

# Case Study

Perception is Reality

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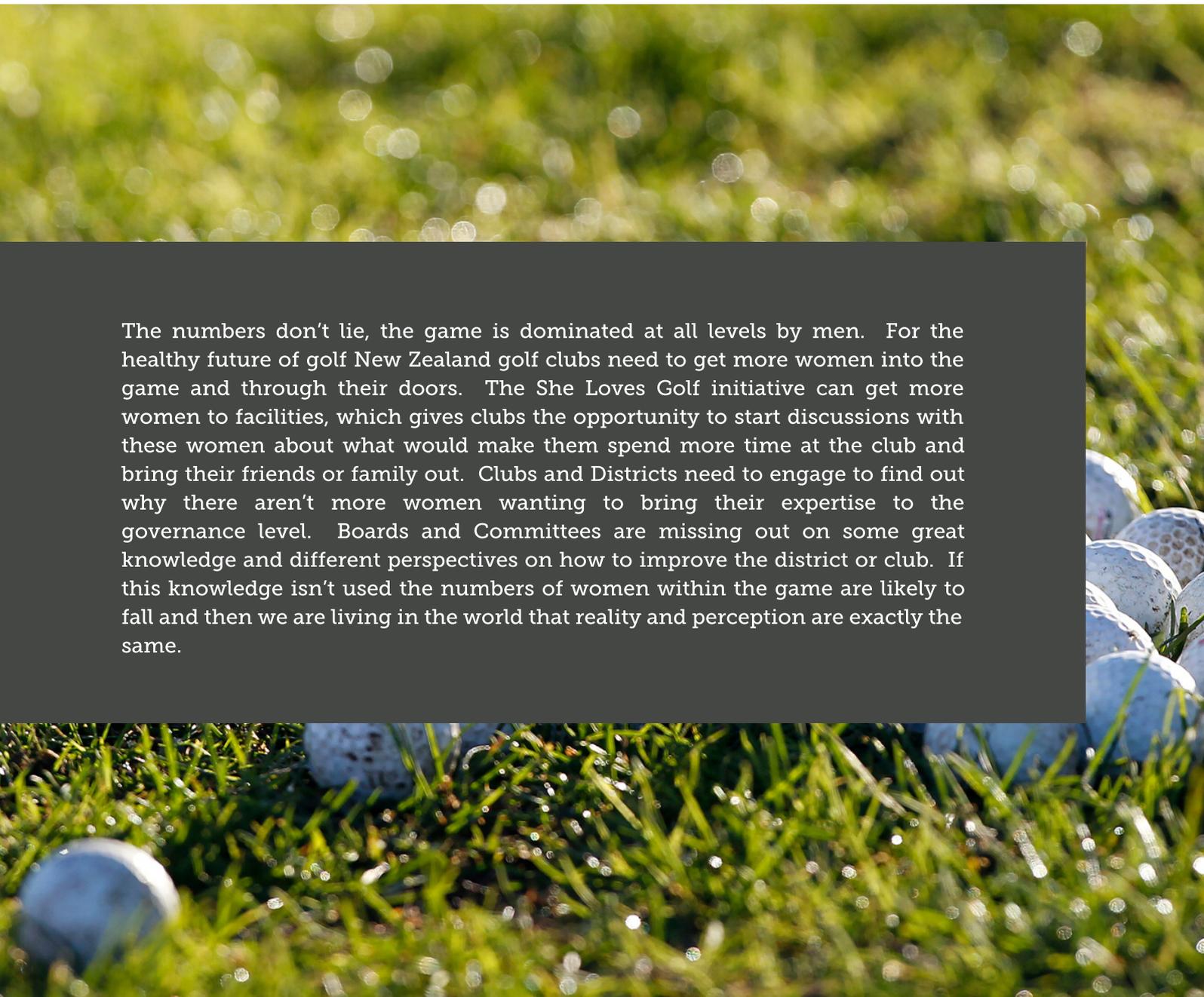


Having diversity within the game of golf adds the fabric of the game as well as to individual clubs. New Zealand Golf, with its Inclusion Charter, wants to share the lifelong enrichment golf gives to as many people as possible but is this vision filtering down from the governing body? Many golfers and New Zealand golf clubs bristle at the accusation that golf is a middle-aged white male sport played by the rich. Generally, clubs will reply that they are not like that at all and are welcoming and open to all. Another comment made by those in golf is the perception of golf being the domain of the middle-aged white male is more of an overseas perception than here in New Zealand. Is there some truth in the perception in New Zealand and is it hurting golf in New Zealand?

