

# Managing the Personal Brand of Professional Golfers: Strategies for Success

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*Personal branding is essential for athletes and in particular professional golfers. Professional golfers employ various experts such as sport psychologists, fitness trainers and specialist coaches in order to improve their performance. As a result, this has significant financial implications for players and having an established personal brand may assist them in gaining sponsorships. However, there is a lack of research in the South African context regarding the personal branding of professional golfers. To address this research gap, the present study aimed to explore the importance of personal branding for professional golfers and identify the strategies that can be implemented to enhance their personal brand. The study participants comprised of Professional Golfers of South Africa (PGA of SA) members, teaching professionals, and golf administrators, who were interviewed using a semi-structured approach. The findings of the study confirmed that personal branding is a crucial factor in the success of professional golfers. The identified strategies to enhance personal branding included improving golfer performance, enhancing physical attractiveness and differentiation, marketing everyday lifestyle, and effectively using social media as a communication medium. The study highlights the need for players, coaches, and managers to become more knowledgeable about the concept of personal branding to ensure success in their professional golf and better sponsorship deals.*

**Keywords:** performance management, personal branding, athlete branding, professional golfer

**JEL Classification:** M10, M31

## 1. Introduction

Branding, in essence, is a differentiating tool for businesses to stand out among competitors (Lamb *et al.*, 2018, pp. 238-267; Vițelar, 2019, p. 260). Branding can be viewed as an approach to managing consumer experiences and perceptions of your brand (Gad, 2016, p. 8). These experiences are facilitated by all the business practices and interactions with consumers (Müller, 2017, p. 509). Likewise, personal branding entail managing people's perceptions of an individual. Personal branding can be defined as methods of managing

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Article History:

Received 31 March 2023 | Accepted 6 June 2023 | Available online 19 July 2023

Cite Reference:

Roos, S.J. and Müller, R., 2023. Managing the personal brand of professional golfers: strategies for success. *Expert Journal of Business and Management*, 11(1), pp. 78-88.

the opinions about an individual's values, qualities, beliefs and actions in order to create their own unique selling proposition (Parmentier and Fischer, 2012, pp. 106-124; Potgieter and Doubell, 2018, pp. 1-13).

Sport has developed into a comprehensive entertainment industry that relies greatly on marketing to achieve success (Bauer *et al.*, 2008, pp. 205-226). According to Kaynak *et al.* (2008, pp. 336-357) sport teams need to adapt to the changing professional environment and adjust their branding techniques constantly to remain relevant. As a result, sport teams will differentiate themselves from their competitors and remain distinctively unique. According to Rein *et al.* (2015, pp. 147-178), sport teams are required to achieve success on and off the field. Carlson and Donovan (2013, pp. 193-206) highlights that the status and overall value of a team can be influenced by a favourable brand image. Sport teams need to raise their brand equity in order to adapt to the growing entertainment industry, and as a result, raise the value of their brand. Consequently, sponsorships will be more willing to get involved with teams with a better brand image among fans (Tsiotsou, 2012, p. 251). Likewise, professional sport athletes with a better brand image secure better sponsorship deals (Brogan, 2015, p. 5). Consequently, personal branding is vital for professional athletes for their overall financial well-being. Golf is one of the sporting codes where personal branding is crucial as it is individualistic in nature. Furthermore, sponsorships influence the progression of the golfer greatly. And sponsors are looking for individuals with a distinctive personal brand (Hodge and Walker, 2015, pp. 112-131). Personal branding is a vital component for professional golfers, in their pursuit of success, but it is important to recognize that it is one among several contributing factors (Roos *et al.*, 2022, pp. 378-399).

