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# An Approach to the History of Golf: Business, Symbolic Capital, and Technologies of the Self

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## Abstract

The connection between golf, businesspeople, and notions of class is common-place in the mass media, but a topic not yet explored in the social sciences. This article seeks to historically and sociologically trace back the association between business and golf by looking at the history of this sport in three nations: Scotland, England, and the United States. I explore the creation of rules of etiquette, the introduction of the handicap, and the socioeconomic composition of golf clubs throughout the nineteenth and early-20th century. In theoretical terms, the article advances Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital and Michel Foucault's idea of technologies of the self.

## Keywords

golf, symbolic capital, technologies of the self, business, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault

On May 31 1998, an article published in the Business section of *The New York Times* claimed the existence of a mathematical correlation between golf skills and business proficiency. The study:

compare(d) the golf handicap<sup>1</sup> of a group of corporate chief executives, [. . . ] to their companies' stock market performance over three years, [finding] a clear pattern: if a chief executive is a better than average golfer, he is also likely to deliver above average returns to shareholders (Bryant, 1998).

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In 2001 the magazine *Fortune* reported that: “no one knows how much companies spend on golf each year, but it is clear [that it is] in the billions and rising” (Colvin, 2001). Likewise, an article published in the magazine *Newsweek* in 2005 explained, “more and more Business Schools offer classes on golf [. . .] a common element of corporate life, so students learn how to handle themselves on the green” (Di Meglio, 2005). These few examples illustrate a narrative recurrently expressed in the mass media about golf, a discourse that associates this sport with businesspeople. The connection between this sport and the business realm inevitably raises questions: why is golf linked to the business world? Has golf always been associated with businesspeople? Could the history of golf tell us something about this connection?

This article seeks to historically and sociologically trace back the association between business and golf. To do so, I analyze the development of golf in Scotland, England, and the United States. I analyze these nations because of the role they played in the creation of modern golf. The first rules of the game, for instance, were penned in 1744 in Scotland (Green, 1987). In the case of England, this nation was a driving force behind the codification of the game as well as in its early global expansion. In fact, the internationalization of golf went hand in hand with the development of British imperialism. The first golf clubs erected outside of the United Kingdom were established in India (Bangalore 1820, Calcutta 1829, and Bombay 1842). More golf courses were subsequently constructed in Ireland (Curragh 1856), Australia (Adelaide 1870), Canada (Montreal 1873), South Africa (Cape Town 1885) and China (Hong Kong 1889) (Green, 1987). Regarding the United States, the connection between business and golf was cemented in this country. Therefore, a transnational and historical analysis is needed to explain the association between golf and the business world.

The article examines these three nations in regards to the creation of rules of etiquette, the introduction of the handicap, and the socioeconomic composition of golf clubs, during the nineteenth and early 20th centuries. In theoretical terms, the article makes use of concepts developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, theorists that seem irreconcilable in their understanding of power and their methodologies (Cole, Giardina, & Andrews, 2004; Mills, 2003; Reed-Danahay, 2005; Tomlinson, 2004). However, Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic capital and Foucault’s idea of technologies of the self proved to be complementary tools at examining the history of golf.<sup>2</sup>

## Theoretical Frame

Pierre Bourdieu’s work looks at issues of status, distinction, and social class, and how these elements build complex structures of power (Bourdieu, 1978). From the vast armor the French sociologist developed I will only focus on the concept of capital, particularly in its symbolic form. Bourdieu’s theory does not conceive capital solely as financial assets. By contrast, capital may take multiple dimensions, such as cultural, social, economic, and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1986). These different forms of capital represent resources individuals possess, accumulate, and exchange in order to augment their hierarchical position in society. Cultural capital, for instance, means knowledge

proficiency, which goes far beyond the abilities to read, write, and resolve mathematical problems. “Most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment” (p. 244). Cultural capital hence includes ways to speak, manners, and aesthetic appreciation.

Social capital is conceptualized as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources structured around durable social relations, of reciprocal acquaintance and identification. This type of capital is a form of membership in a group, “which provides each of its members with the backing of the collective-owned capital, a credential which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248-249). Individuals use their social capital to trade and obtain a myriad of resources, for instance emotional support or financial help. Capital in its economic form means any effects that represent wealth. ‘Economic capital is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights’ (p. 243).

Symbolic capital is formed by cognitive structures that allow individuals to recognize and accept hierarchical relations in society. It permits social groups and agents to perceive and legitimate multiple levels of hierarchies, either in the form of notions—for instance developed/underdeveloped—or social positions—upper/lower classes. The main form of profit originating from the possession of symbolic capital is the notion of distinction, which results from a deliberated accumulation of other types of capital—social, economic, or cultural—and the exhibition, intentional or not, of it. A group or person endowed with a high amount of symbolic capital, and consequently distinction, may possess the power to renegotiate boundaries in their fields of action, that is, fashion, scientific knowledge, sports, economics, or international relations.

