warm weather year round.

	<p>Our program's been at the top for 40 years.</p> <p>A pain in the butt is a 7 hour drive for us.</p> <p>We play in a strong region. It helps us to continue to attract good recruits.</p> <p>You talk (to recruits) about playing against the best, on teams that win tournaments and gain confidence from that.</p> <p>The SEC and ACC can look at our tournament schedule and say, okay, if a kid from this school wins 3 times, that's a very good player, and (the coach) is gonna get him to transfer, type of thing.</p> <p>Our programs have lost multiple guys to Power 5 conference teams.</p> <p>Most of our events we play, probably at least 20 guys could play D1 golf, if not more.</p> <p>75% of our guys are looking to play professionally.</p> <p>That's a big part of it, our nationally ranked teams and our winning teams the last 30 years.</p> <p>We're fortunate to be at really good top tier programs.</p>
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	<p>This school showed me they want me to continue coaching here.</p> <p>A lot of the programs were very tenured coaches.</p> <p>The warm weather definitely helps us.</p> <p>Just the amount of good players. . .if you're finishing top 10 in our tournaments, you're averaging under par.</p> <p>It's probably 20 to 25 legitimate Division 1 golfers in every tournament we play in.</p> <p>It comes down to who's 4th and 5th guy contribute to who's gonna win the tournament.</p>
P12	<p>We don't have to travel as far.</p> <p>The strength of competition week in, week out, within both (S/SE) regions.</p> <p>Teams from other regions to play the same level of strength of field, typically have to come to our region.</p> <p>The depth of the field too in the tournaments, the whole field is like top 25 in the country, you know, definitely top 50. . .it pushes</p>

	<p>everyone, and then that is part of your recruiting piece, or people just know it.</p> <p>The know you're gonna be a top team and play other top teams.</p> <p>Each year you're gonna be a nationally ranked program.</p>
P13	<p>Very few Americans on those teams.</p> <p>Florida is obviously a very attractive state, you know, just because of the weather.</p> <p>Not the nicest people (on some teams), the gamesmanship stuff that they do, like not pick up a pin (flagstick), leave it and let someone else get it, start walking as you're hitting, you know, peripheral stuff like that. In the National Championship, they treated him (my top player) like a caddie. Stuff like that they do constantly. . .it's very intentional. It's kind of the style of play. There was a lot of animosity between some of those teams.</p> <p>They seem to be well-funded and they really don't travel outside of Florida or Georgia very much. You don't need a big travel budget so you can have more scholarship.</p>

	<p>Recruiting to their area is. . . kind of a high profile.</p> <p>That's the model there when you have administration. . .that supports the program.</p> <p>You see a cycle of success. . .a history of winning, once you have that recruiting story.</p> <p>Then once you get there, that ranking committee is like. . . you know, almost like an automatic. . .these teams are always going (Post-season). Somebody's really gonna have to come in and show that they're better than them on that national rank level, and that's the history that you're talking about.</p>
P14	<p>International kids know Florida. They all wanna go to Florida to play.</p> <p>Honestly, they are selling sunshine in Florida.</p> <p>I guarantee the amount of emails they (FL coaches) get dwarfs what I'm getting. . .</p> <p>they're starting with 10 times as many quality options to sort through.</p> <p>They've got great coaches down there.</p> <p>Maybe my #1 or #2 player matches up but as I go down the lineup I feel I'm gonna have to</p>

	<p>have the best day out of my #4 and #5 (player) to compete with their #4 and #5 (player).</p> <p>They will always be successful there (in FL) as long as they have a halfway quality coach.</p> <p>A lot of people can be successful when you give them all the tools.</p> <p>One coach one program there.</p>
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Other coaches noted what made their own program successful within their constraints and team culture:

Appendix B.10 Participant Comment on Their Own Success

P1	<p>I walked into a good situation with good players and we've been able to build off that.</p> <p>The combination of the weather and an indoor facility is what sets us apart.</p> <p>We have playing privileges 7 days a week at a golf course close by.</p> <p>We've done a good job on having as good a player as those consistently nationally ranked.</p>
P2	<p>We have a new (school) President trying to make us fully funded.</p> <p>We are one of the best deals in the State.</p>

	<p>With the weather we definitely have an advantage over Northern schools.</p> <p>I'm a men's coach only. . . there are no part-time coaches doing any of this at a high level.</p> <p>I have connections with pros (golf professionals) and high school coaches all over the State.</p> <p>My job is to bring people in to whip your tail and your job is to not let them. . .and my job is the flip side of that to figure out how to make you better.</p> <p>I'm a big team chemistry guy. . .I target kids we want from a chemistry standpoint.</p> <p>We've built a culture where it's very competitive, but they love each other when they get done.</p> <p>I know what works for us. Everyone's got their own niche.</p> <p>My team is very, very close.</p>
P3	Our President wants all our sports fully funded.
P4	International guys, I can probably negotiate with them a little better.

