

Enneagram Training Intervention's  
Effect on College Golfer's Scores

by

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether MAC-based sport psychology training intervention would help improve college golfers' performance in tournaments.

The instrument used was the WEPSS Enneagram Personality Profile. The study used a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design to compare tournaments scores in six men's golfers from Fall 2017 (before intervention) to Spring 2018 (after intervention).

Improvement was significant, although this improvement could be attributed to a number of factors. Results were significant enough to suggest that continued research be conducted implementing the Enneagram into MAC-style sport psychology.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent decades, sport psychology has gained traction as a popular field of study, but for most of the field's early years, its focus has been too narrow – addressing symptoms and providing surface-level solutions to bolster athletic performance, often to the detriment of the athlete's holistic well-being. The issue is especially pervasive in elite sport programs, where the sole aim is to achieve excellence in one's sport. This researcher's personal interest in this problem was birthed from his journey from athlete to coach, where he traveled the road from childhood competition to the elite-levels of professional golf. The researcher experienced a phenomenon where his years of striving for excellence in his sport resulted in the neglect of other important areas of his well-being.

If we ask a bigger question – namely, what is the purpose of sports – most would agree that sports exist to improve our quality of life, but not as an end in themselves. In other words, the reason one plays soccer extends far beyond the sole purpose of being the 'best' soccer player in the world.

The point of this study is to further establish an emerging, more holistic approach to sport psychology, the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) based approach – a style that seeks to improve athletic performance through developing self-awareness, mindfulness, and personal growth. More specifically, this study examines the usefulness of a tool known as the Enneagram in establishing higher levels of self-awareness and related levels of golf

improvement. The long-term goal of this study is to test the effectiveness of this tool in the realm of sport psychology.

### **Statement of Problem**

Can Enneagram training intervention successfully build upon the MAC-based sport psychology training method and lower college golfers' golf scores?

### **Hypothesis**

The MAC intervention will not improve our athletes' golf scores. The players will gain self-awareness and a healthier relationships with their sport, but ultimately, these changes will take time to translate into lower golf scores.

### **Operational Definitions**

#### ***Independent Variable – Emotional Intelligence***

The independent variable in the study is 'emotional intelligence', which has been defined as the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018). It is the golfers' emotional intelligence that is being altered intentionally through the course of this intervention.

#### ***Dependent Variable – Scores***

Players' progress is measured by their golf scores. Improvement or success will be defined by comparing players' scoring averages from before and after intervention. Lowering golf scores indicate improvement while rising scores will indicate stagnation or digression.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines the Enneagram's potential effectiveness in the realm of sport psychology. Section one examines the evolution of sport psychology and its shift from a performance-based enterprise, using the Psychological Skills Training (PST) method, to a more holistic approach for its athletes. Section two examines the importance of 'emotional intelligence,' especially as it relates to those in late adolescence and early adulthood. Section three considers the effectiveness of a tool known as the 'Enneagram' in regards to its ability to foster emotional intelligence. Section four draws conclusions about how the Enneagram can be used as an effective tool for engaging the new landscape of sport psychology, namely the MAC approach.

#### Evolution of Sport Psychology

The field of sport psychology has changed measurably since its beginning and has made significant strides in the past two decades. Traditionally focused solely on athletes' competitive performance, the field has progressed to address the athlete holistically. Because athletes are people *first* and deserve to be understood in a comprehensive manner, clinical sport psychology (CSP) was envisioned by Gardner and Moore in 2001 as "the application of knowledge and methods from the various substantive fields of psychology for the promotion and maintenance of psychological and physical health and well-being" (p. 176). Essentially, they recognized that sport psychology is about much more than masking internal symptoms for the sake of athletic performance. They recognized, firstly, that the well-being and health of the person is more important than athletic success, and that in fact, the well-being and health of a person is actually

*critical to* the long-term, sustained success in a sport. Gardner and Moore (2004) recount the study of sport psychology from its inception:

Historically, efforts to enhance athletic performance have been most clearly related to the development of social cognitive theory and early skills training models of cognitive-behavioral interventions. By this approach, [the PST method], athletes seek to develop skills in the realms of goal setting, imagery/mental rehearsal, arousal control, self-talk, and routine in effort to establish control over internal processes such as thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. This is all in an attempt to create the ideal performance state (p. 708).

