



Strength and Conditioning for golf

Text: Gavin Groves, hpc

Golf strength and conditioning has rapidly become popular on the professional circuit as well as for the amateur golfer. The PGA Tour in America has a fitness trailer that follows the tour all year round, and there are hundreds, if not thousands of medical professionals, fitness professionals and doctors that are specialised in dealing with golf.

With facilities like the Titleist Performance Institute (TPI) offering certification tracks within the broad term "golf fitness", strength and conditioning for golf has finally caught up with other sports in terms of specificity of training.

The reason behind all of this is simple: if the body is what swings the club, golfers have to make sure their movements are functional enough to allow the golfer to swing the club without limitation. The movements required for golf are also very specific, hence the need for specificity, assessment and conditioning.

There are two main functions for training specifically for golf:

- 1) Improving Efficiency
- 2) Preventing Injuries

Efficiency is a term used to describe the repeatability of a golf swing. It has nothing to do with what the golf swing looks like (also known as style), and everything to do with correct sequencing of the body segments. If the sequence of the golf swing is efficient, maximal energy transfer from the various body segments occurs, and the golfer is able to execute his/her swing optimally, with the least amount of effort. It is

always interesting to see how the vastly different golf swings on tour all seem to get the same result out of the golf swing, and that is because biomechanically, tour players are all moving the same.

Preventing Injuries

Professional golfers hit the golf ball further than ever before. This is largely due to advancements in equipment and swing mechanics. Professionals may hit upwards of 2000 balls a week, channelling forces through very specific muscles and movements, and generate club-head speeds in excess of 100miles/hour. The vast majority of injuries (about 80%) sustained by professional golfers are related to over-use. Wrists, back, shoulders and hips are areas most commonly affected. The rest of the injuries are sustained through acute situations, or non-golf related situations.

Another term that we can use for the prevention of injuries is Longevity: how can the strength and conditioning programme increase a golfer's career?

Longevity allows the golfer to continue to compete for years at a competitive level, prolonging his career and increasing the potential for a substantial career as a professional sportsman. In fact, in the recent Open Championship at Muirfield, Phil Mickelson became the third golfer over the age of 40 to win the British Open in three years (the two previous winners being Ernie Els and Darren Clarke). During the same weekend of the British Open, Woody Austin (at 49 years young) won the PGA Tour event in the USA.

Gary Player, arguably the most successful international golfer in history, is well known for his beliefs on the importance of strength and conditioning for golf, and attributes most of his success as a golfer to his stringent workout routines.

Tom Watson, another very successful golfer still competing against the world's best golfers, stresses the importance of training in an article written by Dave Phillips, co-founder of the Titleist Performance Institute (TPI):

"You have to do it," Watson said. "And not just stretching. You need cardio, strength training, the works. I believe it's a big reason I'm still hitting the ball as well as I am hitting it now." Watson went on to say that he feels the most important area to focus on as you get older is your hips. "The first thing you lose is the ability to fire your hips," he said. "You have to really train that area hard."

As the golfer's body ages, a decline in the level of fitness is inevitable, but the rate of decline can be greatly reduced by regular and specific training.

Strength and Conditioning for golf has become one of the hottest topic trends around the world. In America, it is almost common knowledge that in order to improve your golf you need to address your fitness. In South Africa, golf fitness is not as well accepted, especially amongst the weekend golfers. It is a market that has yet to be harvested, and with very few golf fitness professionals in South Africa, it is a very lucrative market.