



Is the gym hurting your golf?

How to adopt a balanced approach to developing your body for golf.

Many golfers now recognise the importance of getting fit for golf. In the modern game, there is a lot of debate about the importance of driving distance and how crucial it is to give players a realistic chance of becoming competitive at the highest level. Today, professional golfers are more muscular and have to spend more time in the gym than the stars of yesteryear.

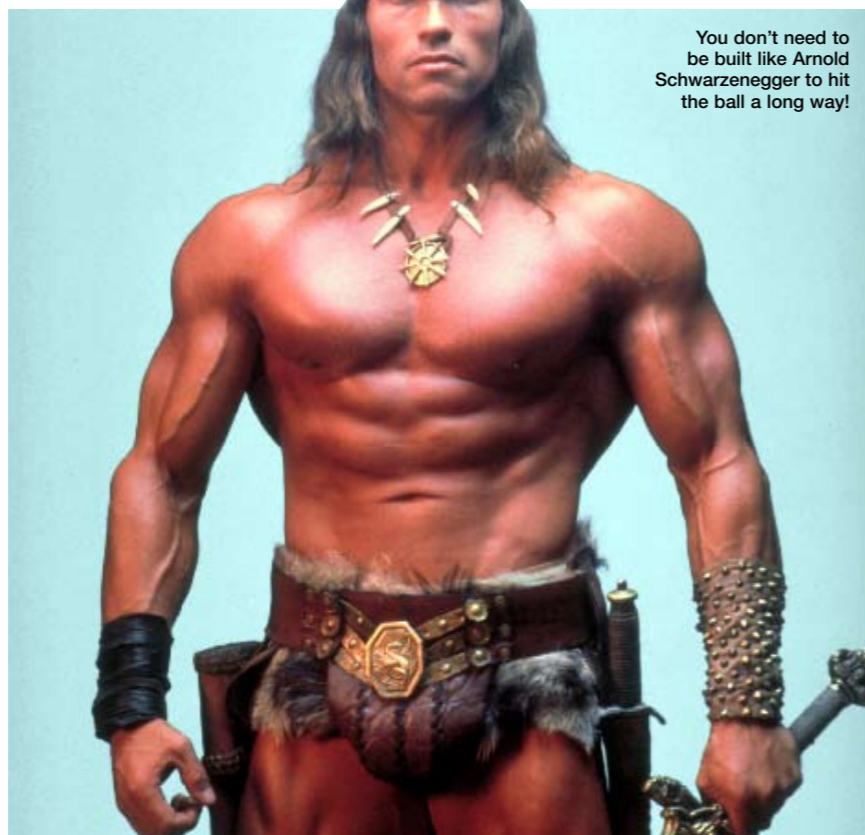
In fact, the world's top 30 players work with sports-fitness specialists like myself to give them a competitive edge. This may not be possible for most club golfers, but it shouldn't prevent an amateur with the right attitude and knowledge from making a significant physical improvement over a period of time.

What everyone can benefit from is a balanced approach to developing his or her body for golf. Some muscles only need to be stretched, while others can be worked harder (that is, resistance training). It is important that the right muscles are worked in the right order – this is called sequencing. This month, I'll explain common mistakes in exercise regimes, and, I'll offer some helpful tips and advice.

In the gym

Have you ever been working out in the gym and asked the question, "How will this exercise assist my golf?" Many amateurs are confused about how they can set up a simple strength and conditioning program designed specifically to improve their golf. And, most are unaware of the muscle groups they should be training to enhance golf performance. The great majority actually uses the wrong muscle groups with poor technique within the gym environment. These faults can cause injury, and they can also affect performance and impair good swing biomechanics.

Most club golfers (and even a few professionals) still think they need to "bulk-up" and build the big muscles of the upper body in order to have the strength necessary to belt the ball a long way. But this couldn't be further from the truth. And one of the biggest mistakes you could make is to try to replicate



You don't need to be built like Arnold Schwarzenegger to hit the ball a long way!

golf swings with gym equipment. It can do much more damage than good.

"Bulking-up" – using heavy resistance exercises – can lead to hypertrophy and make it difficult to achieve certain swing positions. If muscle bulk is being built in the wrong areas for golf, it can have a disastrous affect on a golfer's ability to sequence efficiently. This can restrict movement in the golfer's body and cause imbalances in muscles that need to be balanced for effective weight transference. Significantly, it can impair a golfer's "feel".

Therefore, bicep curls, chest press, pec deck and overhead weights are completely the wrong exercises for golf. You should avoid them at all costs. If the weights are too big and the body can't handle the pressure, the muscles will make compensations to perform the movement, which leads to a detrimental affect on the golf swing. Once in a while you may smash a ball 300-plus yards, but more

often than not you'll struggle for accuracy, control and consistency.

