

**Player Development Leadership Council**

James R. Pond

Department of Exercise, Health, and Sport Sciences, PennWest University

EXSC 9150: Evidence Based Professional Portfolio I

Dr. Marc Federico

November 4, 2024

### **Abstract**

The PennWest Professional Golf Management Player Development Leadership Council (PDLC) serves as an innovative program within the Professional Golf Management (PGM) curriculum, designed to develop leadership skills essential for advancing golf performance and instruction. This program focuses on equipping future golf professionals with critical competencies in communication, strategic thinking, and mentorship, all aimed at enhancing player development and instruction. Through a combination of workshops, seminars, and experiential learning, the PDLC empowers participants to design, implement, and evaluate golf performance programs that address both technical and mental aspects of the sport. The PDLC's emphasis on leadership in golf instruction not only supports the Professional Golfers' Association's standards but also prepares graduates to take on impactful roles within the golfing community, promoting holistic player development. Key outcomes of the program include improved self-efficacy, refined teaching methodologies, and an enhanced ability to lead effective player development initiatives.

**Keywords:** professional golf management, player development, leadership council, golf performance, golf instruction, PGA, leadership development, sports education, mentorship, golf professional training

**Meta Description:** The Professional Golf Management Player Development Leadership Council (PDLC) is a leadership-focused program within the PGM curriculum, aimed at enhancing golf performance through skills physical development, technical skill development, psychological development, and tactical approaches. Through experiential learning, workshops, and seminars, the PDLC prepares aspiring golf professionals to create and lead effective player development initiatives aimed at helping peers complete the requirements for the PGA's Player's Ability Test.

### **Player Development Leadership Council**

The Professional Golf Management Player Development Leadership Council (PDLC) is a targeted initiative aimed at enhancing golf performance through leadership and developmental programming within the Professional Golf Management (PGM) program. The PDLC is designed to cultivate essential leadership competencies among participants, focusing on creating impactful player development programs. Rooted in both leadership theory and practical application, the PDLC emphasizes skill-building for aspiring golf professionals, including communication, strategic thinking, and mentorship skills. By fostering a community that encourages peer-led instruction and collaborative learning, the council seeks to elevate members' abilities to support diverse golfing populations, ranging from youth players to advanced amateurs who seek to complete the Professional Golfers' Association of America's (PGA) Player Ability Test (PAT).

In alignment with the core objectives of the PGM program, the PDLC operates as an incubator for leadership talent within the context of golf performance. The PDLC's framework includes regular workshops, seminars with established golf professionals, and opportunities for hands-on experience in program creation and facilitation. Through guided leadership activities, participants build the skills necessary to design, implement, and evaluate golf instruction programs that address both technical and mental aspects of the sport. Key performance indicators for the PDLC include participant growth in self-efficacy, improvements in teaching techniques, and effective leadership in player development initiatives.

The PDLC contributes to the broader goals of the PGM by ensuring that graduates possess not only the technical skills needed for professional success and the leadership acumen to drive innovative growth within the golfing community. This aligns with the PGA's

commitment to growing the game of golf through instruction, emphasizing the importance of developing adaptable, future-ready professionals.

### **What the Player Development Leadership Council Does**

The members of the PDLC serve as facilitators to programming designed to support their peers in successfully completing the PGA's Playing Ability Test (PAT). This test requires an aspiring professional to shoot a 36-hole passing score that is equal to, or less than, two times the course rating plus fifteen. Course ratings are an estimate of what a scratch golfer (a golfer with a handicap of 0) would shoot on a good day. For many courses, this number is between 69 and 72. The PGM Program at PennWest California hosts an event in the fall and the spring at Nemaacolin Country Club where the course rating is 73.1 (a difficult course), requiring players to shoot scores of 80 and 81 (a 36-hole score of 161) or better, to pass. Over the past few years there has been a decline in the number of students passing the PAT in traditional PAT events. The PGA now allow the scores from the first 36 holes of college and amateur tournaments to be submitted as PAT rounds. With the new alternatives for submitting scores, there has been a decrease in the number of golfers taking PATs, thus a lower number of students passing the PAT in PAT events. The PennWest PGM's goal is to return the pass rate of PennWest PGM students to a number greater than 25%, which is approximately 5% higher pass rate than the national average of 20% of participants passing at a PAT event. The PennWest PGM once approached a 40% pass rate, and while this is unrealistic at this time, it does serve as a testament to the type of student and the active role they played in their own development as players.

