

The History of Golf in Slovakia

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Abstract. Golf has come a long way in the world since the 13th century, but also in Slovakia. The beginnings of golf in Slovakia date back to before the First World War. The blossoming was halted by the Communist regime, which golf considered to be unacceptable. In Slovakia, the expansion of golf began only in the new millennium, with the construction of golf courses and the increase in the number of golfers. Twenty-five years of golf in the heart of Europe suffered from various prejudices. Golf is a snobbish and expensive sport for Slovaks, despite the cost is comparable to skiing. The turning year 2020 affected all parts of our lives with the Covid 19 pandemic. What slowed down our lives, that started the world of golf. The corona closed all sports grounds and closed people at home in Slovakia. Since golf is safe even in the event of pandemics, the courses were limited only for a few weeks and then they filled up with golfers to the last spots. Not only the pandemic, but also the 2020 Olympic Games helped in the development of golf in Slovakia. For the first time in history, Rory Sabbatini the Slovak golfer started with a double cross on his chest. Thanks to him, many prejudices against this sport have changed.

Keywords: history of golf, golf, Europe golf

JEL classification: L83, Z21, Z32

1 Introduction

At the beginning of the golf era, sheep shepherds were in the 13th century. In the 19th century [21] time at work was reduced by a game in which stones were rubbed into rabbit holes with sticks. At first, golf was banned by monarchs who did not want ordinary people to neglect their duties. In the end, golf won them, too. Since the 18th century, we can say that golf has taken on the current contours since the first golf club [10] was officially established. A lot has changed in golf since then [5], but its main idea has never changed, namely fair play, without distinction, for everyone [12]. In Slovakia, golf appeared before the First World War under the Tatras later in the spa town of Piestany.

The aim of the scientific contribution is to bring the development of golf closer in the Slovak Republic. The subject of the solution is the history of this sport on the territory of the Central European country. An analysis of the status quo has become the starting point. To achieve the goal, we have analyzed the development of this sports sector since 2003, since when we have had accurate statistics. Using a regression model, we have identified an aspect of several golf courses per number of golfers playing. The data for this study were collected based on statistics of the Slovak Golf Association. We realized the research in the regions of Slovakia (N=8), in which we watched the composition of golfers. Based on the correlation analysis, we investigated the impact of the construction of golf courses on the increase in the number of golfers and the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on the played rounds. The analysis of individual parts of golf history in Slovakia will help as a base of my dissertation work which deals with development in golf. Because without past it is not possible to do the analysis of future, this analysis is initial for my work.

2 Golf in Slovakia

Slovakia is a small country and so we cannot expect golf to be as popular as in the USA, for example, where players count in millions [13]. In Slovakia, according to the annual report of the Slovak Golf Association, we registered only 8837 golfers before the pandemic year 2020. It is woefully few, even in comparison with the Czech Republic with more than 52,000 golfers. Motivating Slovaks to play golf is a huge challenge [9].

2.1 Start before the First World War

In Slovakia, golf began to develop before the First World War in the High Tatras, Tatranska Lomnica. In 1906 [18], the first golf match was played in Hungary, which was attended by the top of the then golf. The first golf tournament took place on the racetrack, and after three years later, in 1909, the first golf course was built in Hungary. In 1914, Winters built a golf course in Piestany.

The First World War paralyzed the successful expansion of the spa and thus also influenced the development of golf in Piestany. It successfully began to develop again only after the end of the war and after the necessary reconstruction of the golf course. In 1932, the Golf Association of the Czechoslovak Republic was founded, which was also a founding member of EGA (European Golf Association). Both pitches continued their activities during the interwar period. However, with the advent of communism, they disappeared, thanks to the designation of golf as bourgeois entertainment [4]. This sport has become ideologically inappropriate and unwelcome [11].