Ramsay's tips

- Weight training using cables with resistance is beneficial. They work the muscles in different planes and can be tailored to mimic the movements of a golf swing, therefore working the correct muscles.
- Emphasise working the triceps, rotator cuff and lower abdominals as these muscles are vital in a golf swing. Ideally, you should work them together in a specific exercise.
- Isometric (or holding) contractions have also been shown to be beneficial.

Ramsay McMaster is a world authority on golf-specific physiotherapy. Phone The Melbourne Golf Injury Clinic on (03) 9569 9448 for advice about a golf-specific rehabilitation and fitness program. Also, visit golfmed.net.

Running and aerobic work

Many golfers enjoy running and aerobic work. The general benefits to the golfer are that running can be done without any equipment and can be done anywhere, anytime. It improves exercise tolerance on the golf course and in practice. Running strengthens the lower body. Plus, endorphins are released during exercise that make the individual feel good.

Be aware, though, amateur golfers tend to move into a typical pattern associated with their golf practice (e.g. stooping posture, feet turned out, pelvis tilting forward). Therefore, as golfers are in prolonged standing postures, running can increase the incidence of spinal, joint stress and fixed postures. Running can also jar the spine. Excessive running can cause tightness in the hamstrings and hip flexors, affecting golf biomechanics. Excessive running can also cause foot problems, since golfers tend to have fallen arches (flat feet).

Ramsay's tips

- Ensure you undertake specific stretching exercises, both prior and halfway through a stint of running.
- On a treadmill, make sure your heel strikes first. Toe-first impact leads to tightness in the calves, which is detrimental to playing good golf.
- Be aware of extra loading in the joints, especially the hips and spine.
- Good supportive shoes are imperative.
- Run with relaxed shoulders, pelvis tilted upward, feet pointing forwards, good controlled breathing and upright posture at all times.

Cycling

Cycling offers the same benefits as running and aerobics but there is less impact on the joints. However, many golfers will increase their anterior pelvic tilt while cycling, which can weaken abdominal muscles and excessively tighten their buttock muscles. This leads to poor posture and swing deviations. Leaning over handlebars for long periods can cause stiffness in the upper spine and neck.

Excessive cycling can tighten the hip flexors and muscles around the shoulder girdle that can affect rotation. And, inner-range exercises on a bicycle will reduce range of movement at

the hip and knee joints as a result of adaptive muscle shortening.

Ramsay's tips

- Adjust handlebars and seat to your correct height. That is, the leg must be straight when the pedal is at its lowest point.
- Always stretch before and after cycling. In particular, ensure that you stretch your spine and buttock muscles.
- Once you advance your cycling ability, try to keep your arms by your side so that you are improving balance, pelvis and trunk control while working your legs.

Swimming

Several golf-related benefits are gained from swimming. Firstly, it increases exercise tolerance on the course and during practice. It is low-impact on joints as it is not weight bearing. Swimming encourages good trunk rotation and shoulder girdle stability, providing that you have good technique and use a variety of different strokes. And the resistance of water can strengthen specific areas related to golf.

Be aware that freestyle and butterfly strokes can increase pectoralis – major tightness – and therefore may increase rounding of the shoulders and upper back (kyphosis). Also, fatigue can occur in water, resulting in compensatory movements that cause poor muscle co-ordination. Sam Snead said he would never swim before a round of golf, only afterwards. His reasoning was that overhead arm movements could affect your pattern of movement in the golf swing.

Ramsay's tips

- Break up swimming laps with stretches.
- Alternate strokes, for example, backstroke and breaststroke.
- Be aware of fatigue and poor technique.
- Use floats to promote "pistol grips", which will increase the workload through the triceps.

Pilates

Pilates increases the awareness of your core muscles. It promotes a better range of movement in the golf swing. Pilates also increases strength in the upper and lower

body segments, while its general co-ordination aspect complements many of the static set-up postures used in golf.

However, Pilates requires specialist equipment since it is not a functional form of exercise. Golfers can't practise it at home or use it in a warm-up prior to a round of golf. It can also aggravate back problems. Most Pilates exercises need to be done while standing in order to simulate the core stabilisers that are in use during the address position in golf.



Sam Snead was an advocate of swimming to get stronger for golf, but only after a round.

Yoga

Yoga improves balance, co-ordination and agility, which will help in the sequencing and smoothness of a golfer's swing. It is beneficial for breathing, helping golfers to relax and reduce tension/stress. Yoga increases extension throughout the whole spine, improving rotation. And it will aid by increasing core strength.

But golfers must be careful not to overstretch muscles when doing yoga as it could lead to hyperextension and injury. Inflexible golfers may stretch too far, which can result in straining a muscle. And they may also lose a lot of "feel" in their swing.



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