

Developing Jones County's Youth through Golf

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Figure 1 – Learning to Chip

Summary

Youth participation in golf is growing exponentially across the United States, and has been doing so for over a decade. In 2019 the Player Development Committee of the Professional Golf Association of America conducted research supporting the countless enhancements to youth development made by learning and playing the game of golf. Data from the research suggests that golf not only offers countless health benefits, but also enhances social and business skills, etiquette and values, and mental control.

With the promotion of these findings in mind, Jones County 4-H created a 4-H Golf Club to teach and engage youth in the game of golf. Eight 4-H'ers from fourth through twelfth grade participated in the five-week program. Seven club members had no prior experience playing golf. By the conclusion of the program, 88% of youth demonstrated significant growth in their knowledge of the game and their competitive abilities on the course.

Situation

According to research conducted in 2019 by the Player Development Committee of the PGA of America, youth that play golf demonstrate improvement in six mental skills: ability to focus, commitment, acceptance, attitude and mindset, strategy, and awareness. Playing golf also allows youth the opportunity to build social skills such as working in a team setting, demonstrating self-confidence, and applying problem solving skills that in time will prove themselves critical in a business environment. Lastly, golf offers a means of outdoor active living that most youth fall short on day to day. As it is a sport that any one at any age can play, youth who golf indulge in a uniquely diverse culture and experience a broader view of the world.

Youth who play golf have the opportunity to challenge themselves, while learning proper etiquette and values that will aid them on and off the golf course. It is said golf is a mental game, and as a result, youth are taught the importance of controlling their emotions and how to learn from their mistakes and overcome obstacles to better themselves in a way that can only be taught through the game of golf.



Figure 2 – Learning to Putt

Currently, there are no opportunities for students in Jones County to become active in golf outside of joining the limited amount of students on the middle school and high school team or taking private lessons. Therefore, Jones County 4-H developed an introductory level golf program to begin teaching students interested in golf. Furthermore, Jones County 4-H worked in conjunction with the Jones County Recreation Department to gauge student interests to determine if beginning a recreational golf league would be viable and impactful for the county.

Response

Jones County 4-H created the 4-H Golf Club to teach youth the basics of playing the game of golf and learning the rules of play. Each of the five club meeting dates had a different lesson and learning objective. During the first meeting, each students' skill level was assessed. This was done by practicing with each club on the driving range and individually talking students through the mechanics of their swing. Meetings two and three focused on the short game, chipping and putting respectively (Figures 1 and 2). Though seemingly short strokes, this is where 65% of shots are made on the course and where the most frustrations from new and old golfers alike arise. The final two club meetings consisted of game play on the course. The first of the two was centered around learning the rules of the sport and practicing proper golf etiquette, and the final was focused on proper score keeping and competing with other club members.