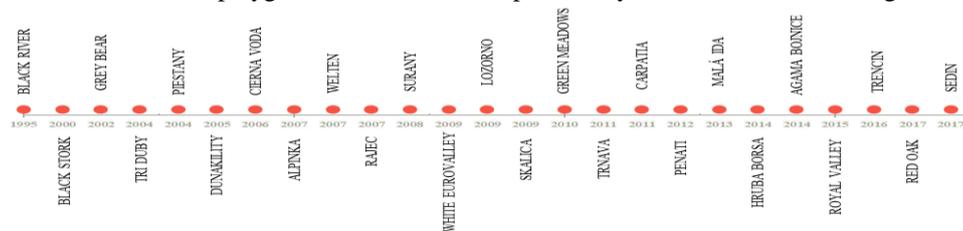
Lady Luisa Abrahams was a woman [6] who took care of the boom in golf in Czechoslovakia. She was born in 1910 in Prague in a medical family. She has been involved in sport since childhood, started tennis and won a championship junior title. She started playing golf in Austria. After the initial failures, Arthur Lees, at that time a highly sought-after and busy guest coach in Marianske Lazne, took her over. The first real successes came in 1934, winning the Junior Competition and then a much more valuable 2nd place in the GCP Championship on blows, called the Ring Hoffer Cup.

Her next fate was influenced by political and war events, but she survived the war in England, saving her from a terrible war crime. The Abrahams couple also made friends with the Queen Elizabeth II husband, Prince Philip [7]. When The Sunningdale Men's Golf Club also opened the women's section, Ms. Luisa became its first member. In 1968, the couple went to Mariánske Lázně and brought to Czech golfers a lot of older but still very good golf clubs and balls, after which there was an incredible hunger for it at the time. She helped with her contacts to regain the lost status of Czechoslovak golf and opened the door to world and international golf institutions. Thanks to her, golf was remained and played throughout the all period as the only country in the Eastern Bloc. She died at the age of 95 and an annual tournament for the best golfers is played in honor of her [19].'

Golf was rediscovered only in 1974 by the creation of a golf club in the sporting union of Elan Bratislava. Elan in the 1980s and 1990s of last century organized the unofficial Championship of Pairs in Golf in the Czechoslovak Republic. Founding member of the club Ing. Miroslav Kaliciak and subsequently Ing. Juraj Lupsin since 1983 became members of the Presidium of the Czechoslovak Golf Association. In 1991, the Slovak Golf Union with 178 golfers was established in Stupava on the founding meeting. The first president became Ing. Juraj Lupsin, who acted in this office for 10 years. After devision of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the Czech Republic automatically became the successor to Czechoslovakia in EGA (European Golf Association) and WAGC (World amateur golf council), but Slovakia did not meet the conditions to be a proper member in these structures, as we lacked the existence of a golf course on our territory, unlike in the Czech Republic where there were 8 playgrounds. The implementation of the 9-hole pitch in Bernolakovo in 1995 was accepted SGA as a member at the EGA annual meeting in Milan and in 1997, St Andrews in Scotland, also included in the world golf association WAGC.

2.2 Modern development

After the realization of the course in Bernolakovo in 1995, the construction of golf courses stopped. With a new millennium came to Slovakia also the restoration of the playground under the High Tatras, the construction of the Black Stork playground in Velka Lomnica in 2000. Gradually, in the span of two years, playgrounds in central Slovakia in Tale and Sliac were added. The rebirth of the first golf club in Hungary in Piestany occurred only in 2004. A year later, Slovak players opened a golf club in a beautiful castle park in Dunakility, Hungary. The first playground in the far east, namely in Kosice, was created only in 2007 and so far, it has only 9 holes of playground. The second Kosice playground, Mala Ida was opened only in 2013. In the Zilina region,



golf started to be played in 2007 in Rajec and in Záhorie only in 2009. The only PGA pitch in Slovakia with two 18-hole pitches opened its doors in 2012 in Sajdikove Humence. The latest additions in 2017 were added in Nitra's Red Oak and Sedin. Together 25 golf courses have grown, including one 36 holes, three 27-hole courses, eight 18-hole courses and 14 nine-hole courses.