Symbolic capital can be accumulated either by individuals or by other forms of social arrangements, for instance academic institutions or social clubs. Bourdieu explicates that symbolic capital can acquire an institutionalized state, “the institutionalization of it, by customs and rules of dress, sumptuary laws, etc. tends to constitute ‘status groups’ (orders, nobility, etc.) by constituting as permanent and founded in nature certain de facto differences, and by establishing mechanisms destined to assure their perpetuation” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 337). This form of capital legitimizes status groups by providing permanent elements of distinction,

enabling one to intervene effectively in current struggles for the conservation or augmentation of symbolic capital, that is, for the power of nomination and of imposition of the legitimate principle of vision and division, universally recognized in a determinate social space. (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 336)

This struggle Bourdieu refers to is not an epic battle, but a fight experienced on a daily basis. In other words, social groups permanently battle with each other to reinterpret or maintain social orders, from academic spaces (Bourdieu, 1988) to sport activities (Bourdieu, 1978). Symbolic capital is constantly used to reinforce visions of the world or to be more precise ‘visions of the vision of the world, principles of classification’ (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 337). The historical transformation

golf experienced throughout the nineteenth and early 20th century offers many examples to illustrate this argument.

Regarding Michel Foucault, this article uses the idea of the technologies of the self to elaborate on the forces that fuelled the transformation of golf from a popular leisure activity in 18th-century Scotland, to an upper-middle and upper class sport associated with business communities in early 20th century United Kingdom and United States.

Foucault's intellectual work investigates how the emergence of modern institutions was preceded by the development of professional/scientific discourses about 'normality' and 'abnormality', that is, health-illness, decency-immorality, and reason-madness (Mills, 2003). Foucault is particularly interested in explaining the relationship between the historical transformation of scientific practices and the materialization of ways of being. Professional knowledge and the infrastructure that emanated from it (for example, prisons, hospitals, and asylums) can be linked to specific historical logics. The French philosopher argues that the process of modernization which many spheres of human life experienced in the last centuries has created diffuse, but powerful mechanisms of control and domination (Smart, 2002).

These oppressing practices have appeared in the form of powerful behavioral norms. The latter are reinforced by the development of technologies, which are "defined in terms of techniques as well as knowledge that carefully fabricates—or creates—individuals" (Cole et al., 2004, p. 212). In other words, technologies shape individuals by promoting the internalization of social norms that eventually become self-policing practices. Foucault illustrates this argument with the Christian idea of confession, a practice that seeks to purify individuals through the public rejection of indecent thoughts (Foucault, 1988). Therefore, individuals are constantly reproducing cultural understandings of decency and normality, even in their most private acts. Technologies of the self "permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and ways of being, so as to inform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perception or immorality" (p. 17). This concept is particularly useful to explain the introduction of handicapping rules in golf during the 19th century; I will expand this point later.

The combination of Bourdieu's and Foucault's theories may seem an ill-conceived project, particularly as these thinkers depart from different foundations. The way these scholars view the role institutions play in society represents a good example of their conflicting positions (Cole et al., 2004; Tomlinson, 2004). The problem of using these two thinkers together also resides in their mutual distrust. On the one hand, Foucault views sociology as part of the "sciences of men", which are scientific discourses associated with the process of rationalization and control Western societies have undergone in the last centuries (Foucault, 2002, p. 345). On the other hand, Bourdieu study of power structures within the academic field uses Foucault as an example of the type of academics who embraces a virulent anti-institutional standpoint because he has been deprived from scientific power, as well as the benefits the latter entailed (Bourdieu, 1988, p. xix). Despite these differences, I will demonstrate how the idea of the technology

of the self complements the concept of symbolic capital, to analyze the structural and cultural changes golf experienced during the nineteenth and early-20th century in three nations.

## Scotland

Golf has been played for a longtime in Scotland, to the extent that it is considered a Scottish creation. Until the late 19th century, however, the sport lacked a homogeneous set of rules; each club developed and amended a code individually. In fact, the first formal rules of the game were established in Leith, a seaside resort very close to Edinburgh in the mid-18th century, 1744 (Green, 1987). Despite the publication of this code, the game was still played on public land using all sort of improvised equipment, bets were a normal practice, and golfing matches were commonly followed by festive groups drinking and celebrating the outcomes on the course (Lowerson, 1994a). Hence, the publication of these rules did not have an immediate impact on the popular character golf had at the time.

However, this popular dimension was slowly transformed. In 1783, for instance, the Society of Golfers at Aberdeen included a reference to etiquette for the very first time in the history of golf. “While a stroke is playing none of the party shall walk about, make any motion, or attempt to take off the player’s attention, by speaking or otherwise” (The Rules of Golf, 1783). It is remarkable that the other existing golf clubs—such as St. Andrews, Leith, Bruntsfield, and Crail—did not include anything regarding manners in their rules. In the rest of the 18th century, I have not been able to find any other reference to etiquette or manners in the codes of the sport. By the turn of the century, in 1810, the Glasgow Golf Club expanded the notion of etiquette in its code, stating:

That every member who is a player, that is who has played twice during the season, shall make a match on the day when the club is played for, and play for it under the penalty of a bottle of rum (The Rules of Golf, 1810).