The aim of this study is to explore the significance of personal branding for professional golfers to identify strategies that can be employed to enhance their personal brand. There is a dearth of research regarding the personal branding of professional golfers within the South African context. This study aims to address this gap by providing valuable insights and guidance to professional golfers in developing and nurturing their personal brand. When professional golfers have an effective personal brand, they are more likely to be successful over a long period of time (Arai *et al.*, 2013, pp. 383-403).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Personal Branding of Athletes**

The prominence of well-known 'person brands' like Tiger Woods and Tom Brady have become apparent in a wide variety of sports (Parmentier and Fischer, 2012, pp. 106-124). Arai *et al.* (2013, pp. 383-403) argue that many professional athletes acknowledge the importance of developing and managing their personal brand and have employed sport brand management consultants to assist. Moreover, Agyemang (2011, p. 137) suggests that athlete branding has become vital to obtain sponsorship agreements. Accordingly, many academics (Agyemang, 2011, p. 137; Arai *et al.*, 2013, pp. 383-403; Burgunder, 2016; Hasaan *et al.*, 2019, pp. 1-42; Na *et al.*, 2019, pp. 88-108; Väättäinen and Dickenson, 2019, pp. 244-264) started to research the topic of athlete branding.

Arai *et al.* (2014, pp. 97-106) defines an athlete brand as "a public persona of an individual athlete who has established their own symbolic meaning and value using their name, face or other brand elements in the market". An athlete brand is represented by a unique name, appearance and other characteristics (personality and image) that distinguish the athlete from other competitors (Parmentier and Fischer, 2012, pp. 106-124; Williams *et al.*, 2015, pp. 75-86). Hasaan *et al.* (2018, pp. 169-198) simplified the definition by stating an athlete brand consist of peoples' opinions about a particular athlete. There are various aspects that influence these opinions. Arai *et al.* (2013, pp. 383-403) developed the model for athlete brand image (MABI) that outline the most important aspects influencing athlete brand perceptions.

### **2.2. The Model of Athlete Brand Image (MABI)**

The MABI consist of three brand association dimensions for athletes namely: athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle. Athletic performance is determined by an evaluation based on the athlete's performance during the sport (Yu, 2017, p. 18). Arai *et al.* (2013, pp. 383-403) explain athletic performance as "an athlete's performance-related features, which are defined by athletic expertise, competition style, sportsmanship, and rivalry". Carlson and Donovan (2013, pp. 193-206) classify an athlete's expertise as one of the most significant aspects to influence an athlete's brand based on the ability to attract a lot of attention from the public. Arai *et al.* (2014, pp. 97-106) describe competition style as the athlete's specific characteristics

exhibited during the sporting competition. Sportsmanship is the ethical behavior of an athlete exhibited through fairness and integrity by respecting all aspects of the sport (Abad, 2010, pp. 27-41). Yu (2017, p. 12) suggests that rivalry happens within a sport when the two competitors have the same objective of being superior and the manner in which they conduct themselves during the competition. All of these aspects contribute towards the perceived athletic performance

Brogan (2015, p. 7) define attractive appearance as an athlete's physical attractiveness and body fitness on the field. In addition, personal style, fashion or "any outward unique features" can also contribute towards an athlete's attractive appearance (Arai *et al.*, 2014, pp. 97-106). Constantinescu (2016, p. 360), argues that the attractiveness of a fit body will always sell which is why the athletes can use this to build their brand image perceptions to a great extent. Furthermore, an athlete's brand image will be enhanced if their body fitness matches their sporting code and/or the athlete has a unique personal fashion style (Yu, 2017, p. 12). All of these physical attractive appearance elements contribute towards an athlete's brand image (Arai *et al.*, 2014, pp. 97-106).

Arai *et al.* (2014, pp. 97-106), define marketable lifestyle as the off-field marketable features that an athlete possesses. Constantinescu (2016, p. 360) argues that athletes may choose to concentrate on marketing their life story to enhance the perception of their brand image. This approach can be more effective, as it allows individuals to connect with the athlete's daily experiences, rather than solely emphasizing their exceptional sporting accomplishments. Furthermore, athletes can use personal branding to showcase their values and skills by getting involved in a variety of social activities and businesses outside the sporting code (Arai *et al.*, 2014, pp. 97-106; Johnson, 2019). Athletes' brand image perceptions will also be influenced by their relationship efforts relating to their interaction with fans, sponsors and the media (Väätäinen and Dickenson, 2019, pp. 244-264). As a result, an athlete's life story and relationship efforts will determine whether society will view the athlete as a role model worth emulating which will influence their athlete brand image (Brogan, 2015, p. 7; Yu, 2017, p. 12).