As the field of sport psychology progressed, experts and researchers began to recognize that while this approach, known as the Psychological Skills Training (PST) method, could provide temporary benefits and improve athletic performance, its results weren't sustainable, and that this approach even neglects the overall well-being of the athlete. Gardner and Moore, considered to be leaders in the field, developed a new approach, known as the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment based model (MAC). This approach promotes an awareness and acceptance of the internal state of the athlete, suggesting that "internal states need not be eliminated, changed, or controlled to facilitate positive behavioral outcomes." A better way, as suggested by Gardner and Moore, is to develop "strategies and techniques that target the development of mindful (nonjudgmental) present-moment acceptance of internal experiences."

This method also seeks to clarify valued goals and attention to responses to external cues (Gardner & Moore, 2004, p. 707).

In the words of Moore and Bonagura, this form of psychology “advises against viewing sport psychology as a discipline intended solely for the enhancement of performance” but that those in the field should be “apply[ing] sound theory and strategies from multiple sub disciplines of psychological science . . . for those wishing to enrich their functioning in a variety of life domains” (Moore, Bonagura 2017, p. 176).

As this approach to sport psychology has gained traction over the past 20 years, action research studies have been undertaken, even studies specific to golfers. A study by Bernier, Codron, Fournier, and Thienot (2009) builds on previous research styles which traditionally utilized the PST methods. This study sought to implement the MAC approach into traditional PST styles of training to test the performance benefits of mindfulness in a group of elite junior golfers at a training academy. Of the seven elite junior golfers tested, four were in the intervention group with three remaining in a control group (only engaged in PST methods). By the end of the year-long study, all four of those in the intervention group had improved their national ranking and reached their performance goals, while only two in the control group had done the same. These individuals also increased their scores related to activation, which is defined as “the process by which individuals heighten their physiological and mental states in situations where they need to increase their energy, motivation, or focus” more than those in the control group (Durand-Bush, 2001, p. 119). The golfers’ coach emphasized that four golfers in the intervention group took advantage of their mindfulness and acceptance skills, becoming “more aware and lucid in their approach to golf” (Bernier, 2009, p. 328).

At the heart of this shift in sport psychology is an increasing emphasis on emotional intelligence. The primary focus of mindfulness and acceptance-based (MAC) models, according to Gardner and Moore, is to promote a *modified relationship* with internal experiences (i.e., cognitions, emotions, and physiological sensations), rather than seeking to change their form or frequency (Gardner & Moore, 2007). It suggests that optimal performance does not require the suppression or controlling of internal states, but rather, requires a non-judging, moment-to-moment awareness and acceptance of one's internal state (Gardner & Moore, 2012).

The MAC approach suggests that a holistic understanding and acceptance of one's self and inner workings is the healthiest and most sustainable route to athletic performance. With emotional intelligence as a key factor, the next section explores importance of this trait – particularly for those in late-adolescence and early-adult stages of life.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

To begin understanding the importance of emotional intelligence in late adolescence, we look to a study examining the correlation between emotional intelligence and academic success. Emotional intelligence has been defined as “one's ability to accurately identify and understand one's own emotional reactions and those of others . . . and to use them to form good decisions, to act purposefully, and to involve effectively in a given situation” (Tom & Ansia 2017, p. 329). A recent study sought to determine the correlation between emotional intelligence and test anxiety among adolescent students. Previous studies had shown counseling sessions to help in reducing test anxiety, so it was thought that a higher level of emotional intelligence would be a key factor in reducing test anxiety. As predicted, it was found that those with higher emotional intelligence have lower testing anxiety and generally perform better in school (Tom & Ansia 2017).