P5	<p>The right kids gotta embrace your culture that are gonna buy in, stick it out with you, be leaders, play at a high level, and get better.</p> <p>If you got kids that don't have good character or match the talent, then you're probably not gonna succeed. . .at least you're not gonna sustain it.</p>
P6	<p>I like to have a smaller roster and one-on-one time, I have anywhere from 6-8 (players).</p> <p>I have a soft spot for internationals. . .they've worked their butts off. . .they adapt quicker to how things are gonna go.</p> <p>I want to be invited to your wedding. This is the relationship we're gonna have.</p> <p>It's a relationship. They need to be comfortable with me. . .comfortable with what we are doing on the golf course, you know, we've got a game plan.</p> <p>It's recruiting the right kids into what you've got, because our culture changes.</p> <p>These are (like) my kids.</p>

P7	<p>We had a Division 1 transfer player this year and it drastically changed our national presence.</p> <p>We're deep as hell. . .a legit #1 player is the difference between being 50th and (where we are now). If I had two #1 players like this. . .game changer.</p>
P8	<p>It takes time. . .a lot of people. . .you gotta pick on thing at a time and to try and get done.</p> <p>We believed every time we teed it up we were the toughest team.</p> <p>You make decisions on how this can help us in recruiting.</p> <p>Taking the time to be very intentional about getting at their heart. . .I got hooked on creating connection every day. . .either between be and a player or between players.</p> <p>If you can create connection, you can motivate somebody to do anything.</p> <p>We describe ourselves as deeply competitive.</p>

	<p>I saw the value of making things more clear and simple.</p> <p>Calm, tough, closer (of the round) became our mantra.</p> <p>Create the mindset of: nobody wants to see us in head-to-head play.</p> <p>Talk the way you think the best team in the world talks.</p>
P9	<p>One of our top players was released from a D1 school. . .we were able to get him to commit. . .and it was that extra piece we needed.</p>
P10	
P11	
P12	<p>A player can be a cancer that takes away from the other guys.</p> <p>Chemistry definitely impacts. . .if everyone's striving for the same goals pulling for each other. . .people wanna work harder and be in a better environment than working alone toward their own individual goals, pulling in different directions.</p>

P13	There was so much tension on the team that it cost us big time.
P14	<p>You've got to sell winning and culture, being a part of that, and life in the balance and all that stuff.</p> <p>It's hard to really have a good control of the team and build the culture you wanna build when you're not around all the time (due to coaching both teams).</p> <p>If you're a lazy recruiter, then you don't know how to run or manage the culture of a team and you just bring kids in. . .and turn them loose. . .whatever they wanna do is fine. . it's gonna turn to craziness real fast. Horrible things as far as the culture of the team, and that team might have good days here or there but consistently will not produce.</p>

At large head coach leadership and strategy was also noted:

Appendix B.11 Participant Comments on Head Coach Leadership

P1	
P2	

P3	The coach is the program. You create the culture, you put in the work, you do everything. You, your talent level, and your work ethic and your skill set is what's gonna determine the success of a program.
P4	
P5	
P6	Some kids, you can tell them whatever and get in their face. . .you gotta get in their face at the right time. You gotta time all that.
P7	<p>You get a lot longer in life if you're not an asshole.</p> <p>The coach is the floor and all the other stuff we're talking about . . .determines what the ceiling is.</p> <p>If you have the right person leading the program, you're going to be competitive.</p> <p>The coach itself plays a factor in gaining institutional support.</p> <p>One coach rose them (to national rank).</p>
P8	Coaching is hard, it's exhausting. . .if you're doing it the right way it can burn you out, but

	<p>it gave me a different excitement to try and create a connection with our team.</p> <p>Not basing everything on how they are playing.</p> <p>Very intentional on holding players accountable in terms of body language and attitude.</p> <p>I don't like sarcasm talking about your golf game. . I don't like when you talk negatively about a course or experience.</p>
P9	Successful coaches and teams that are gonna win have a certain amount of grit to them.
P10	
P11	<p>This is not a knock on any coach, but it's a little like, maybe, someone coming in to make an effort, might sound kind of crazy.</p> <p>Not being a 60 year old man that (just) enjoyed driving the van to tournaments.</p> <p>A coach using it as maybe a platform to be successful and get a different job.</p>
P12	I try to seek advantage.