### **How Does the Leadership Council Address Player Development**

The PennWest PGM PDLC utilizes the four pillars of player performance to facilitate activities that promote better play. The four pillars are: The Physical, The Technical, The

Tactical, and The Psychological – which collectively allow a player to be physically in shape to maximize performance (reasonable cardiovascular endurance, strength, range of motion, speed, and power), technical skill to execute the various shots needed to play a round of golf at a competitive level, the tactical knowledge to know when to use certain shots, understand the patterns and predictability of the individual player's game, and finally the ability to manage stress, anxiety, and excitement throughout a round to maintain predictable results and steady state.

### **My Role**

As the author of the graduate-level Exercise Science and Health Promotion concentration in Advanced Golf Performance Training, I integrated the concept of the four pillars of player performance to help personal trainers and golf professionals better support their athletes and establish baseline knowledge to prevent practitioners from unintentionally promoting patterns that lead to injury. The four pillars approach allows me to oversee the programming and provide direct instruction and mentorship to the PDLC. My role is to help them discover their own pathways to player development by providing additional experience writing programming, teaching lessons, and tracking player performance. This supports the PLDC as emerging leaders who have already successfully completed the PAT requirement toward PGA membership and who have expressed a desire to hone their skills as teachers and coaches of the game.

### **The Team**

PDLC members are the core of the program. At the program's inception the two initial members were Owen Reichelderfer and Cole Villa. Both are seniors in the PGM Program who came back their senior year to play on the Men's Golf Team. They are both exercise science majors with a golf performance concentration. Their roles are tracking data from rounds turned

in by PGM students, oversee practice and write programs to support players on their journey to passing the PAT.

Assisting with oversight of the program and to add support to the PDLC are Justin Barroner, Derek DeJidas, and Kyle Bennett. Justin is the Chair of the department of Exercise, Health and Sport Sciences, he is PGA Certified Professional and the original author of the Player Development Program, as well as a PGM graduate from the PennState PGM Program. Derek DeJidas is a PGA Member and fellow faculty in the PGM Program. Derek brings a background in business, having an MBA from PennWest. Derek is also a PennState PGM graduate. Kyle Bennett is the men's and women's golf coach at PennWest California. Kyle is also a PGA Member Professional and promotes opportunities for players from the club team to participate in multiple events a year and shares his teaching and coaching activities to the PDLC to use for their own programs. Kyle is a graduate of the Cal U (now PennWest) PGM Program.

### **Technology and Tools to Support Programming**

The Forge, the name given to the indoor facility, is a dedicated space for all things golf. Students in the PGM Program, and members of the men's and women's teams, utilize several pieces of equipment and technology for practice and training when the weather is less than ideal outside. The most prominent feature is a 1200-square-foot artificial putting surface in the middle of the room for putting and chipping throughout the year. There are two simulators in the space, one is an optic based overhead mount from AboutGolf and the other is a Trackman 4 radar-based launch monitor that allows facilitators to record data on clubhead speed, launch, club path, face angle, carry distance, total distance, angle of attack, and many other objectively measured data points. SAM (Science and Motion) PuttLab, which tracks the putter in 3D to see how the player utilizes the tool, if there is loft added or taken away, the path of the putter, the tempo of the

stroke, the distance the putter travels back and through, and how the data compares to tour averages. There are three hitting bays to work on swing changes without the influence of ball flight, a necessary tool for changing motor programs since the brain tends to associate desirable ball flights with the executed motor program, even when the program was inefficient or not easily repeatable. There is also a full club repair station to adjust, disassemble, and reassemble equipment to match swing characteristics with the player's needs

### **How PDLC Aligns with My DHSc Core Elements**

#### ***Vision***

My vision is to positively impact the lives of others by improving their quality of life on and off the golf course. The PDLC aligns with this vision by providing another to leave my mark on the game that has given me so much. As a golf professional, I realized I would have a limited impact on the game through the mentoring of future professionals as assistants and interns. This provides another way for me to positively impact others who will leave their mark on the game. It is an extension of my work beyond the classroom and golf instruction.

#### ***Mission***

Utilizing the four pillars of player performance as a vehicle to feel stronger, manage stress better, and find purpose in the process for improved quality of life. While the PDLC is not the initial demographic I planned on working with, it does provide additional opportunities to help the games of future professionals and have the skills learned also contribute to improved stress management in their lives and work away from the game.

#### ***Core Values***

My core values are Service to Others, Family, and Love. This project aligns with these core values as teaching and training are ways to serve others, helping them be better leaders, play

better, teach better, and have more faith in their own abilities as teachers and coaches. When you approach service to others in this manner, you find your family, your chosen family. I believe many teachers see their students as their “children” in some sense of the word which makes them both family and people you care about – aligning with the core value of love.