Another study sought to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among undergraduates in Nigeria. Prior research had discovered a strong positive correlation between life satisfaction and academic success. Past researchers had noted that “students who are satisfied with life are more likely to perform better academically, develop positive attitude towards school and teachers, and experience better physical and mental health” (Afolabi & Balogun, 2017, p. 247). Nigeria is a country where evidence of life satisfaction is low, and so the study sought to find means of enhancing life satisfaction. The three traits studied were emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and psychological security, and of these three traits, emotional intelligence was the strongest predictor of one’s life satisfaction. It was indeed found that a strong correlation exists between emotional intelligence and one’s life satisfaction. From this study, we can begin to conclude that emotional intelligence can somewhat predict his or her academic success, engagement with life, and overall well-being, and that it is a quality that is highly valuable and worth the effort in imparting in our youth.

In sport psychology as well as in all of life, emotional intelligence has proven to be an important trait. The next section examines research on a tool that aids in emotional intelligence and has recently come into mainstream consciousness – the Enneagram.

### **The Enneagram**

The Enneagram is a tool that has tremendous potential to bring awareness and emotional intelligence to the people and organizations who engage with it. It gives its users a framework for understanding the human experience, and it is truly becoming a catalyst for positive change in the lives of many. Defined, the Enneagram is an ancient system of personality development represented by nine character orientations. These orientations are composed of habitual patterns of perception, emotion, and behavior, and by exploring their orientation, individuals can identify

and transcend the strengths and limitations of their value systems and work toward an integrated worldview conducive to others' growth (Bland, 2009). It can assist us in identifying the core desires, fears, and basic needs that influence our capacity for relational connection to people and to the world around us. It also helps us understand our motivations for engaging in behaviors or strategies that disconnect us from meaningful relationships (Louden-Gerber & Duffy 2008).

One study conducted that highlights the Enneagram's potential sought to predict its participants' problem-solving styles based on their Enneagram typology. The study tested the Enneagram against the well-established KAI test, which has proven to accurately assess one's problem solving style. The study chose 127 Enneagram-tested participants and had them take the KAI test. The results showed that the Enneagram overwhelmingly was able to predict one's problem solving style, as researchers noted a strong correlation with the well-validated questionnaire on the KAI test. It was stated that "the results of this study contribute to scientific validation of the Enneagram" (Nathans & Van der Meer, 2009, p. 76).

Another study that confirms the Enneagram's potential dealt with cardiovascular disease. It was hypothesized that a person's risk for cardiovascular disease could be accurately predicted according to one's Enneagram typology. The hypothesis was confirmed, adding credibility to the Enneagram as a tool for addressing emotional awareness and for engaging growth (Komasi & Saroush, 2016).

A third Enneagram case study was run by a boutique consulting firm specializing in the Enneagram at a leading national law firm. The aim of this study was to "measure the effectiveness of various human resource interventions based on the Enneagram personality system" (Weeks & Burke, 2009, p. 7). The study began by assessing personality types and developing hypotheses regarding related behavior, then proceeded to develop and implement

strategies for dealing with this behavior. The results of the intervention appear to indicate that where the Enneagram-based strategies were implemented, there was a change in the financial performance of that group for the better. This can be contrasted with groups who did not elect to implement the strategies – who experienced no significant changes in financial performance over the same period. This study appears to provide support for the use of the Enneagram as a tool for increasing personal and group effectiveness in the workplace (Weeks & Burke, 2009).