### **2.3. Branding Strategies of Professional Golfers**

Hodge and Walker (2015, pp. 112-131) conducted a qualitative research study with professional golfers on the PGA, Web.com and Champions Tour. During this study, the perspectives of professional golfers on athlete branding were investigated. A player's personal brand is heavily dependent on their performance (Hodge and Walker, 2015, pp. 112-131; Jensen, 2012, p. 49). Many players in this study indicated that performance is the key to developing and maintaining their personal brand. As a result, performance of the player's act as a prerequisite (Hodge and Walker, 2015, pp. 112-131) and plays a significant role in the exposure that sponsors generate (Jensen, 2012, p. 40).

However, numerous participants identified that they do not want their appearance to take the attention of their performance on the course. In saying that, it was evident that one of the most successful brands on the PGA tour, Ricky Fowler has perfected his brand. Fowler displays a wonderful example of having an attractive personal style. According to Hodge and Walker (2015, pp. 112-131), Rickie Fowler did not have the best athletic success early in his career on the PGA tour. However, he has a very successful personal brand due to his unique external appearance. He wears bright coloured clothing and is world renowned, however, he has not won many tournaments on the PGA Tour (PGA Tour, 2020). According to Hodge and Walker (2015, pp. 112-131), sport team branding is essential and personal branding of professional athletes has become critical. Consequently, athletes such as Tiger Woods and Michael Phelps have promoted their image successfully over time and has therefore reaped the rewards. This entails them having a unique identity, and characteristics that are different from one another (Hodge and Walker, 2015, pp. 112-131).

According to Arai *et al.* (2014, pp. 97-106), building relationships with fans is essential in developing a successful personal brand. However, Hodge and Walker (2015, pp. 112-131) identified that the relationship that players have with their sponsors is regarded as more important than that of the brand-to-fan relationship. As a result, these relationships need to be managed effectively in order to achieve success over a long period of time (Hodge and Walker, 2015, pp. 112-131). According to Cousens *et al.* (2006, pp. 1-23), the relationship that athletes develop and maintain with corporate sponsors is essential to achieve success as a brand in the sport industry.

## **2.4. Branding Challenges for Professional Golfers**

Hodge and Walker (2015, pp. 112-131) noted that not many players have adequate knowledge on personal branding. Furthermore, it was stated that players are often not aware of what is required of them to develop a successful personal brand. Players admitted that they lack the necessary branding strategies needed as professional golfers. In accordance, Jara Pazmino and Pack (2022, pp. 1-18), state that building a personal brand is often regarded as a challenging task due to two main factors: limited time and insufficient knowledge of strategic brand development. Developing a personal brand was previously done by a players agent (Arai *et al.*, 2013, pp. 383-403; Arai *et al.*, 2014, pp. 97-106). However, Hodge and Walker (2015, pp. 112-131) argue that professional golfers are required to develop their own brand. Professional athletes often do not consist of adequate time in order to manage their personal brand. Mason and Duquette (2005, pp. 93-109) suggest that the career of professional athletes is temporary. As a result, athletes need to be aware of strategies in order to position themselves and their identity. It is essential for players to develop branding strategies, and be aware of possible opportunities and threats involved (Hodge and Walker, 2015, pp. 112-131).

## **2.5. Importance of Social Media as Branding Tool for Professional Golfers**

Johnson (2019) argues that social media offers endless possibilities for professional athletes to connect with their fans and promote their unique personal brand. Communication as a branding strategy is essential and the use of social media forms a strong part in this (Anagnostopoulos *et al.*, 2017, pp. 1-42). Social media platforms such as Facebook (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, pp. 31-53), Instagram (Anagnostopoulos *et al.*, 2018, pp. 413-438; Constine, 2017) and Twitter (Parganas *et al.*, 2015, pp. 551-568) is essential in the marketing of a personal brand .