Fig. 1. Timeline in the build-up of golf courses in Slovakia in modern history

Just as the background of golf courses in Slovakia has grown, the membership base of this sport has grown. As we can see, there is a great dependence between the construction of golf courses and the recruitment of new golfers [1].

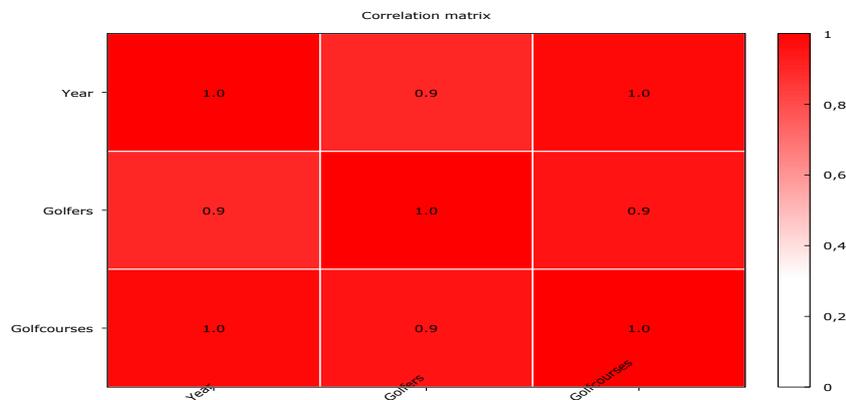


Fig. 2. Correlation matrix of dependence between the construction of golf courses and the number of players

2.3 The turning year 2020

2020 was a turning point in all spheres of life. The Covid 19 pandemic entered our lives, which hit us not only in spring, but also in autumn. People had limited movement and spent time at home. We can see an increase in the number of rounds depending on the corona pandemic, as indicated by the correlation matrix.

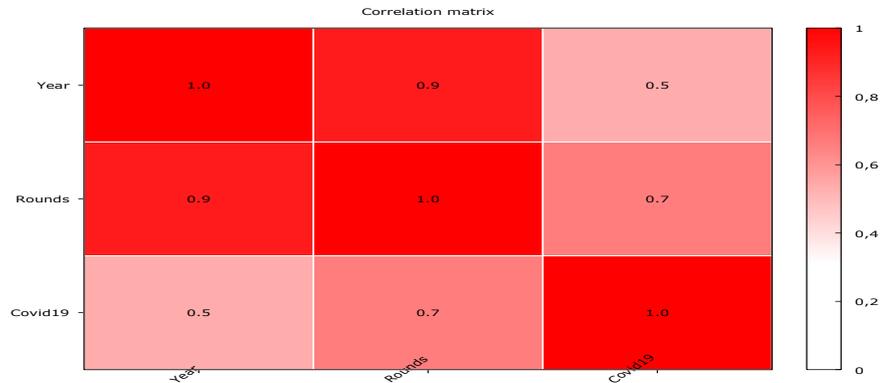


Fig. 3. Correlation matrix of the dependence of the rounds played on the impact of time and the Covid 19 pandemic

Golf was one of the few sports activities that could be carried out even during the pandemic period. Fortunately, the golf courses were only closed for a few weeks and then fully filled up as we see Fig. 4, where the travel ban was fully reflected. Golfers are known for travelling [2] abroad. Air connections were cancelled, people stayed in Slovakia and golf courses were filled up to the last place. Year-on-year, the number of rounds has increased by a maximum of 20% since 2009. Before this year, the number of rounds played was largely influenced by the construction of golf courses. In 2007, three golf courses were opened, which caused a year-on-year increase of 115%. Such a significant year-on-year increase was no longer taking place in Slovakia, but the travel bans during the pandemic caused a year-on-year increase of 68%.