These small changes in the perceptions of manners simultaneously suggest a transformation in the way golf was socially conceived and the incorporation of technologies of the self; as this sport gradually became a vehicle for social improvement. In 1824 the Thistle Golf Club included a more detailed statement about code of behavior, “it may not be improper here to mention certain points of etiquette, which it is of importance should be observed by all who are in the habit of attending matches at Golf” (The Rules of Golf, 1824). In this section the rules required attendants to keep quiet, to walk after the players, and not to remove objects from the course. These rules were slowly adopted by other clubs, Perth included a similar explanation in its rules by 1825, Burmtisland did it in 1828, Edinburgh by 1839, and St. Andrews in 1875 (Rules of Golf). Yet, some clubs still did not mention anything about behavior in their rules until the very late 19th century, when the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews created a unified code.

**Table 1.** Number of Clubs Founded in Scotland: 1870-1910s

	Before 1870	1890s	1910
Number of clubs	40	111	79

Source: Lowerson, (1994a), p. 78

The frequency of rules regarding etiquette grew on a par with the increasing exclusion of the Scottish lower class from the sport. “The early history [of golf] does suggest that there was popular participation in the 18th century, [but] formalisation began to shift it toward being a middle-class preserve” (Lowerson, 1994a, p. 79). In the eighteenth and early 19th century, for instance, golfers played with all sorts of improvised clubs and frequently did it on public land. This type of practice gradually lost their legitimacy vis-à-vis proper accoutrements and regulated spaces (Collinson & Hoskin, 1994). A growing regulation eventually impacted upon golfers’ outfits. In 1814, the Edinburgh Burgess Golfing Society clearly established in its rules, “in playing for prizes, no competition to be allowed unless the parties are dressed in the uniform of the club” (The Rules of Golf, 1814).

This formalization of clothes and the importance gained by regulated courses—over improvised public courses—slowly excluded the lower sectors which were unable to afford the sport. Some private clubs accepted economically disadvantage golfers, yet these players had a second-class membership, which meant restrictions on their rights and free-work in exchange for time to play. “If the poor played, then they did so as the servants or the cleaners of an established, patronizing and self-regarding Scottish bourgeoisie” (Lowerson, 1993, p. 126). During the last decades of the nineteenth and the early 20th century golf clubs experienced a rapid rate of growth in Scotland. This expansion was connected not only to the steady transformation of the rules of golf, but also to the creation of an affluent middle-class, which developed as a result of the industrial revolution (Table 1).

The industrial revolution modified the way Scottish society was structured, by creating an affluent middle class, mainly integrated by commercial, industrial, professional and managerial men throughout the 19th century. This new group had enough disposable time and income to embark on diverse pastimes. Their affluent status, however, diverged from their position in society. They were neither part of the upper, nor the lower classes. They could not afford an aristocratic lifestyle, nor did they possess sufficient elements, such as rituals, codes, and traditions, to detach themselves from the lower class. Consequently, this group did not fit into the old hierarchical division of the Scottish society. These newly affluent groups were urgently in need of ways to exhibit their recently gained capital, particularly their economic assets.

It was in this moment of social reconfiguration that golf functioned as a vehicle to show the amount and types of capital that the new bourgeoisie had accumulated. The proliferation of private golf clubs meant that the game was played in spaces physically and socially delimited, which still resembled aristocratic private gardens,<sup>3</sup> and thereby

offered golfers the illusion of an honorable lifestyle. In the preface of *The Logic of Practice* Bourdieu argues, “conducts of honor, . . . , [are] the product of a more or less conscious pursuit of the accumulation of symbolic capital” (1990, p. 16). In many ways, golf clubs allowed Scottish players to exhibit the vast amounts of capital they possessed, for instance, in the form of lavish club houses, and exclusionary membership practices. In this regard, the expansion of golf in Scotland coincided with a growing trend for playing golf in worn-out clothes, a tendency that was presented as a symbol of the democratic spirit of the game (Lowerson, 1993). These casual clothes—the Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers suit—contrasted with the expensive equipment used and the sophisticated private facilities, emphasizing paradoxically the privileged economic position of golf players.

Another element which illustrates the connection between the formation of an affluent middle-class and the transformation of golf is the introduction of the handicap in the rules of the sport. Although diverse versions of the concept were used before the 19th century—mainly for betting purposes (Knuth, 2007a), it was not until 1898 that the notion became accepted in the rules of the sport, (Knuth, 2007b) albeit not without complaints. A surprised golfer commented at the time,

At St. Andrews [in Scotland], until a very few years ago there were no handicap prizes at all, [...] probably it may be true to say that there was no handicap prize in Scotland. [...] [*In the past*] the game used to be entirely a game of match-play; that handicap prizes were practically unknown (Hutchinson, 1900, p. 23).

The institution of the handicap in the rules of golf, indeed, separated the sport from its popular origins. I will elaborate more about the meaning of the handicap in the next section, as the English played a fundamental role in the development of this practice.

The steady introduction of rules of etiquette transformed golf into a more respectable pastime; the old version played in public spaces, with a pub-style atmosphere, was not part of the sport by the late 19th century. By contrast, golf clubs were private spaces offering a sophisticated and clean environment far from the factories and crowded city centers created by the industrial revolution. The fascination golf exerted among affluent groups was not only restricted to physical characteristics. The sport became identified with moral notions as well. For example, in the 19th century some golfers pointed out the moral value the score-card played in the game. The latter was a card where each player kept a record of their own score, without the intervention of a referee or any other player. Although the possibility to cheat was at hand, it was expected that players honestly count their strokes. This card represented a secular version of the Puritan idea of moral self-evaluation. “For many men the fact that this could be found in a milieu where they had a considerable degree of control undoubtedly made the golf club more palatable than their local church or chapel” (Lowerson, 1993, p. 128). The score-card illustrates how technologies of the self operated within golf, as the card worked as a self-policing practice promoting the internalization of moral codes.