Social media platforms are self-controlled publicity that athletes can utilise to give the world a glimpse into their personal life by showcasing what's important to them and what they are currently doing (Johnson, 2019). This can also be used to preserve and expand an athlete's personal brand and relevance in the market during temporary career interruptions caused by illness, injury or external disturbances like COVID-19 (Bredikhina *et al.*, 2022, pp. 212-227). Athletes can now target specific audiences with the use of social media. Furthermore, athletes are required to engage with supporters and businesses through social media (Constantinescu, 2016, p. 354). As a result, supporters may be able to relate to the marketable lifestyle that an athlete displays through these platforms. Athletes are required to engage with their audience on a daily basis and provide fresh and relevant content (Burgunder, 2016). According to Doyle *et al.* (2022, pp. 506-526), the use of self-presentation tactics, the type of content and the marketing orientation of the posts that athletes have on social media have a significant impact on fan engagement. This is vital for success as brands and sponsors often seek athletes with a large and engaged social media following to promote their products or services. Athletes such as Tiger Woods used their distinctive personality, qualities, and characteristics to create a memorable brand. This social media process started when he appeared on a television show at the age of three to showcase his incredible golf skills (Whiting, 2019, p. 5). According to Whiting (2019, p. 6), even after the scandal that Woods had, he still has a significant impact on television ratings.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1. Participants and procedures**

Bronfenbrenner (1986, p. 723) provided the ecological model that guided the social-constructivist paradigm of the study. Consequently, this formed the research design of the study. The data was collected and analyzed using the ecological approach by Bronfenbrenner (1977, p. 513). This approach originated in a biological context and developed into an interdisciplinary and integrative framework (Visser, 2007, p. 108). The ecological approach sees beyond the individual and identifies the importance of many role-players such as coaches and parents (Human, 2015, p. 17).

The participants that formed part of the research study consisted of PGA of SA members, PGA of SA teaching professionals and golf administrators. Semi-structured interviews were completed with 17 participants. The sample consisted of 12 PGA teaching professionals, three former and/or current Sunshine Tour players and two golf administrators. The inclusion criteria included teaching professionals who have qualified successfully, players who have competed or are currently competing on the Sunshine Tour and golf administrators actively involved in the golf industry. These types of interviews allow researchers to develop

an interview schedule, which consists of various topics related to the research question. As a result, the researcher may ask open-ended questions that ensures a friendly conversation that will provide the data needed (Seidman, 2013, p. 7). Semi-structured interviews offer a researcher the advantage of having a set format while still allowing for the incorporation of exploratory questions within the interview framework (Ellis, 2016, p. 62; Jones, 2015, p. 177). The design of the semi-structured interviews was informed by the researchers' expertise and the questions used by Hayman *et al.* (2014, pp. 959-974); Hodge and Walker (2015, pp. 112-131); Jorlén (2008, p. 66).

### **3.2. Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used during this qualitative study. This form of analysis identifies themes that form patterns during the data collection process (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). During this study the data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis is well-suited with the social constructionism paradigm of the study and is often used in qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp. 77-101). According to Corbin and Strauss (2015, pp. 1-431), thematic analysis allows the data from the semi-structured interviews to be grouped into smaller units. The social constructionism paradigm permits the researcher to reflect on the data, and as a result influence the construction of categories and themes.

## **4. Results and discussion of Findings,**

During the research study it was highlighted various aspects regarding the personal branding and its integral part in the success of a professional golfer. The importance of players developing a personal brand and maintaining this was noted by a number of participants. The branding strategies that aroused from the interviews were in line with literature (Arai *et al.*, 2013, pp. 383-403; Hodge and Walker, 2015, pp. 112-131) namely golfer performance, physical attractiveness, marketable lifestyle and social media use. Another theme that was prominent is the importance of personal branding for golfers.