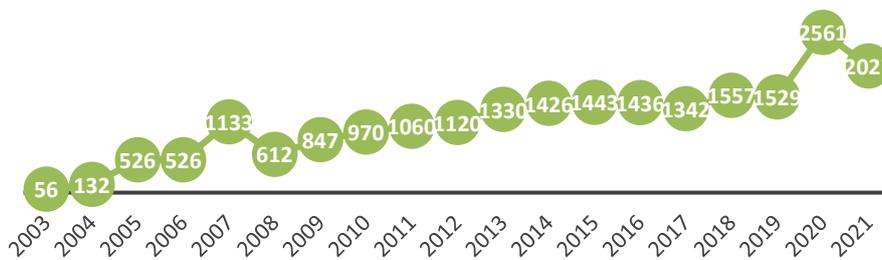


Fig. 4. Development of the number of rounds of golf, during the years 2003-2021

The 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, where Slovak golfer Rory Sabbatini stood up for the first time and became the oldest Slovak Olympian medalist, as a breakthrough in Slovakia. Rory is a native South African and left his native Durban to study in the U.S. with a golf scholarship [15]. He did very well in college golf, later after successfully qualifying on the PGA TOUR [16], where he has won six times. He was not very successful on the PGA Circuit since 2011. The change came in 2018, where he once again climbed into the top of 100 best players in the world [3]. In this successful

year he acquired Slovak citizenship as his wife is Slovak. Before the start of the Olympic Games, he stood the grin by the whole nation when he wanted to compete under five circles with a sport that had absolutely no tradition in Slovakia. However, he gained beautiful silver medal with hard work, which shook our entire country. An absolute outsider became a hero [20]. Suddenly, golf appeared in all the media. It was no longer a snobbish walk, but in the eyes of the Slovaks, golf was finally considered as sport. Rory has participated in various media appearances, supporting charity events. He became an ambassador for the Olympic Hope Tournament, where the future stars of the golf world compete. Thanks to Rory, golf became popular in Slovakia and people began to see it as an Olympic sport and not a sport for the rich.

3 Golf statistics

We can only see the exact golf statistics since 2003, when a single golf server was introduced, which brought together golf in Czechoslovakia. We therefore report the following statistics only from this year. Golf in Slovakia has developed slowly. In 2003, the total number of golfers was 419 of them 312 men and 107 women. This number doubled after 12 years of operating Slovak golf, but it was not a big increase from the original 178 golfers. A big increase of more than 400% occurred in 2004 for 1770 golfers. This was also caused by the construction of 2 playgrounds. With this addition, 5 golf courses were active in Slovakia. Since then, golf has developed year-on-year. The slight decrease occurred in 2015, when the economic crisis was [8]. As you can see on Fig. 5 women make up 25-30% of the total number of golfers. The aims not only of the world but also of Slovak golf associations are mainly the development of women's golf. Women are the creators of the leisure program and therefore it is important to get them for this sport.

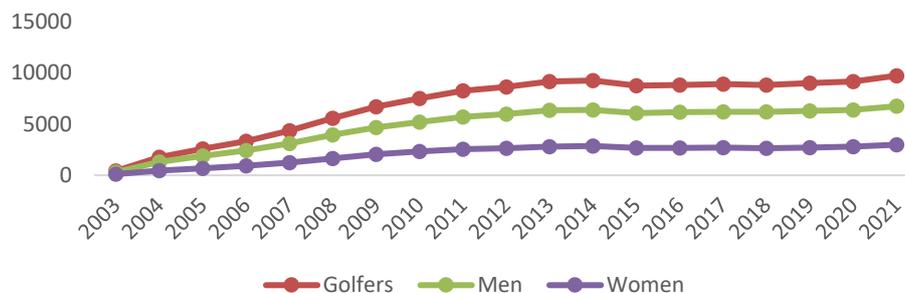


Fig. 5. Development of the number of golfers in Slovakia during the years 2003-2021