The communities structured around golf clubs were another important aspect that attracted prosperous middle-class individuals. Most clubs established admission procedures that sought to maintain the socioeconomic and racial homogeneity of the community. Potential new members went through a process of scrutiny in which their social, cultural and economic forms of capital were verified; potential members were only accepted if the rest of the community agreed on it. Consequently, golf clubs gave members control over those with whom they wanted to mingle. Golf perfectly suited middle-class ambitions, privileging notions of status and exclusiveness. In terms of social stratification, the sport permitted affluent groups to exhibit the vast amount of economic and social capital they had accumulated; thereby, generating forms of symbolic capital. The latter allowed golfers to detach from the lower sectors, and move closer to the upper echelons of society.

To sum up, throughout the 19th century golf underwent a process of gentrification, implying the exclusion of lower sectors, which were regarded as rude, savage, and impolite. The introduction of technologies of the self and symbolic capital played a substantial role in this transformation. The former materialized into rules of etiquette, replacing the pub-style atmosphere with notions of restraint and decorum. On the other hand, the growing importance private golf clubs acquired during the 19th century, shows that this sport became a meeting point for people eager to preserve and augment their symbolic capital. These changes primarily benefited well-off middle-class golfers, who used the sport to cement their social position.

## **England**

Golf in England became a great success by the late nineteenth and early 20th century, as prosperous English middle class rapidly embraced the game. A similar process to that in Scotland triggered the popularity of golf in England, namely the creation of affluent managerial and business sectors. Table 2 illustrates the fast development golf experienced between 1850 and 1914. It shows that whereas only one club existed in the mid-19th century, only 20 years later, in the 1870s, a dozen clubs had been founded. By 1914, the game was extremely popular, as 1,200 clubs had been opened.

This rapid rate of expansion generated anxiety among many golfers. Some players were particularly afraid that the enlargement of the number of players and clubs could distort the “nature” of the game. This fear was accompanied by the fact that golf lacked a regulating body. All the previously published codes of rules only regulated the game in specific home clubs or in those clubs that freely accepted these same rules. It was in this context that the Royal Wimbledon Golf Club urged the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews to provide a homogeneous code of rules in 1885, realized in a booklet that was finally published in 1891 (Lowerson, 1993). It is noteworthy that despite golf being considered a Scottish creation, the English played a crucial role in regulating the sport. As part of this process of codification, the notion of handicap gained legitimacy, and consequently the Royal Wimbledon Golf Club “set out the rules for handicapping” in 1898 (Knuth, 2007b).

**Table 2.** Number of Golf Clubs in England: 1850-1914

	1850	1870s	1914
Number of clubs	1	12	1,200

Source: Lowerson (1993), p. 125.

Although some forms of handicap had existed in Scotland, mainly for betting purposes (Knuth, 2007a), this was not an integral part of the early game. By the dawn of the 20th century an amazed golfer commented, “the Englishman has gone in for handicap competitions to an extent which is an abhorrence to the old [Scottish] school” (Hutchinson, 1900, p. 21). The institution of the handicap in the rules of golf meant a complete rupture with the popular past of golf. Most popular games were based on elements of physical strength, masculinity, and ability. The best players in any popular game were those men who could perform it faster, who were stronger, and who were the most skilled participants. This has not been the case of golf since the formal establishment of handicap, because it detached golf from the strenuous and skilled spirit of most sports, moving it closer to a gentlemanly and fair play ethos. In other words, the handicap allowed individuals displaying uneven physical condition or golfing skills to play a competitive round together, which was not a feature found in many other games. This practice clearly went in the opposite direction from most sports from popular origins.

The new regulation brought golf closer to the vision of the upper-middle social sectors which had steadily taken control of the sport since the mid-19th century. Although the handicap did not eliminate the idea of competence from the sport, this rule certainly reframed it by introducing the notion of fair play. Regarding the latter concept Bourdieu indicates, “fair play is the way of playing games characteristic of those who do not get so carried away by the game as to forget it is a game” (Bourdieu, 1978, p. 824). In other words, the handicap moved the structure of golf toward perceptions of sportsmanship, in which restrained attitudes and manners were essential attributes of the sport. The handicap is also an interesting example to show how technologies of the self became part of golf. Competence took the form of self-improvement, as those players who wanted to become better golfers were playing against their own handicap in order to lower it. Hence, the notion of the handicap contributed to interiorize perceptions of improvement and purity among golfers.

The formalization of golf definitely contributed to detach it from popular practices, which were strongly rooted in perceptions of physical strength, masculinity, ability, and ultimately direct competence. Golf’s new identity was demonstrated in the impression it generated by the early 20th century. In 1902, a journalist described the sport in these terms: “certainly there is no other occupation in which the desire for self-improvement is so constantly present” (Lowerson, 1993, p. 127). The high cost of constructing courses was another factor that attached further notions of status to the game, as it was more expensive to construct courses in the English clay-based parkland

and meadows, rather than the Scotland's porous, sandy soil (Klein, 1999, p. 219). This economic aspect was accentuated by the conspicuous consumption that affluent middle sectors introduced to golf. Expensive equipment and sophisticated club facilities thus became symbols of prestige and distinction among the golfing community.