Number of Strokes Over 3 Holes at Final Club Meeting, Par 12

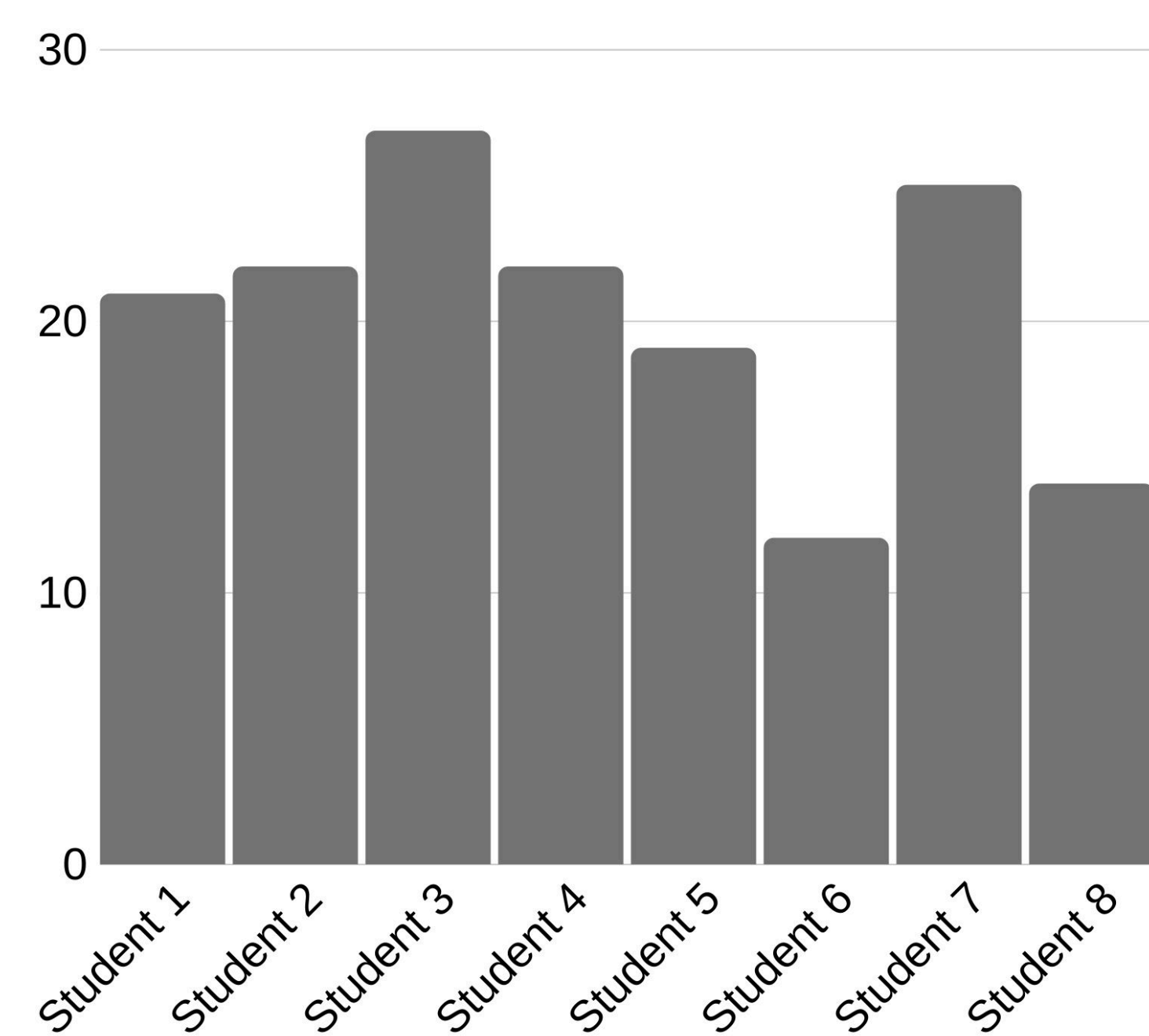


Chart 1 – Game Play Results

Impact

The Jones County 4-H Golf Club had the maximum allotted number of eight students enrolled in 2019. At all times, two coaches were present and were able to give instruction to students who were divided into groups of four based on their skill progression levels. This provided a more focused learning environment for each student, better allowing them to retain the information given. All eight students were present at all five meetings, maximizing the impact the club had on their game improvement. At the end of the program, the County Extension Educator evaluated each participating student through a survey and skills assessment. Of the eight students, 88% had no prior playing experience. Of those students, 100% stated as a result of the club they better understood the rules of the game and the fundamentals of their swing. The skills assessment consisted of drill repetition. Students had to repeat various swing drills demonstrated throughout the club meetings. Such drills included proper driving stance and ball approach, proper mechanics for iron shots based on distance from the hole, and lastly, proper green reading and putting techniques. After conducting the skills assessment, it was found that 76% of students met expectations by conducting the drill correctly, while 24% exceeded expectations by conducting the drill correctly and making the assigned shot. The final club meeting consisted of game play and allowed students to play three holes of golf with a total of 12 strokes needed to make par. Twenty five percent of students achieved par or better, 50% of students shot no more than eight strokes over par, and 25% of students shot more than eight strokes over par (Chart 1).

Future plans for the club include offering a more advanced club for the experienced students who return next program year, as well as continuing to offer the introductory level club for new students to join. The club meetings will lengthen to offer further growth opportunities for the students involved, as well as a coach from the school system will be invited to recruit potential players for their county school system team to better encourage students to continue within the sport.