Demographic structure of golfers in Slovakia Fig. 6 represents a clear predominance of players in the 22-29 age structure. This is mainly because in Slovakia men in managerial positions [14] play at this productive age. On the early days of the millennium, the players took their children with them, so the under-21 category was significant in the early days. The breakthrough came in 2010, where they were overtaken by category 50-59 [17] It is logical, as people who started golf at productive

age got older and they reached a higher age group and for the same reason another 10 years later they have already overtaken this category even the age category 60-70. In this category we already find people who have been playing golf for over 20 years. We can see that the youngest category was not only overtaken by the last category of those oldest golfers over 70 years. For young people, golf is not attractive. In recent years, other sports sectors have also registered a reduction in children's interest. Golf is a sport that can be played until old age, and this is also the case in Slovakia.

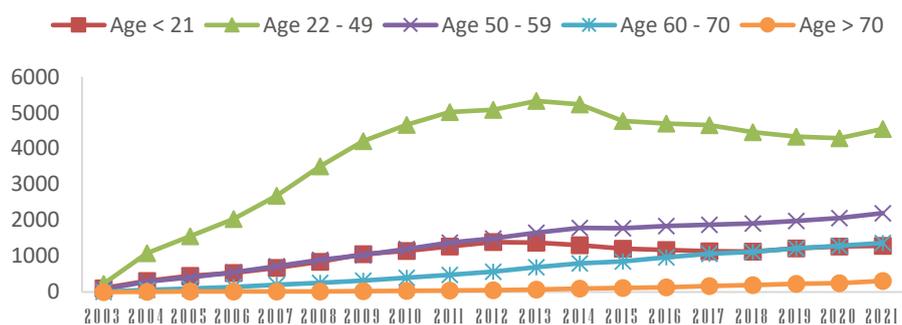


Fig. 6. Demographic development of golfers in Slovakia during the years 2003-2021

In Slovakia, golfers with a handicap higher than 37 are very prevalent, it means, they are absolute beginners. In the world, this category does not exist, because passing a green card is more time-consuming often in months, so golfers already have higher quality and get the handicap 36. A card in Slovakia, which is something like a driving license to play golf, lasts a weekend and therefore golfers have only a basic command of beginnings. A lot of people get a green card, but within a year, they're going to end up with this sport. Therefore, these statistics are mainly influenced by the first decisive year. In the middle positions there are golfers who play golf only a few times a month. Below are golfers who have made a green card but have not registered in any golf club. They mostly do not continue to play golf. We see the smallest number of golfers in the category of people who spend their time on the golf pitch at least 3 times a week. They are golfers with handicaps under 11.4.

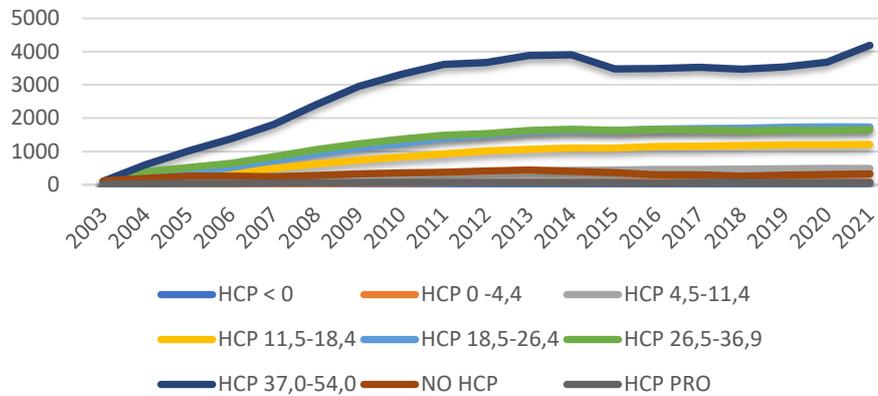


Fig. 7. Development of golfers in Slovakia in terms of handicap during the years 2003-2021

