

What makes for a successful transition from amateur to professional golf?

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Despite the allure that a professional golf career holds, earning a living from playing golf appears unlikely for most. Becoming a professional golfer offers little opportunity of upward social mobility and only a limited few hold a genuine chance to gain significant financial reward. Yet continually high numbers of golfers try to establish professional playing careers even though career opportunities are severely restricted.

More than 600 golfers worldwide turn professional on an annual basis after enjoying success on amateur golf circuits. However, a strong amateur record does not correlate necessarily with a successful professional career. Attrition rates in professional golf are alarmingly high, particularly in the preliminary career period, with more than 90% of those entering withdrawing within 3 years. Out-with the notional understanding of failing to be competitive, the reasons for this remain unexplored.

An on-going qualitative study is examining the importance of work readiness to career transitions into professional golf through the narrative stories of 8 male players. In considering players' subjective experiences of transition, it aims to provide a contextualized athlete perspective of the adaptation process and how athletic and non-athletic factors were considered and managed during this process. Consideration is also being given to how work readiness status impacts upon career duration.

It addresses 5 questions around what makes for a successful transition into professional golf:

- What readiness indicators do golfers use to turn professional and do they hold value in supporting their transition from the amateur game?
- What challenges do golfers face during early career transition into professional golf?
- How might rookie tour professionals best prepare for, and cope with, these challenges?
- Does work readiness at entry transition affect career longevity?
- How might work readiness be conceptualized in relation to entering the professional game?



At the study's mid-point, dominant themes are already emerging. The significance of career planning; establishing appropriate support networks; recognising personal strengths and weaknesses; establishing progressive personal development strategies; gaining personal resilience; and acknowledging risk are all prominent in the golfers' stories.

The researcher's interest in this area is both personal and professional. Having managed a successful high-performance golf programme for over 16 years that helped dozens of golfers turn professional, only a handful were able to make a living from competitive golf. Combining talent with a competitive edge and a strong work ethic appear not enough to allow a player to prosper in professional sport. Understanding better the requirements of elite professional golf should help in determining whether talented amateurs are ready to make a successful entry into professional golf and help practitioners support rookie-pros as they adapt to their new competitive environments.

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