Not unexpectedly economic barriers stopped the English working class from embracing the sport at the same time. "[In the early 20th century] taking club subscriptions, balls and clubs, caddy and professional fees, transport and lunch together golf might typically cost around ten shillings a week—half an unskilled weekly wage" (Holt, 1998, p. 77). If wealth was not a sufficient factor to dissuade new players to join a club, there was another aspect to consider, namely time. At that moment, a game of golf required nearly two and a half hours (Klein, 1999). Apart from playing, golfers needed extra time and money to socialize in the clubhouse. Thus, it was not a simply matter of disposable income, but also about control over time, a highly complicated element for most workers.

The festive atmosphere of the public Scottish seaside links definitely faded away. "Knocking an old ball about with makeshift clubs on common land on public holidays, exalted by the prize given to the best-scoring fishwife by the Musselburgh Golf Club in 1810" (Lowerson, 1994a, p. 82) was no longer part of the golfing scenario in the early 20th century. In contrast, by the 1910s golf was widely recognized as the sport of affluent males from the urban middle class in the United Kingdom.

Golf offered a splendid opportunity to show the economic capital the bourgeoisie had amassed: in the form of specific garments, proper equipment, and private courses; and social assets: such as the social networks constructed inside golf clubs. These assets were eventually converted into symbolic capital. At the same time, the technologies of the self integrated into the game generated perceptions of self-improvement. The introduction of the handicap, for instance, clearly distanced golfers from other sportsmen and practices regarded as rude, such as football. There is an old English saying that goes: "football is a gentlemen's game played by ruffians." Golf hence was a pastime that allowed prosperous groups to exhibit their new position in society. These were some of the reasons that explain why the English bourgeoisie embraced the game.

To summarize, golf experienced a deep reconfiguration of its cultural meaning during the 19th century, particularly in the second half. The upper-middle class was crucial in this process, as they were looking for practices to cement their own place in society. This game allowed them to create cultural links with the upper classes, such as the beautifully gardened fairways and magnificent club houses that so much resembled aristocratic palaces, or the civilized manners fellow golfers displayed which also looked like the codes of conduct of noble gentlemen. The construction of private clubs and the regulation of equipment, the formalization of courses and behavior generated senses of exclusiveness, making golf a respectable pastime. In many ways, golf clubs allowed members to convert diverse forms of assets possessed into symbolic capital, which meant social distinction. Concomitantly, by the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries technologies of the self were incorporated into the game, offering ideas

**Table 3.** Number of clubs in the United States: 1888-1900

	1888	1896	1900
Number of clubs	1	80	982

Source: Green (1987), p. 24.

about superior moral codes. Golfers, therefore, not only transformed the socioeconomic composition of the game, but also the attitudes and dispositions required to play the sport.

## The United States

Although it is not clear when and where golf was first played in the United States, it is broadly accepted that St. Andrew's in New York was the first golf club to be formally founded in 1888 (Kirsch, 1998). The sport rapidly captured the attention of wealthy groups, which welcomed golf immediately. "(The) early private country clubs in the United States focused on cricket, polo, and the hunt, but in the 1880's the upper class eagerly embraced golf, which was safer than polo and better suited than cricket to casual conversation and informal business dealings" (Simon, 2007, p. 318). The expansion of the sport was incredibly fast; as Table 3 shows, between 1888 and 1900 nearly 1,000 clubs were founded.

The social context in which this development took place frames the amazingly rapid and widespread adaptation of golf in the United States. At the turn of the century the United States was experiencing not only a huge wave of immigration but also a rapid economic expansion. These trends impacted on the structure of society, particularly on the fast erosion of village and community life. The destruction of the old social fabric inextricably generated anxieties (Moss, 2001). In these circumstances golf provided many cultural elements which fulfilled the concerns of affluent groups. This sport permitted opulent sectors to establish cultural links with their revered British past (Ingham, 1978; Wyckoff, 1990). The fact that golf courses and club houses resembled aristocratic gardens and manor houses in the United Kingdom was not a mere coincidence. The British origins of this game implied a whole range of positive associations. These cultural connections became particularly significant during a period in which the nation was flooded with immigrants from all over the world. "Golf, a sport perceived as linked to the lifestyle of the Scottish and British aristocracy, possessed an aura of Anglo-Saxon-ness, in contrast to the pastimes of what one observer called the *swarthy, unwashed masses*" (Starn, 2006, p. 451).

The sport rapidly fascinated communities of prosperous businessmen as well as some quasi-patrician individuals. Two interesting examples which show the composition of early golfing organizations are the Shinnecock Hills Golf Club, founded in New York in 1891 by William K. Vanderbilt, and the Baltusrol Golf Club in New Jersey, established in 1895 by Louis Keller, publisher of the *New York Social Register*.