The government has mandated that by 2021 the National Sport Organisations (NSO's) need to have at least 40% of women on their boards. In an article in from Sky Sports Lockerroom the Minister for Sport reported that there are NSO's that are concerned they won't meet the target. For New Zealand Golf our current board is made up of 5 women and 4 men. This puts New Zealand Golf well ahead of many other sports at the board level around diversity. However, if we look at the next levels down these numbers are not replicated at either District or Club level. Many times the women on these boards are appointments because of the board having a position for a Women's committee member. Looking at the governance structure of districts and clubs within New Zealand it is definitely the domain of men with an average 37% of women on district boards throughout the country. It is at the district and club board levels that decisions are being made for how best move golf forward. Some of these decisions are on how to get more women and girls into the game. These decisions are being made by boards and committees that are overwhelmingly dominated by men. With club and district governance level boards looking very similar, there is a lack of diversity of opinions at these levels. The issue with this is that the experiences that the board or committee members have are all the same and they are making decisions around groups that they have little experience or knowledge about.

New Zealand Golf truly believe that golf enriches the lives of all New Zealanders. Every person deserves equal opportunities and access to experience such meaningful enrichment through our game. At the club membership level, the story around women being members of clubs is much the same as women being in governance roles. Nationally women and girls make up 22.4% of club members. Looking at district level the lowest percentage of women members sits at 18.7% while the highest sits at only 26.9%. The importance of having women members can be seen in a study conducted by Syngenta. The 2019 study found that there is a 'female-junior multiplier effect', meaning that for every 100 new players, new female golfers will bring up to 72 more juniors into the game compared to new male golfer. Looking at that study as well as the figures in New Zealand around women playing the game, clubs should be targeting women to come to their clubs, but clubs also need to understand that women's expectations and needs are completely different to the male membership. The New Zealand Golf She Loves Golf initiative offers a way of helping break down the perception of the game not being female friendly. She Loves Golf can be used as part of a bigger push by a club to introduce the game of golf to women and show that the game and club itself can fit their needs and wants. One of the arguments given to the low numbers of women at the governance level is that "they are given the same opportunity as anyone else to get onto boards or committees." I would argue that if a large company like Nike or Adidas had women buying only 23% of their product they would be heading to women asking why they aren't buying their product as the status quo is likely to be working for those at governance level while they are missing out on input from people who they are making decisions about.

Registered casual women golfers even have lower numbers than the membership numbers. Registered Women casual golfers make up 16.2% of total registered casual golfers in New Zealand. Casual golf is the way most people get into golf and therefore become members of golf clubs. With this level being so low, the knock-on effect for clubs in the future is likely to mean a much more male dominated look in the clubhouse after a round of golf. Using the Nike and Adidas analogy above, these companies would realise that there is a massive opportunity to target women to the benefit the profitability of the company. Having a conversation with this market would result in finding out why the casual women's golf market is so small and what needs to be achieved to increase it. Some clubs overseas that have specifically targeted casual women golfers have put in place some of the following; day-care while the women are on the course playing, run coffee groups around the golf, relaxing the dress codes, running junior sessions at the same time the women are playing, and having a 3 or 6 hole option to play. One of the other things that has worked overseas is making sure there is another event occurring around the golf. The benefit for the club for this is that the group would still turn up and be in the clubhouse even during times of inclement weather. These initiatives only happened because the golf clubs involved went and engaged with the women they were targeting.



The numbers don't lie, the game is dominated at all levels by men. For the healthy future of golf New Zealand golf clubs need to get more women into the game and through their doors. The She Loves Golf initiative can get more women to facilities, which gives clubs the opportunity to start discussions with these women about what would make them spend more time at the club and bring their friends or family out. Clubs and Districts need to engage to find out why there aren't more women wanting to bring their expertise to the governance level. Boards and Committees are missing out on some great knowledge and different perspectives on how to improve the district or club. If this knowledge isn't used the numbers of women within the game are likely to fall and then we are living in the world that reality and perception are exactly the same.