### **4.1. Participant's Knowledge Of Branding**

The participants indicated a great deal of uncertainty when the theme of personal branding was raised. The term personal branding was not clear to many participants, and as a result, indicated the lack of knowledge by participants. It was required by the researcher to clarify the term, and once this was explained thoroughly, the importance of personal branding could be discussed.

Participants 2, 4, 6 and 8 indicated that they have knowledge on personal branding.

*Yes. [79:29, 85:44, 87:45, 90:40]*

Participants 1, 3, 5 and 10 indicated that they have limited to no knowledge of the term personal branding:

*No. [76:55, 77:50, 84:85, 86:36]*

Participants 7, 9 and 11 displayed a large amount of uncertainty when asked if they knew what personal branding is:

*Yeeeeees a little bit. [81:43]*

The semi-structured interviews with participants identified that their knowledge of personal branding is limited. Hodge and Walker (2015, pp. 112-131) agrees and notes that research on personal branding when applying it to athletes is limited. Furthermore, Arai *et al.* (2014, pp. 97-106) indicate that limited studies has been done with regards to athlete brand image. In addition, Kristiansen and Williams (2015, pp. 371-388) state that the body of knowledge on adequate branding strategies for athletes is limited. As a result, players, coaches and administrators may have to employ personal branding training from a young age in order to raise the knowledge of branding strategies amongst athletes, and in particular golf players.

## 4.2. Branding Strategies

Participants emphasised that if players want to develop and maintain a successful brand, they need to display the complete package to the public and possible sponsors. Furthermore, the aspects identified by Arai *et al.* (2014, pp. 97-106), such as the importance of athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle was evident in the data that was collected in the interviews.

## 4.3. Golfer Performance

It became evident in the interview process that participants believe that success on the golf course is a prerequisite for the development of a personal brand. Furthermore, participants indicated that a certain level of success is required before sponsorship deals will present itself.

Participant 9 believes that a player first need to be succesfull on the course and have a high level of athletic performance:

*I think its easier personal branding when you are at the top of your game [88:69]*

Participant 1 emphasised that a player needs to perform well on the golf course for sponsors to show interest:

*You really need to perform before the guys start to show interest in you [76:61]*

Participant 6 stated that athletic performance on the course may bring success to players. However, players need to be aware of personal branding and the influence it has on their career trajectory:

*Golfers are brands, you are a brand, mmm I'm afraid, yes you can win golf tournaments and you can make money winning golf tournaments, of course you can. [87:46]*

According to Jensen (2012, p. 49), developing a successful personal brand is highly dependent on the athletic performance of a player. O'Roark *et al.* (2010, pp. 131-144) indicates that in order for sponsors to show interest in a player, the player needs to consist of a high level of athletic performance. Hodge and Walker (2015, pp. 112-131) agree and suggest that athletic performance is essential in starting to develop a personal brand.

## 4.4. Physical Attractiveness

Participants indicated that the manner in which players present themselves to the public is essential to developing a personal brand. As a result, it was found that players who have a distinctive physical appearance may have a successful brand.

Participant 4 highlighted that the physical appearance of players is important:

*...take care of their physical appearance, how they dress, their haircut and so on.... [85:49]*

Participant 4 indicated that a player can develop confidence by simply having a good appearance:

*...it's as I said to you about me standing next to Retief Goosen with my old tatty bag, it's a confidence thing and its sort of like...what do they call it, neurolinguistic programming. You know if you smile, if you walk around all day smiling, eventually you are going to be in a good mood. So if you look good and you talk well, you're going to start believing that you're a good player to. [85:50]*

Participant 6 stated that players need to be aware of their brand and the influence it has on their career trajectory:

*But the majority of them, they are basically walking billboards. And certain companies and certain operations or whatever want to be associated with a player that has a good public self image. [87:46]*

Participant 2 emphasised that having a good appearance assist him in developing a quality personal brand:

*...keeping myself looking good as a pro and I've got my names and sponsor on the shirt. [79:32]*

According to Parmentier and Fischer (2012, pp. 106-124); Williams *et al.* (2015, pp. 75-86), the brand of an athlete correlates significantly to a player's appearance and image. This differentiates them from their competitors and raises the possibility for branding opportunities.