During this stage “American golf was a game for the cultured and wealthy members of society” (Varner & Knottnerus, 2002, p. 431). A parallel trend to the British case promoted the expansion of golf in the United States. Wealthy groups embraced the sport as it allowed them to exhibit the vast amounts of capital they had accumulated, not only in terms of economic capital reflected by lavish facilities and expensive equipment, but also in the form of social capital represented by the exclusive admission procedures and socially delimited communities. This process, as Bourdieu’s theory suggests, was essential to convert such assets into forms of symbolic capital. Simultaneously, the technologies of the self incorporated into the game offered mechanisms through which individuals could transform themselves, that is, rules of conduct and the handicap, generating ideas about moral superiority.

In 1901, at the Annual Committee of the incipient U.S. Golf Association, a member described in few words one of the key features of golf during those early years, “we shall admit there is one thing clear, that is that this game is played by gentlemen only” (Varner & Knottnerus, 2002, p. 437). In fact, the initial members of the Association constantly used notions of manners and behavior to call for the exclusion of poorer groups, such as caddies and professional players, which were assumed to lack courteous manners, proper aspect, and restrained attitudes. In the very late 19th and early 20th centuries golf was an activity for the upper sectors and was predominantly played in private venues (Napton & Laingen, 2008).<sup>4</sup>

An analysis of the geographical distribution of golf clubs in this early period corroborates the arguments here suggested. Most clubs were established around the urban north-eastern region, most concretely New York City, Boston, and Philadelphia. Other cities in which golf also became a fashionable sport at the time were Chicago, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, and Detroit (Napton & Laingen, 2008). “The location of golf courses reflected the urban wealth and decision-making hierarchy of the very late and early twentieth century” (p. 27).

The fascination golf created among opulent groups was strongly influenced by the possibility golf clubs offered to convert different forms of assets into symbolic capital, as well as the perceptions of moral superiority golf presented by means of technologies of the self. Golf allowed players to exhibit their wealth as much as their civilized codes of conduct. In many golfers’ view the sport required and promoted a “proper behaviour, control, obedience to the rules, concentration, accuracy, courteousness, and good judgment” (Varner & Knottnerus, 2002, p. 431). Those who played the game practiced a physical activity as much as developed superior social manners. The United States situation was comparable to the cases of Scotland and England; in all three places the specific characteristics attached to the game produced a self-improving sport, in which forms of symbolic capital reinforced the status of those social groups linked to golf. A process of symbolic capital institutionalization took place in these early golf clubs.

## **The Business Narrative**

In the cases of Scotland and England golf took off among affluent groups of business-people who emerged from the industrial revolution and to a lesser extent among aristocratic

sectors. The interaction of these two communities in golf clubs reinforced the link between the sport and notions of status. However, the relationship between these groups was not completely harmonious; some members of the nobility profoundly despised their business-oriented fellow golfers. By 1912 a gentleman sent a letter to the magazine *Golf Monthly* complaining about the stock-brokers in a golf club in London, because they “introduce the atmosphere of the speculative jobber and broker to the club room. They constitute themselves the bookmakers of the golf course, adding that business should be confined to quiet chats on the tee” (quoted in, Lowerson, 1993, p. 140). Despite such complaints the sport became strongly identified with business communities in Britain, to the extent that many golf clubs around Edinburgh were considered businessmen’s spaces (Lowerson, 1994a, p. 83).

In the United States the connection between the sport and the economic spheres was even stronger. Some of the key figures of the thriving business world in this nation were keen golfers, such as John D. Rockefeller, Charles Schwab, and Andrew Carnegie (*BusinessWeek*, 2001; Gordon, 1990, p. 79). Even more revealing, some clubs were clearly identified with particular business groups, such as the Century Country Club in New York, which primarily served the community of Jewish bankers of Wall Street (Birmingham, 1967, p. 345; Baltzell, 1985, p. 361). The fact that the United States lacked an aristocracy did not mean that all these golfers and golf clubs were considered equal. Country clubs indeed separated upper sectors from lower strata; however, distinctions between old-money and recently acquired wealthy existed within the community. These clubs “provided another convenient means for grading and sorting the upper class and its prospective candidates” (Ingham, 1978, p. 97).

It is worth noting that certain structural characteristics of the sport did contribute to make golf an appealing pastime among businessmen. As with any other game, golf promoted relaxation which brought about two outcomes. On the one hand, it introduced more friendly interactions in the business world. On the other hand, this casual scene offered the opportunity to form closer social ties, as people unwound and showed their emotions. It is true that many other sports or games might also have induced similar relationships; however, few games needed the amount of time a round of golf required to be completed at the time, approximately two and a half hours (Klein, 1999). This feature also provided business-players with plenty of opportunities to create rapport and discuss business matters in a round of golf. The introduction of the handicap—in Britain in 1898 and in the United States nationally accepted in 1911 (Knuth, 2007b)—allowed individuals from uneven physical condition and golfing skills to play a competitive round together, which was not a usual feature in other sports. All these peculiar aspects made golf an attractive pastime for many business communities, but the association between the sport and the business community went far beyond structural elements.