As leaders consider the latest trends in sport psychology, they will find the new landscape placing a premium on emotional intelligence. This is good news when considering the wide-ranging benefits that possessing this quality provides. Those seeking to coach and lead well in competitive athletics will do well to explore new means of fostering emotional intelligence. With higher levels of personal awareness, individuals will thrive in their athletic endeavors as well as in other areas of life. While limited empirical research has been done using the Enneagram, its widespread effectiveness suggests that it a highly suitable tool for imparting emotional intelligence, and especially in the realms of modern sport psychology.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

#### **Design**

This study used a quasi-experimental pretest/posttest design. Players from both the men's and women's Goucher Golf College team participated in a personality assessment and three rounds of training seminars, which were designed to help players interpret test results and gain new insights. Seminars were held from October 2017 to February 2018 (after Fall season, before Spring season). Players' tournament golf scores were averaged before intervention (five tournaments) and after the intervention (five tournaments) to determine whether intervention was impactful.

#### **Participants**

Participants in this study included ten golfers from the Goucher College Men's and Women's golf team. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 20. All ten golfers were freshman (it was the program's inaugural season). Seven players were American, while two were non-U.S. residents.

#### **Instrument**

The instrument used in this project was a tool known as the Wagner Enneagram Personality Style Scales (WEPPS). The Enneagram is a unique personality test that assigns test-takers a percentile score on each of nine, distinct personality styles – ultimately assigning one primary 'type'. The test suggests a balanced person can resourcefully tap into any of the nine styles, depending on the given situation. Unknowingly, people will rely too heavily on one

perspective and can become ‘stuck’ in a singular way seeing and relating to the world. This unbalanced way of relating leads to brokenness in all areas of a person’s life, i.e. work, relationships. The Enneagram seeks to provide perspective and balance, ultimately restoring a person’s sense of ‘wholeness’.

According to Mental Measurement Yearbook, several dissertation studies have provided evidence of criterion-related validity for the Wagner Enneagram Personality Style Scales (WEPSS). Some of these studies measured the similarities between Enneagram ‘types’ and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) ‘styles’. Over the past 20 years in the United States, the standardization samples used for norming and for determining validity and reliability evidence were primarily participants in Enneagram workshops. Both internal consistency and test-retest reliability are reported to be satisfactory.

### **Procedure**

Players initially arrived at school in the Fall and played a semester’s schedule of tournaments. When players initially arrived, they were administered the Wagner Enneagram Personality Style Scales (WEPSS) assessment. They proceeded to compete in five Fall tournaments, where scores were logged. After the Fall tournament season is over, players took part in three Enneagram training seminars with a sport psychologist who is experienced with Enneagram training. The three sessions were as follows:

#### *Session One:*

In the first session, the sport psychologist explained the Enneagram’s purpose and began to show examples of how it can apply to golf. The purpose of the initial session was to have players begin to connect with the Enneagram and for them to see how it can apply to their lives

and their sport. They began to build trust with the team's sport psychologist and began to see their need for further investigation into their own personality nuances. Example quotes of PGA and LPGA tour players were presented to help players connect with their need for this training. After the session, coaches had one-on-one meetings with each player, briefly introducing them to their Enneagram type. Players were introduced to the idea that their unique way of relating to golf, while having benefits, can hold them back if they remain unaware. For example, an 'Enneagram 5' was confronted with their propensity to mentally "check out" during practice; this golfer will need purposeful reminders to *engage* with the task at hand – whether preparing or competing. The Enneagram's suggestions provided coaches with a less offensive means of addressing growth areas in players.

#### *Session Two:*

The second session focused on explaining the nine Enneagram personality types, giving the players *perspective* on the many different lenses through which they and their peers see the world. The knowledge that they do in fact see the world differently than most of their peers was intended to have an initial liberating effect. Realizing that there are other ways to be and to think will encourage the athletes to open his or her mind to further Enneagram training. An interview with a PGA Tour golfer was shown – The team's psychologist and coaches lead a discussion about this player and the level of self-awareness they demonstrated. The connection between self-awareness and confidence began to be made.