#### **4.5. Marketable Lifestyle**

Interaction with fans as well as sponsors was indicated by participants as essential to develop a successful personal brand. The manner in which players communicate with people was noted as being an integral part of a personal brand. As a result, players will develop relationships with individuals and therefore develop a quality personal brand.

Participant 12 indicated that interaction with fans is crucial in developing a personal brand:

*But also the value of interacting with people is having a conversation and having time to have a conversation with someone can go a hell of a long way, so I think it's definitely important. [83:71]*

Participant 3 believes that it is important to communicate with people and build relationships:

*You need to have the personality for it, and you have to be professional about it, you must not just be a taker, you must be a giver. So if you're giving me a million, what do you want from me, do you want me to wear your badge, am I playing with your clients, am I coming to dinner at your house, when your friends are there, you know, there's always a give and take so the ones that don't make it are always taking and they're not giving. [77:52]*

Participant 2 emphasised that it is about the role model a player portrays to the public:

*I would say personal branding from there, he's a great person, now people are going to latch on, which has helped him to play better which is improved his confidence. [79:31]*

Participant 11 stated that a player needs to behave in a professional manner in every area, on and off the golf course:

*I think a player needs to number one realize that his brand gets created around everything and anything that he does on and off the golf course [81:47]*

Participant 12 indicated that being a good role model and being courteous to people is important:

*...general manners, being courteous to people, and polite, and friendly, you know, to people at the golf course, giving your time, just to sign his hat do it with a smile [83:67]*

Furthermore, Hodge and Walker (2015, pp. 112-131), indicate that players need to be able to develop relationships with influential individuals that may assist in this brand-building process. Adler (2014) indicates that this process needs to start at an early stage in the career of golf players. According to Golf Monthly (2017), every player needs to be able to display different and unique qualities than their competitors. However, players need to stay true to who they are and not attempt to be somebody else.

#### **4.6. Social Media**

Participants stated that social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are important for players. According to the participants it forms a powerful part of a personal brand, as a result, participants indicated that players need to be aware of the information they share on these platforms. They indicated that players have a responsibility to be disciplined and not share inappropriate information.

Participant 10 confirmed that players need to be active on social media platforms:

*...social media, the oaks have to kill it. [86:38]*

Participant 6 indicated that the players that are successful have a good social media image:

*...social media and that have a very good social media persona out there, and profile and brand that they're promoting. How many of those top line brands will align themselves with those blokes. And unfortunately it's the hard truth, but if you are not putting yourself out there in a positive light, you are not going to be invited into bigger events and opportunities other than if you play your way in. [87:48]*

Participant 12 states that although he does not favour social media, he believes that this is a crucial part of marketing your brand:

*...obviously social media, I am not a social media person it took me, I never had Facebook I don't have Instagram I never had it, I have Twitter its part of my contract with Titleist from when I was a junior, because I have been with them since I was 15 and I was part of the thing and I wasn't happy with it initially but I kept it strictly professional, it's got nothing on my personal life, it's just golf its golf and the brands.... So I do use social media platforms of course! [83:74]*

Participant 5 agrees that social media is important for players:

*...look, social media is now an incredibly big platform, I think that's where it starts. The more people see you, the better, so, social media makes an absolute big impact according to me. You obviously also have to pay attention, you now have a great responsibility, you can't post anything on social media right now. But I think when you're out there, making people aware of the tournaments you're playing and where you are now... [Translated from: 84:88]*

Social media platforms are one of the most important branding strategies organisations and athletes may employ (Filo *et al.*, 2015, pp. 166-181). As a result, athletes are presented with the opportunity to establish, develop and market their personal brand effectively (Geurin, 2017, p. 357). According to Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016, pp. 133-145), every post that an athlete makes on social media is important, and this forms part of their communication to the public.