Some common features of the sport and the business realm were highlighted, bringing golf closer to the daily life of businessmen. Attitudes and elements such as competence, fighting against nature, risk taking, strategic thought, calculation, individualism, and trust were aspects emphasized by businessmen and golfers alike (Moss, 2001). Golf became, to a great extent, a metaphor of the businessmen’s daily reality, that is,

a correct swing needed a precise calculation of numerous factors such as distance and slope to reach the hole, while a successful deal required a correct calculation of the economic environment. A daring stand in business, as well as a daring approach on the golf course might save time and strokes. Bad weather in golf required a different strategy; equally harsh economic times might necessitate a novel plan. Miscalculations produced bad consequences, such as lost balls in golf and extra costs in business.

Ideas about modernization characterizing life as a struggle between humans and nature, then in vogue, affected views of businessmen competing with the economic environment and golfers seeking to conquer their course. This struggle was a titanic fight that could only be won through technological improvements, which either took the form of lighter and better equipment to conquer the golf course or heavy machines to transform the landscape (Klein, 1999). In this regard, in 1910 a row erupted between the British regulating authority—The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews—and the U.S. Golf Association. The former refused to accept the lighter and easier-to-use equipment developed in the United States, particularly the Schenectady putter. By the next year, the U.S. Golf Association decided not to accept St. Andrews authority, creating its own rules. Although the conflict was framed in terms of nationalistic discourses, “the time has come for the men of spirit who play golf in America to revolt against the tyranny of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews” (*The New York Sun*, 1911, quoted in Kirsch, 1998, p. 334), this disagreement indeed showed how powerful perceptions about technology were among golfers in the United States.

After the second decade of the 20th century, golf grew beyond the upper class, primarily among affluent managerial and business individuals. The case of the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania represents an interesting example to illustrate this trend. This region was famous because of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, an outstanding symbol of the relationship between business and technology. Before the 1920s the Lehigh Valley had two country clubs, which served enthusiast golfers from the local elite and few upper executives from the steel company. However, in 1920 successful local businessmen and some executives from the Bethlehem Steel decided to establish their own club, the Saucon Valley Country Club (Simon, 2007).

Although the senior Corporation officers [from the Bethlehem Steel] took the lead in organizing the [Saucon Valley Country] Club, local businessmen, professionals, and corporate middle managers numerically dominated the roster from the beginning. The businessmen included officers of local banks in the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company, and of the Lehigh Valley Railroad; principals of insurance and real estate agencies; contractors; successful merchants; and local manufacturers (Simon, 2007, p. 319).

The composition of the club demonstrates how appealing golf had become among business-people. The ideological link that identified similar characteristics in both activities, such as risk taking, calculation, analysis, trust, losses, and saving was indeed robust by the 1920s. Golf provided business-people with a metaphor to link

their daily business activities with their leisure pastime, in addition to the possibility of reinforcing their social position.

The [Saucon Valley] Country Club leadership adopted admissions procedures for new members from standard business and country club practices. A candidate for admission required written nomination by two current members. A secret membership committee investigated the candidate and posted his name in the clubhouse for two weeks (Simon, 2007, p. 320).

Although since the 1920 golf experienced a rapid expansion in the United States, especially in the north-central region, this growth did not change the main characteristics of the sport. For instance, during the 1930s “golf remained a sport for the wealthy and was associated with country clubs and other private golf facilities” (Napton & Laingen, 2008, p. 27). The association between the game and business communities was now well established. Golf in the early 20th century became strongly identified with the businesspeople, who used the sport not only to interact with other like-minded individuals and carry out economic activities, but also to cement their position in society. Certainly the link between business and golf has ebbed and flowed according to local and historical transformation, but many of the elements that led to its emergency at the end of the 19th century and the early years of the twentieth were still present by the 1950s, when the magazine *Fortune* published an article explaining the relationship between golf, businesspeople, and notions of class.

It is simply a fact of life that golf is one of the most delightful dodges yet discovered for multiplying contacts, for ingratiating oneself . . . with clients, and for generally enhancing one’s business prestige. . . . Theatres? Nightclubs? Blondes? Such gambits are usually obvious, often tedious, and sometimes downright offensive to the client. But an invitation to play golf at a renowned club . . . is something that can be proffered, and accepted, in the best of taste (Sheehan, 1954).

## Conclusions

Throughout the 19th century, but particularly in the second half, golf underwent a process of gentrification in Scotland. The formalization of rules slowly transformed the etiquette of the sport and delimited the spaces in which the game was played. This process increasingly excluded popular sectors, as the requirement of proper equipment and courses made golf a more expensive activity. In the last decades of the nineteenth and early years of the 20th century the sport experienced a rapid expansion, essentially promoted by the fascination golf generated among Scottish middle-upper and upper sectors. This enlargement in the number of golfing facilities and players was deeply connected with the social changes the industrial revolution generated, as

an affluent managerial class was in search for symbols to differentiate from the working class.

In the English case, the industrial revolution also created a wealthy middle class which did not fit within the old social fabric. They could not afford the aristocratic lifestyle nor did they possess enough symbolic capital to detach themselves from the working class. This group was urgently in need of practices and traditions to distance themselves from the poorer social sectors and to move closer to upper socioeconomic groups. In this context, private golf clubs offered prosperous golfers an exclusive environment, one that was both physically and socially demarcated. These spaces generated a sense of social belonging to well-off golfers, particularly as members came from the same socioeconomic position.