### ***Guiding Principles***

My guiding principles are Inspire, Coach for Success, and Leave Positive Lasting Impressions.

My guiding principles align closely with my core values and extend into everything I do, including my leadership project. The PDLC not only works on coaching the members of the PDLC but also all those participating in the Player Development Program. If we succeed as a group, we will inspire, coach for success, and leave lasting positive impressions that continue our work forward through the acts of others.

### ***Research Foci***

My research foci align with the four pillars of player performance, which support the work of the PDLC and golf-specific training for all demographics through physical training, technical skill development, tactical approaches to playing by utilizing the player’s strengths, and psychological elements for mindfulness and the maintenance of the player’s state.

Physical training for golf performance has implications on quality of life away from the course, reducing frailty and improving balance in older demographics, improving body awareness and coordination in our youngest demographics, while supporting healthy lifestyles for every player in between.

Technical skill development increases the proficiency of the player moving from the primary skills of swinging the club to successfully adapting to conditions affecting the shot (uneven lies, different lengths of grass, use of different clubs, and navigating wind or other



natural elements impacting the shot). Technical skill development includes approaches to modify motor programming for improved proficiency and performance. How do players learn and change motor programs? Knowing what changes to make to produce desirable ball-flights is important, but how those changes are learned and established for use under pressure is even more important. Newport (2016) expressed the importance of deeply focused work without interruption, which is one of the practice approaches needed to develop repeatable swings that do not break down under stress. Cooke (2016) dives into different forms of practice for skill development including block, variable, and interleaved practice which allow for pattern formation and recall in a round of golf.

Getting tactical refers to the identification of strengths, weaknesses, and normal patterns for a player. Knowing how far each club goes, the player's dominant shot shape, and what shots they are most comfortable with allows the course to be broken down into a plan that utilizes the player's strengths and reduces the number of shots that fall in their list of weaknesses. Broadie (2014) demonstrates the concepts of tactical approaches in his book *Every Shot Counts*, which is supported by the work of Hunt (2014). The statistics used for strokes gained in tour events are based on Broadie's work and provide players with objective data on their strengths and weaknesses.

There is a blend between tactical approaches and psychology for golf. In this gap, there is a need for habit formation that allows the player to remain process-driven and stick to their plans. Iain Highfield (2017) looked at pre-shot routines to shift thinking toward process-driven rather than results-driven. Additional habit formation concepts from BJ Fogg (2020) and James Clear (2018) are leveraged to make the processes automatic, leaving executive functioning free to manage the repeated decision-making required in a round of golf.

Psychology for golf includes mindfulness, managing state, and the differences between process-driven and results-driven athletes. It is the purpose of my continued work as a golf instructor, educator, and PGA Professional. Prior (2023) is one of the individuals who looks at the phenomena of psychology on golf performance through mindfulness and player habits. Once players reach a high enough proficiency in their physical ability, skills, and understanding of what to do and when to do it, their mind becomes the difference maker. Golf is hard. It is one of the hardest sports ever created, requiring the activation and coordination of multiple body segments to produce a significant amount of force in less than two seconds. The force produced in the golf swing must be directed onto a round projectile with an incredible amount of precision to control the direction, distance, and curvature of the golf ball to eventually sink it in a hole that is potentially hundreds of yards away. Bad shots happen to the best in the world, and it is how they bounce back from the bad shots that separates the good from the great. Sticking to a plan, following a consistent process, and having breathing exercises and mindfulness practices to manage anxiety and excitement, are ways to improve the golf games of proficient players and help them manage stress and anxiety when away from the course.

### ***Current Alignment of the PDLC and the DHSc Portfolio***

The PDLC has provided an amazing opportunity to align my portfolio's core elements with my purpose as a golf professional and teacher. The program will continue to grow and improve as the elements become more defined and specific to the needs of each player. Currently, the learning management system, Desire to Learn (D2L) Brightspace, is housing content in the community shell for the Professional Golf Management Program, which includes submission folders for scorecards, practice routines, workouts, and round data to be evaluated. As more data is collected, programming will improve to support athletes even more as

individuals – shifting from circuit-style practice and training to individualized programming that addresses the needs of the individual. Ideally, the doctoral work will add to an academy style approach with individualized instruction, supervised practice, and structured plans that promote development of the four pillars of player performance for each player.

### **Building Trust within the Team**

Trust is critical in any team, as explained by Simon Sinek in several of his TedTalks (2010, 2011) and Patrick Lencioni (2002) in the Five Dysfunctions of a Team. The biggest hurdle we have had to overcome with the PDLC is getting buy-in from the students. When we adjusted the Player Development Program to create more consequences (positive and negative) for actively working on their games, we noticed we got greater pushback from the collective student body. We still had the students doing what they were supposed to (who received rewards for their work) but we saw increased reluctance to participate from others. The activities needed to become student-driven to shift the culture since policy was not going to force the reluctant members of the group to do anything more than the minimum requirements.