Up to 31/3/2022, the Slovak Golf Association lists 8059 club golfers Fig. 8. They are golfers with paid membership fees in individual clubs for 2022. As can be seen, this number is lower than the number of total golfers in Slovakia up to date 31/12/2021, which was made up of 9714 golfers. Nearly 1,700 golfers have no golf club membership and play golf sporadically. The highest concentration of golfers 3375 is in the Bratislava region, where there are also the highest numbers of golf courses in total seven. The second significant region is Trnava with 1434 club members and six golf courses. There are also regions of Nitra, Banska Bystrica and Presov where we find proportionally the same number of game holes on golf courses. There are up to 500 members in Kosice and Trencin, who play on two nine-hole pitches. The worst part is the region of Žilina.

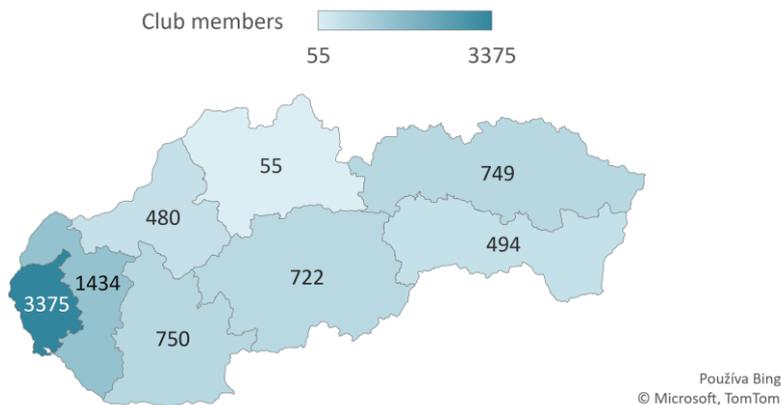


Fig. 8. Number of club golfers in the regions as at 31.3.2022

That we see on the map is also a regression model of the impact of the number of golfers on the construction of golf courses and training grounds in Table 1.

Table 1. Regression analysis of the impact of the number of golfers on the construction of golf courses

	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>t-ratio</i>	<i>p-value</i>
const	-0,3793	1,4793	-0,2564	0,8007
Golfers	0,0025	0,0002	12,4602	<0,0001 ***
Mean dependent var	16,6316	S.D. dependent var		7,6682
Sum squared resid	104,5064	S.E. of regression		2,4794
R-squared	0,9013	Adjusted R-squared		0,8955
F(1, 17)	155,1728	P-value		5,67e-10
Durbin-Watson	0,2226			

$$\hat{y}_i = -0,3793 + 0,0025x_i \quad (1)$$

Supposing there would be 100 club members in a particular region of Slovakia probably it would not be enough to build a golf course. Making a prognosis: If we got 550 club players, the estimated total increase of golf courses would be on the level 1.

The regression coefficient is statistically significant - the number of golfers affects the number of golf courses in Slovakia. The regression model with independent variable number of golfers can explain 90.13% of the variability in the construction of golf courses. However, we see that the Durbin-Watson value is low and so there is a risk of spurious regression. Our problem is endogeneity. We cannot clearly distinguish the direction of causality. That is, whether the construction of a golf course will bring in new golfers, or whether new golfers will be able to exert pressure for the construction of another new course. We will continue to research the impact of these aspects.

4 Conclusion

The aim of this work was an analysis of historical milestones in golf development in Slovakia. Increasing golfer's membership was chosen as a subject matter of the analysis. On the basis of research of golf history on the territory of The Slovak Republic we found out that the highest aspect that influences on the development of this sports branch was the time. The construction of golf courses in individual regions had significant influence on increasing number of golfers. We found out that the biggest part on golf courses especially in western Slovakia makes 70 % of men at productive age. These men play golf only for leisure what is visible at the high golf handicap. As the pandemic Covid 19 theme is still actual we proved by our research that Corona had considerable influence on the rise in golf and especially in the number of played rounds which were increased thanks to closing borders and another sports grounds.

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