Regarding the United States, golf's rapid expansion was linked to the historical changes that took place in this nation at the time. This country not only experienced an extraordinary economic boom, but it was also flooded with foreign immigrants from all over the world. This trend generated anxiety among many social groups already established in the nation. Golf dovetailed with the moment offering the upper class cultural elements to deal with their social fears. The sport was strongly connected with Britain, which permitted upper groups to reinforce their cultural heritage. Golf also offered wealthy groups a platform to exhibit their assets. Economic capital was reflected in the form of expensive private clubs, and social capital was mirrored in socially homogeneous communities. During the first two decades of the 20th century, golf was essentially confined to upper sectors; yet, after the 1920s the sport grew among affluent middle groups linked to business activities. This characteristic strengthened a trend started in the United Kingdom, which had brought together the sport and the economic sphere.

The transformations golf experienced in Scotland, England, and later in the United States were clearly associated to mechanisms of capital reproduction and the assimilation of technologies of the self into the sport. On the one hand, throughout the 19th century golf underwent a process of privatization, as it moved from public land to members-only courses. Golf clubs increasingly worked as sites to preserve and augment the economic and social capital that the newly created middle-class had accumulated. Through mechanisms of selection, such as admission committees and costly equipment, golf clubs formed communities of affluent individuals who shared similar amounts of capital. This situation facilitated the opportunity to exchange assets within the club, for instance converting social into economic capital via marriage or finding economic help through the social network constructed at the club. In fact, "the convertibility of the different types of capital is the basis of the strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital, and the position occupied in social space" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 253). Golf clubs therefore offered a perfect site to convert and reproduce multiple forms of assets, promoting eventually the formation of symbolic capital and consequently distinction.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the socioeconomic transformation golf underwent also impacted upon the attitudes golf players were expected to display. The popular characteristics

of the game, such as the consumption of alcohol and the presence of crowds following duels, were replaced by practices that promoted self-improvement and decorum. Foucault argues that the technologies of the self “imply certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes.” (Foucault, 1988, p. 17) In this respect, the introduction of the handicap in the rules of golf, in 1898, modified the perception of competition. The latter was not conceived anymore as a battle among players, but as an individual fight against oneself to improve your own skills. In the same vein, the role of the scorecard secularized the Christian practice of the confession. The card was used to allow each player to count his own score, including the possibility of calling a penalty on himself, according to the rules of golf, without the need for referees. Finally, the increasing importance codes of etiquette gained in the sport showed how golf was viewed as a practice for self-improvement. Therefore, by the early-20th century golf was assumed as a game that infused moral superior codes to its enthusiast players.

A connection between golf and the business world was based upon this gentrification of the sport, as well as upon structural characteristics. The handicap, for instance, not only introduced attitudes of self-improvement, but also gave players from different physical conditions and abilities the possibility to play together, allowing younger executives and older businessmen to play together. The sport required a mind-set such as daring attitudes and strategic thought, aspects that were also present in the daily life of any businessmen. The time necessary to play a round of golf meant extended opportunities to network and form rapport among business partners. Golf symbolically represented the fight against nature that businessmen constantly confronted in their work. This game, as any other sports, created a relaxed environment, which induced more friendly interactions. The combination of individualism and peer-trust engendered by golf were fundamental components in economic environments. The game therefore became a metaphor for what the business world was about.

This article has shown that the notions of symbolic capital and technologies of the self are useful tools to explore the process of gentrification that golf underwent, and to analyze why businesspeople from upper-middle and upper strata in the United Kingdom and the United States linked golf to their job during the late nineteenth and early 20th century. Despite the differences between Bourdieu's and Foucault's theoretical models, the use of two of their key concepts has proved revealing in the examination of the history of golf, providing many threads to understand the connection between golf, business-people, and different notions of class. There are of course topics not elaborated in the article that need to be explained, such as issues of gender and race. Were golf clubs divided by racial issues? What role did women play in the transformation of the sport? Did female players embrace the business-golf metaphor? I do not intend to neglect such important questions, but they are beyond the scope of this article. These are threads, however, that require further exploration, as they will permit us to even further understand the interaction between leisure, the economic sphere, and the formation of social hierarchies.

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### Notes

1. A golf handicap is a numerical representation of a golfer's playing potential, the lower the number the better the golfer, that is, a 5 handicap is better than a 13 handicap, which is better than a 23 handicap, and so on. The rules of golf use the handicap to equalize competition between amateur players of different abilities. The golfer with the lower handicap—the best player—should give some facilities (in other words strokes) to the other(s) golfer(s) with higher handicaps in order to have a fair game. Handicaps are calculated based on a complex formula that takes into account a range of recent scores, (USGA, 2010)..
2. I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting the inclusion of Foucault's idea of Technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988) to complement Bourdieu's concept of Symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).
3. Gardens in Britain have been strongly associated with wealth and the nobility; any respectable manor house or palace had a large amount of land exclusively used for aesthetic purposes. In fact, in the late 19th century some nobles used their gardens to practice golf (Lowerson, 1994b).
4. In fact, 'private courses outnumbered public courses until the 1960s' (Napton & Laingen, 2008, p. 26).
5. To read an explanation of how the conversion of capital works in modern golf clubs see, Ceron-Anaya, 2010.

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## Bio

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