	<p>They (recruits) have got to fit into your philosophies and ideals, where the team is, and where you're trying to go.</p>
P13	<p>Fully funded. . .but it's whose hands it's in, you know.</p> <p>Each program and coach is just trying to find their competitive advantage, right, to build that program.</p> <p>It's having the leadership at the top.</p>
P14	<p>Would it be fair to tell the basketball kids, hey, one of your coaches will be there for the first half but then he's gotta go coach another team.</p> <p>I end up being on the road for 24 weekends a year just to go to tournaments. . .that's a ton of travel, like 70-80 days on the road. That's hard on a coach and a family.</p> <p>One coach one team is how it should be.</p> <p>Bad coaching destroys a program.</p> <p>If the coach has success and really wants to make coaching his career, then he's gonna jump to a job that has those resources.</p>

	Kids are worried about that: are you gonna jump jobs?
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RQ4 What is a winning recruitment methodology? (Each player eligible for competition either came from high school, a two-year transfer, or a four-year transfer domestic or international player. All eligible players are final certified academically and with amateurism. No previous or current professional is allowed in an NCAA sport.)

Appendix B.12 Winning Recruitment Methodology Self-Reported and Themes

P1	<p>Tangible resource of . . .fully funded.</p> <p>Our climate and facilities.</p> <p>Scholarship is the #1 factor.</p> <p>For the first time I'm starting to lose some recruits based on money.</p>
P2	<p>Scholarship from the State.</p> <p>Domestic players.</p> <p>Very nice campus and area.</p> <p>Facilities.</p> <p>A big sell for us is you get a college atmosphere but not too big.</p> <p>Connections to courses and Junior programs.</p> <p>Instagram is pretty much where I get connections, kids.</p> <p>Most of my players within 4 hours.</p>

	<p>Biggest challenge if I can just get them on campus.</p>
P3	<p>We were fully funded and it helps the depth of your program.</p> <p>Why would a Florida or Texas kid play (north) with 10 or 9 months (of playing season)? The kid's probably got some issues.</p> <p>Why are Midwestern and Northern teams getting better? (NCAA) Regionalization probably did that.</p>
P4	<p>I'm just getting lucky. Within a few years all my roster might be international, as the reason is the kind of kid I want to coach.</p> <p>They can afford to go to school here.</p>
P5	<p>You gotta have a product.</p> <p>The name of the game is getting the right kids. . . .good character and talent.</p>
P6	<p>The international student needs a lot more money. I spend more money on them.</p> <p>Our smaller roster leads to a higher rate of retention.</p> <p>Our golf course on campus is our biggest recruiting tool.</p>

	<p>It's recruiting the right kids into what you've got because our culture changes.</p> <p>I want to see. . .how the kids fits in with our guys.</p>
P7	<p>You can operate between 1.5 and 2.5 (scholarships) and still be competitive.</p> <p>Is it a desirable program and does it have the history?</p> <p>You've got to get really good players who fit into your program and fit into your university.</p> <p>You need a coach who's willing to get out and recruit, and probably work really hard to build it up.</p>
P8	<p>Recruiting, if you're trying to be competitive, is your lifeblood.</p> <p>You really make decisions based on how does this help us in recruiting. . .and if it doesn't, it probably shouldn't be that high on the list.</p> <p>I think everything stems from recruiting.</p> <p>An underrated aspect of recruiting is that they wanna go where they know someone.</p> <p>When you're using recruiting services, you're at their mercy.</p>

	<p>It's 80-85% recruiting, I mean, you have to get whatever you're trying to accomplish.</p> <p>Location-based from a recruiting standpoint. .</p> <p>.an access to a better recruiting base.</p>
P9	<p>Each school has their own type of thing they need to try and find. . .finding your target recruiting pool.</p> <p>Find out what your niche recruit is, but also what is your recruiting advantage. . .win your home state. . .you can't miss on or not recruit those players. . that is also your reputation with all the people you're around.</p> <p>Sell the whole opportunity (of playing for championships).</p> <p>We're trying to get that player into the dorm room any way possible.</p>
P10	<p>Kids come here. . .and play well quickly and move on (to D1).</p> <p>We're one of the few schools who can stack scholarships.</p>
P11	<p>Playing in a strong region helps us continue to attract good recruits.</p>