#### *Session Three:*

Nuances of the Enneagram were explained in greater detail. Athletes were introduced to their resourceful characteristics as well as their non-resourceful characteristics. This part of the

intervention became uncomfortable and more difficult to receive, as players began to face the ‘blind spots’ and ‘dark sides’ of their personalities. They began to realize unhealthy and exaggerated ways that they have been relating to the game of golf. Based on their Enneagram score, each player was assigned a task for the following weeks and to work on over the Winter Break. These assignments are strategically designed to touch the players’ soft spots, or areas for growth.

*Additional Training:*

In addition to training seminars, coaches held a minimum of three individual meetings to walk players through what they are learning. Specific questions were answered and advice tailored to each individual based on their Enneagram profile.

*Post Intervention:*

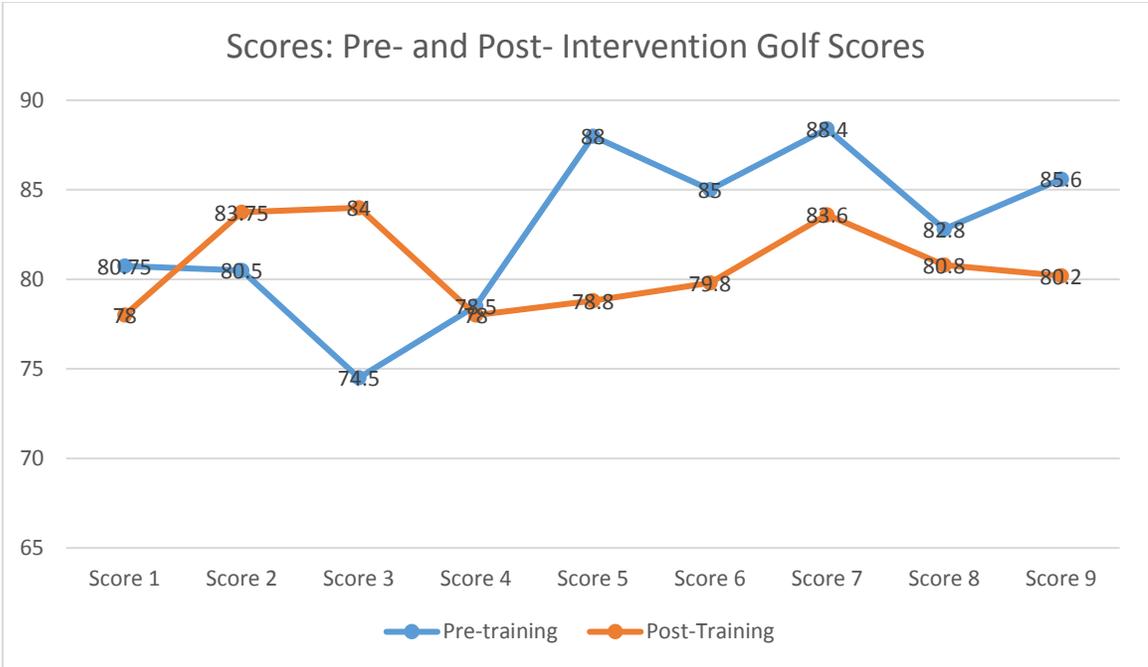
In the second semester, after the intervention, players competed in their Spring season (consisting of five tournaments), and scores were logged. The degree to which players’ scores improved, stagnated, or worsened determined whether the intervention was successful.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

Before exploring results, an important reminder is that lower scores indicate better performance in golf. The analyses indicate that a comparison of the scores before and after sport psychology intervention were significantly different  $t = 2.14, p < .05$ , the mean score after intervention being lower (80.76) than those before intervention (83.07). Overall when the pairs of scores across nine rounds of golf were compared, the post-test mean became lower toward the end of the time periods, with the final five pairs showed improvement; three of which showing significant improvement from before to after the intervention. On the whole, scores before the intervention were relatively unstable, and even rose (got worse) as time went on. Scores after the intervention were more stable and consistent, and were also lower (better) than scores before the intervention (Figure 1).

