

Early starters

Development camps return for talented teenagers. BY ROHAN CLARKE



Talented amateurs between the ages of 13 and 21 attended a national development camp conducted by Golf Australia at Moonah Links in February.

Promising golfers from as young as 12 will have better access to top coaches, physiotherapists, psychologists and biomechanists under a Golf Australia initiative. The amateur body recently established a national junior squad to identify good players at a younger age.

The 12-16 age group is a bigger priority for Golf Australia, which will allocate more resources – coaching, international travel and development camps – to juniors with the potential to become elite amateurs and professional golfers. Junior development camps had been a priority for the Australian Golf Union and Women's Golf Australia before they merged in 2006. Since then Golf Australia only provided national camps for elite amateurs, usually aged between 18-21.

But in that age bracket it's very difficult to rectify potential problems, according to Golf Australia's high performance director Brad James. "We are screening these individuals at an earlier age to look at the physical, emotional and technical tendencies to see if there are any red flags with those aspects of their development," James says.

"If there are, we look at ways to develop them over the long term by working with their home base coach and high performance state program."

For instance, muscle imbalances and

weaknesses often lead to physical pain and injury. Hence, a musculoskeletal and motor pattern screening may indicate a golfer is prone to back injury by the age of 25 due to a certain style of swing. Similarly, a chipping technique may be too one-dimensional and only effective on certain types of grasses or a particular style of golf course.

A catalyst for the new program has been mediocre showings in the past four Eisenhower Trophy campaigns while European and Asian nations have benefited from creating development opportunities at a much younger age. James says: "We would like to start a culture for long-term development at an earlier age. So by the time they get to that 18, 19, 20-year-old age bracket, the work ethic and understanding of what it takes to reach their full potential has been better established."

MESSAGE FROM THE TOP

"Every single day he's got a little bit better." – Kevin Kirk, American teaching professional, reflecting on Venezuelan rookie Jhonattan Vegas who adopted golf-specific training in the months prior to his maiden victory on the US PGA Tour in 2011.

CHANGE THE RANGE

'Wild horse' drill

Here's a golf-specific abdominal exercise I recommend for stabilising the trunk and lower limbs. Performing the exercise is Melbourne-based amateur Jin Jeong, who last year became the first Asian player to win the British Amateur.

Afterwards, Jin said he felt as though his lower base was more stable – that the legs were connected to his trunk. He wasn't losing his 'levels' during the golf swing. Because the pelvis was stronger, he was less inclined to collapse his left knee. This powerful central control comes from strong abdominal muscles. Imagine riding a wild horse without a saddle. You have to maintain control of the centre points through your body.

The exercise requires the use of a posture belt and bar. To start, place a posture belt around your waist. Lie on your back on the floor, placing a spiky ball behind your skull (not in the arch of your neck). Assume a 'dead bug' position with your legs in the air and forming a 90-degree angle. A posture bar needs to be placed between your knees and held in position with pressure from the inside thighs. Outstretch the rubber tubing attached to the posture belt. This promotes connection through your body segments. Your arms should be flat on the floor with the shoulder blades touching the ground. Feel the stability in the shoulder blades. Ensure your lower back is in a neutral position.

Now begin to rotate the ankles and feet, firstly in a clockwise direction and then an anti-clockwise pattern. Continue this for 30 seconds. Waggle or gently shake so that you can feel the inside thighs, pelvic floor, the deep lower abdominal muscles and posterior gluteals. This promotes stability through the lower-body segment and pelvis, essential for a consistent golf swing.

– Ramsay McMaster

Apparatus used in this drill can be purchased from the Melbourne Golf Injury Clinic on (03) 9569 9448. For advice on golf-specific training, call Ramsay McMaster on 0407 432 282.



IMPORTANT:
See your physiotherapist before attempting this exercise if you suffer from back pain. Stop immediately if you experience sharp pain or soreness.