#### **4.7. Importance Of Branding**

According to one participant, there are many professional golfers that do not comprehend the importance of personal branding. Each participant stated that gaining sponsorships by means of developing a personal brand is vital for a professional golfer. In this sense, Potgieter and Doubell (2018, pp. 1-13) states that individual success is determined by the manner in which they brand themselves, and not only their skills, interests and motivation. It was emphasised that players need money to succeed. In order for them to receive the financial backing they need it will be required of them to attain a sponsorship of some kind and they will only receive this if they establish a successful brand for themselves.

Participant 3 emphatically agreed that personal branding for professional golfers is essential:

*Well you won't survive if you don't have that [77:51]*

Participant 12 agreed and said that the importance of personal branding is essential to each player and for the sport:

*Where will the money be in sports if no one watched it, zero, if you're not treating people who watch it and the people who are involved making this happen, well like how dumb are you, for me it's you got to value those people immensely because without them there is nothing, there is no golf, there's no value to it without people watching it. So to answer your question brand image is very important. [83:65]*

Participant 4 emphasised that personal branding is important for players:

*Definitely yes. It really is. [85:45]*

Participant 9 stated that players need to market themselves:

*Yes, I do agree with that. Marketing, I agree with that 100%. You market yourself in a different way. And marketing in golfing terms is...spending a lot of time sucking up. And that's really what it is. [88:70]*

The importance of athletes developing their personal brand has become evident, and essential to achieving sponsorships (Hodge and Walker, 2015, pp. 112-131). Tiger Woods is one of the most loved golfers in the world (Whiting, 2019, p. 5). He has developed a brand that is unique and that increases tournament attendance worldwide (Golf Monthly, 2017). Furthermore, the Nike Golf ball experienced excess sales of \$9.9 million, with a profit of \$103 million due to Tiger Woods endorsing the product (Chung *et al.*, 2013, pp. 271-293). Tiger has over the years developed such a successful brand, that even after the off-course scandal in 2009, he still has a strong brand (Whiting, 2019, p. 5). According to Chung *et al.* (2013, pp. 271-293), he earns more of the course than on it. In 2007 Tiger Woods earned a staggering total of \$100 million dollars in



endorsement deals (Sirak, 2008). Consequently, if a player has a successful personal brand, many opportunities may arise to gain sponsorship (Hodge and Walker, 2015, pp. 112-131).

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights the significance of personal branding as a critical determinant of success for professional golfers. The primary contribution of the study is the identification of personal brand management strategies for professional golfers. These strategies include performance improvement, enhancing physical attractiveness and differentiation, marketing everyday lifestyle, and effectively using social media as a communication medium. In addition to delivering a certain level of athletic success on the course, displaying an attractive physical appearance, and maintaining a relatable lifestyle, professional golfers are also required to effectively employ social media as a means of communication. Players need to be aware of methods to attract stakeholders and gain the support to be able to pursue a career as a professional athlete. The study emphasizes the necessity for players, coaches, and managers to acquire in-depth knowledge of personal branding strategies, ensuring a successful professional golf career and fostering lucrative sponsorship opportunities.

The limitations to the study include the restricted sample size and exclusive reliance on interview-based data collection. The inclusion of a broader sample paired with alternative data collection methods could have contributed to the acquisition of more comprehensive and diverse data. Future research should include an evenly distributed sample of different types of participants namely: teaching professionals, administrators, and players from all parts of South Africa. Future studies should also consider using a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative questionnaires for comprehensive insights. Furthermore, longitudinal studies can examine the long-term effects of personal brand management strategies and the athlete's career success.

**Author Contributions:** Stephanus Johannes Roos: Writing - Original Draft, Methodology Conceptualization, Resources. Re-an Müller: Review and Editing – Original Draft, Writing – Abstract, Conclusion and Recommendations.

**Acknowledgements:** The Authors would like to thank all participants who participated in this study.

**Funding:** This research was funded by the North-West University.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors state that they have no conflicts of interest.

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