The analysis compared scores across 18 different rounds of golf – nine before intervention and nine after. The first four pair scores (pre- and post-intervention) do not indicate that the intervention had any positive impact, with the third  $t(3) = -2.943, p < .05$  even suggesting a negative effect; however, after these first four pairs, the results clearly indicate a positive trend post-intervention. The fifth pair improved significantly  $t(5) = 3.043, p < .05$ , as did the sixth  $t(6) = 3.399, p < .05$ , and the ninth  $t(9) = 5.823, p < .05$ . The seventh and eighth pairs also improved, but not significantly. The trend of improving scores from beginning to end may suggest that the intervention gradually took root and that the effect became stronger as time went on.



## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The null hypothesis, that sport psychology training intervention would not have a beneficial effect, was not supported by the results of this study. On the whole, golf results significantly improved after the intervention; six of nine team rounds before intervention averaged below 81, while only four of the nine after intervention did. Furthermore, four of the nine rounds before intervention were above 85, while zero of the team rounds after intervention reached as high. While there were threats to validity, the significance of the improvement suggested that the intervention played a role in the improvement.

#### **Theoretical Consequences**

Findings of the study support the idea that the Enneagram and related training interventions may be helpful tools that supplement and further build out the Mindful-Acceptance-Commitment Based model of sport psychology. To this point, the MAC-approach does not have a standard accessory or tool, but considering its primary aim to awareness and acceptance of ones thoughts and emotions, the Enneagram proved again in this study to be an appropriate tool.

#### **Threats to Validity**

Threats to validity lie in the fact that each tournament was played on a different course in different conditions. This makes it somewhat difficult to compare rounds to one another. It should be noted that even though this is a real threat to validity, it is also common to judge a golf round based on how far above or below 'par' a players score is, regardless of course. In other words, a score of 78 carries a similar weight regardless of the golf course on which it was scored.

It would be expected (or at least hoped) that players' scores would have improved after a semester of intentional practice and coaching, regardless of sport psychology intervention, but there were also factors working against this expectation – namely, the difference in weather from first to second semester. Most every tournament round in the Fall semester was played in perfect scoring conditions (mild temperatures, low winds), where the tournaments in the Spring semester were mostly played in substandard conditions (cold temperatures, wind, ice, snow, etc.). So for the sake of the experiment, we can conclude that increasingly difficult playing conditions counteracted the effect of natural improvement from first to the second semester. With outside factors effectively neutralized, we conclude that the null-hypothesis was disproved.

### **Connections to Previous Studies/ Existing Literature**

The literature review showed other studies working toward greater self-awareness (mindful-acceptance-commitment based approach), but there have not been any that used the Enneagram specifically with golf. There are Enneagram studies that predict the performance in a law firm, those that predict blood pressure, among others, but there are not other studies that are related to sports.

### **Implications for Future Research**

There has been very little research or even application of Enneagram in sports contexts, and I believe these studies are called for. Future research should include Enneagram application in different sports as well as using different measuring metrics. Although score in golf is the simplest measure, longer-term studies that focus on character development would be highly telling. Questionnaires measuring self-awareness may be pertinent, as we have already

determined that higher levels of self-awareness are good, but other methods of measuring should be considered as well.

### **Conclusion**

This study was successful in that we saw the Enneagram play a meaningful role in helping players to develop and improve—as reflected in their improved golf scores. Though this introductory study lacked the depth to precisely identify the Enneagram’s correlation to the observed improvement, the results suggest that further studies using the Enneagram in sports should be conducted – particularly in conjunction with efforts to continue expanding the MAC-based sport psychology approach. This style of may well be the long-term future of sport psychology as it focuses on the athlete as a holistic person. In the short term, the Enneagram provides an important step forward in applying the MAC approach to the landscape of modern sport psychology.

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