	<p>It's part of recruiting to talk about playing against the best.</p>
P12	<p>It's a recruiting race. . .if you're not keeping up on things, you lose out. It's fine margins.</p> <p>Recruiting the right types of people.</p> <p>We try NOT to mix too many different nationalities and cultures, because then you don't have connectivity. . .something from my experience.</p> <p>Any half decent (in) State kids are committed 2 years out, so I feel we can get as quality of a player internationally.</p>
P13	<p>It's convincing kids and parents of the cost.</p> <p>I would rather have teams that are special people. I primarily recruit for team chemistry.</p> <p>It's recruiting players who want to come in and be a part of that (history), be disciplined, want to be challenged, and held accountable.</p> <p>Once you have that recruiting story and history of winning, you see a cycle of success.</p>
P14	<p>Convince kids they (have) got everything they need (here) to be successful.</p>

	<p>Overcome against other schools, and I think money is one way we can do that.</p> <p>Sell winning and culture and being a part of that.</p> <p>Find kids at lower levels or NAIA that are looking for a more competitive opportunity.</p> <p>For us it's gotta be a lot about location. . .maybe a bounce back kid (from D1 to D2).</p> <p>Money is the #1 factor.</p> <p>(you have to be) actively recruiting at a quality level</p>
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RQ5 What is the player development methodology of nationally ranked teams? (Is there a collegiate golf program so robust as to develop their players into a nationally ranked team? It is a given that teams have strength and conditioning programs, but do they have a sports psychologist or statistical tracking software available? Do these add-ons make a difference? Each program will show through a survey of descriptives, which is the “footprint” of their team.)

Appendix B.13 Participant Comments on Player Development Methodology

P1	
P2	<p>I build from the bottom up guy. ..to make my 10th guy good enough to whip the #1 guy.</p> <p>Taking care of business off the golf course so you can focus on golf.</p>

	<p>My job is to figure out how to make you better. . .to help you figure out and eliminate the distraction so we can be as good as we can be.</p>
P3	<p>Maybe that 6, 7, 8, 9 player is not as good right now, but it will push them to work harder.</p>
P4	<p>My old school (ways) you know, get in their face and (tell them) to get their act together. Anybody (else) sucks up to them and I don't do that.</p>
P5	<p>A lot of kids over my history, talented kids have come and gone simply because the character wasn't good, and the social things derailed them. They lost their talent. . .drive. . .work ethic, ability to sacrifice and do the things necessary to get better.</p> <p>We provide, in our case, a very structured program. . . requiring that they still gotta put in all that extra time on their own as well.</p>
P6	<p>More one-on-one time.</p> <p>When we are indoors we are looking at numbers.</p>

	<p>Upgame has been really good. . .I've always done my own kind of analysis.</p> <p>Things we do after a round to develop and see where we are. . and say this is your practice plan.</p> <p>It's development in the right way . . .you don't know everything, I'm no swing coach.</p> <p>Having those conversations and learning from other people and understanding how the kids' minds operates. . .then you point out the good things and the bad things.</p> <p>I don't call it development. . .it's just more of tackling certain things.</p> <p>That's where you find your numbers, right?</p> <p>That's where you shave everything off. . .you do that for 5 kids. . .makes a big difference in your 5 guys dropping 69s for you.</p>
P7	<p>If there's no stigma transferring down to D2.</p> <p>College golf is about playing golf. PGA tour guys played in 88% of their available events in college.</p> <p>Replace your 5th man with another #1 and it's probably a 3 shot swing.</p>

P8	<p>Put them in tough (weather) situations (to play), especially early in the Spring.</p> <p>Create connectivity.</p> <p>Sometimes it's about toughness and not your swing.</p> <p>So important to be a closer (in a competitive round), to envelop that mindset. . .we are dominating the last 4 holes.</p> <p>A coach is not gonna out-coach talent level to a certain degree.</p>
P9	<p>To be around each other ties more into a culture thing than what on actual skills gained on those indoor days. It just adds up to putting the work in and doing those things.</p> <p>College golfers are smart. . .they know what your motives are. . .you've got to treat them the right way. . .they've got to know you're all in.</p>
P10	<p>You want them to have success young when they come in.</p>
P11	
P12	<p>People wanna work hard and be in a better environment itself.</p>

P13	Plenty of talent out there. . .you gotta work it into your system. Takes time to get players in and convince them.
P14	Make sure the schedule is nicer, max out your swag a little.