By having students lead the programming, we saw more engagement, more rounds played, and better stat tracking, as this became the standard. Those who were reluctant to participate, play, and practice were now the outsiders, and eventually they participated more as they did not want to be left out. By rewarding the standard, we were devaluing the process. Now, students are building the trust by setting up rounds at courses in the area where those who are actively working and contributing get invited to join the group to play. The PDLC is taking detailed notes about who earns the privilege to go on these special trips, and they have made it a point to try to include a few students who are showing improvement to inspire their continued work.

The rewards and consequences require trust. Most of the criteria to be invited is objective, but we trust the PDLC to include the “captains picks” for students they see improvement in which could include upkeep of the facility and participation in events and activities or changes in their academic performance.

### **The Role of Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional Intelligence connects the group together. The PDLC is developing greater EI as they recognize what is going on in the lives of others and how they are managing their time, commitments, and challenges. This contributes to the “captain’s picks” to motivate those who may be struggling with challenges and are overcoming them, even if they are not the top individuals objectively. When developing skills as instructors, the students must read what is going on and how individuals receive and interpret the messages they deliver. Instructors must continually check for understanding and identify when to adjust the messages and approaches to best resonate with the player. This is a skill that requires practice, and the PDLC provides an additional avenue for practice.

### **Motivation**

With player development being integrated into the Professional Golf Management Program, it was easy to get buy-in and participation. With significant reward systems and consequences, students excited to work on their games were given ample opportunity to practice and play. Those reluctant to participate knew they had requirements to fulfill to remain in good standing. The PDLC and faculty utilized several leadership types depending on the player’s needs. Some players responded to coach-style leadership, while others required an authoritarian style that was clear and concise with the activities and requirements the player needed to complete. A collective belief that every player can successfully complete the PAT created an

energetic culture that inspired action from each student. As students became more active there appeared to be an increase in motivation to continue working toward their goals. It is still a work in progress, and the components of the four pillars still need more revision to fully support the mission of the PDLC fully.

### **Conclusion**

As worked progressed on this project, the need for more organization and improvement in time management became apparent. The calendar is still overfilled too easily, which has resulted in lower-quality outcomes. Additional, and improved, resources will allow for more delegated responsibilities, ultimately showing more trust in the abilities of the PDLC and allowing faculty to serve in the management roles they should be. Overall, the program is surviving but has not yet reached the point of thriving. The fall PAT event moved to a different facility, which many participants had not played or practiced on resulting in a lower pass rate. However, the results of the fall PAT allowed the team to see the gap in skill development that is independent of the requirements of the course. Improving the technical skill and the understanding when to use each skill will improve the quality of play regardless of the course being played. The program will add new elements of individual and supervised group practice to work on these skills and hold game plan sessions to establish tactical approaches to playing each course and the conditions affecting a stroke.

There is a drive to continue developing as a leader – with a strong focus on productivity. These are the types of books I enjoy reading and the summaries of books I listen to nearly every day. I look forward to reducing the load and requirements on my time so concepts from Cal Newport, Steven Covey, James Clear, B.J. Fogg, Napoleon Hill, Dale Carnegie, and Edward De Bono, among others, can be further integrated into my life, leadership, and teaching.

### References

- Broadie, M. (2014). *Every shot counts*. New York: Avery, Penguin Random House.
- Clear, J. (2018). *Atomic habits: an easy and proven way to build good habits and break bad ones*. New York: Avery
- Cooke, M. (2016). *Expert golfer: Truths on how to become one*. Authorhouse
- Fogg, B.J. (2020). *Tiny habits: The small changes that change everything*. Waterville, ME: Thorndike Press
- Highfield, I. (2017). *Osvea: Practical ways to learn pre-shot routines for golf*. Iain Highfield
- Hunt, R. (2014). *Pro golf synopsis 2014*. Orlando, Fl: Richie Hunt
- Lencioni, P. (2002). *The five dysfunctions of a team*. New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Newport, C. (2016). *Deep work: Rules for focused success in a distracted world*. New York: Grand Central Publishing
- Prior, R. (2023). *Golf beneath the surface*. Dallas, Texas. BenBella Books.
- Sinek, S. (2010, May). *How great leaders inspire action* [Video]. TED Conferences.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qp0HIF3SfI4>
- Sinek, S. (2011, April). *First why and then trust* [Video]. TEDxMaastricht.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qp0HIF3SfI4>