



# Finding a golf-specific trainer

Not everyone shares the same idea on how best to train for golf.



It's time to delete "Eye of the Tiger" from the iPod, stop eating raw eggs and breaking into a butcher's shop to punch raw meat. That's not what golf fitness is all about. And pull down those Hulk Hogan and Arnold Schwarzenegger posters on the gym wall, saying: "You could look like this in three weeks!"

A European Tour player recently visited The Melbourne Golf Injury Clinic in a very bad state. He had been given a lot of upper-body exercises such as dead lifts (lifting weights and holding them above the head like a weight lifter). He was also asked to do bench presses and bicep curls, which made his body 'top heavy'. Now, he has to completely change his body, purely as a result of very poor information given to him. It will take at least a year to get rid of all those bad habits and patterns that have infected his golf swing.

A golf swing is like a spinning top. It works on an axis and smooth radius. But if you placed a big chunk of Blu-Tac on a spinning top, then it would start to swerve and tilt in the wrong direction. As a golfer, you're already leaning over the ball. You've increased the front muscles that affect your centre of gravity and also increase the tone and flexion in your body. Therefore, you really need the opposite muscles – the anti-gravity muscles – to keep you upright (e.g. the triceps, lower-trapezius, 'lats', 'gluts', and lower and deep abdominals).

These are the muscles that should be used in golf-specific training. I recommend the crucifix drill and posture bar lifts. Most importantly, these exercises should be done while standing in order to simulate the movements of a golf swing.

### More war stories from the gym

Some people are tightly strung. Others are too loose and need to get tighter. A six-foot-tall male is likely to have different tolerances to a 5-foot-3 woman. So there are different body types among golfers and that's why you need to be "screened" by a physiotherapist. It's important to have a correct diagnosis, so that a trainer or conditioner knows the muscle lengths and flexibility range of a golfer.

I've heard many horrific stories that have occurred in a gym-like environment. One involved a US Tour player who fractured his rib while overstretching. He was quite a tight golfer and the trainer had no concept of his body type. The player's arm was over his head in a hip-and-trunk stretch when the rib

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"popped". The injury forced him off the tour for eight weeks.

One trainer used cable-and-weight exercises that were meant to simulate the golf swing. That's an absolute disaster. He wasn't trained as a PGA professional, yet he was getting a player to move into the different planes of a golf swing. That actually destroys the golfer because it encourages a really bad movement and technique under load. Because the body has been under such a strong load, the brain starts to accommodate that movement. So the player eventually swung the club in that manner. Subsequently, his instructor had a lot of trouble fixing this ingrained pattern of movement.

In another case, a personal trainer told a trainee professional to do 200 bicep curls on either arm. The trainee came in to see me and couldn't straighten his elbows! We had to ice and massage them for a week. He was stuck in a "Thunderbirds" position with stiff, fixed, bent elbows. The personal trainer thought that you need strong biceps to hit a golf ball. But most people who play a lot of golf already have tight biceps. So bicep curls will just exacerbate the bicep tension.

Some personal trainers assume that pro golfers are "tight" and would benefit from a lot of yoga. But they don't realise that a golfer loses "feel" with a certain amount of excessive overstretch. There's a place for yoga but top golfers need a tension threshold in order to keep their swing compact.

### What to look for in a personal trainer for golf

I've found that the best golf trainers are the ones that seek information and work closely within a team. Good trainers take a golfer's "screening" from a physiotherapist, so that they know the person's diagnosis and pre-existing injuries. Only then will they establish a fitness and conditioning program for the golfer.

Good golf trainers take an interest in the game and continually build their knowledge by attending seminars and workshops (such as the PGA of Australia's Teaching Summit or Titleist Performance Institute lectures). In particular, they have a passion for golf. Most play regularly and spend time at golf courses to watch how PGA professionals teach the game.

Look for a trainer who is golf sophisticated rather than someone who is stuck in his own little world. If someone asks you to do

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10 x 10 x 3, it's means they're not thinking about the training volume. They're giving a recipe of their favourite robotic exercises.

What do 'reps' mean? If you can only feel a certain movement four times, then why would you do it 10 times? You would be losing the feel for what you want to do. Therefore, you're losing the control and giving your brain different information. So you've confused the brain on quality of movement.

And that's what the golf swing is all about

– quality of movement under control and pressure. You're in the wrong gym if you find yourself straining under a barbell with teeth clenched and eyes popping out of their sockets as your face changes colour from white to red to blue.

Ramsay McMaster is a world authority on golf-specific physiotherapy. You can call him on 0407 432 282, or The Melbourne Golf Injury Clinic on (03) 9569 9448.

## Four questions to ask a golf-specific trainer

### 1. How many hours a week do you train golfers?

**Simon Webb, Victorian Institute of Sport, physical preparation specialist:** "My involvement with the VIS golf program means that I am always training golfers throughout the week. The number of hours varies greatly depending on the time of year. At its peak, I would do more than 20 hours per week with as many as 30 elite golfers, often in small squad-based sessions.

### 2. What muscles do you use?

**Trent Malcolm, consultant to The Melbourne Golf Injury Clinic, exercise physiologist:** "Important prime movers and stabilisers in the golf swing. They are the:

- torso – internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, erector spinae, transversus abdominis and multifidus;
- lower body – gluteus maximus and medius, adductors and quads;
- upper body – triceps, deltoids, traps and rhomboids, lat dorsi, forearms.

### 3. Have you done any golf-specific conditioning courses?

**Simon Webb:** "I studied human movement at Deakin University before I began working with the VIS golf program in 1996. In the past 12 months I attended the World Golf Fitness Summit in Florida (where I will be presenting this year) and assisted at the Titleist TPI certification course at Southern Golf Club in Melbourne."

### 4. What golf teaching models and philosophies do you know?

**Trent Malcolm:** "I integrate the technical goals of the coach with my exercise programming as much as I can, to create an exercise program that is specific to the client's swing and their physiology."

Next month: A 'spiky' ball workout for the white-collar golfer

