



Trends and lessons from golf in 2010

The 2010 season sparked a seismic shift in power – and thinking.



The year of 2010 was a defining season in golf for so many reasons, particular the emergence of Europe as the source of the world's best players. European Tour players won the US Open (Graeme McDowell), British Open (Louis Oosthuizen) and US PGA Championship (Martin Kaymer). Europe won the Ryder Cup while a European nation (France) claimed the Eisenhower Trophy at the World Amateur Teams Championship. And Tiger Woods lost his mantle as the world's No.1 player to a European (Lee Westwood).

In terms of producing elite golfers, I think we're witnessing a continental shift from America to Europe in men's golf and America to Asia in the women's game. It's no coincidence that teaching has played a massive role. And I would argue the world's best instructor is Pete Cowen, the coach of Westwood, McDowell and Oosthuizen. Cowen was recognised in the United Kingdom as Coach of the Year, which was the first time a golf coach has won such a prestigious award that includes all other sports.

I thought I'd share some observations I've made over the past 12 months. The most encouraging sign has been the broad acceptance that a golfer's body is the priority for improving a person's golf. Golfers are actually preparing their body before they hit balls. So that's a quantum leap by coaches – acknowledging your body needs to 'feel' good so that you're more coachable.

The institute-based golf programs in Australia have been a pioneer of this concept, led by PGA professionals such as Steve Bann, Dale Lynch and the late Ross Herbert. Of course, Tiger Woods has been a big influence upon how players prepare physically for tournament golf. Almost all tour players have their own physio and/or trainer to advise them on a full or part-time basis.

It's worth noting that in 2003, Cowen was the first international coach to visit Australia to see our institute of sport golf programs. His players (such as Westwood, Henrik Stenson, Oliver Wilson, Simon Dyson and Alex Noren) were some of the first European players to combine sports science with good coaching. Increasingly, more golf associations around the world have adopted golf-specific training and are taking a compulsory approach to providing golfers with what were once radical ideas, such as motor pattern postural and musculoskeletal screenings.



US PGA champion Martin Kaymer, pictured caddieing for his girlfriend Allison Micheletti at Ladies European Tour qualifying school, assumed a new mantle in European golf last year.

Relatively 'young' countries have made a rapid progression in golf (for example, Belgium, Norway, Holland, Poland and Slovenia). Belgium won this year's European Boys Team Championship (with Norway in second place) despite virtually no tradition in the sport. They've been able to fast track their development because they have embraced sports science and technology in a similar manner to how they approached tennis, soccer and training Olympians.

The use of technology has increased greatly. Computer software and instruments – SAM PuttLab, TrackMan, vision goggles and force plates – are a routine part of testing players to capture biomechanical analysis away from tournaments. It's very sophisticated and is driving players and coaches to gain a competitive edge.

European coaches appear to be 'doctors of golf' because they refer players on to a team of service providers such as medical people, physiotherapists and biomechanists. They're no longer just golf coaches. They're an integral part of the player's wellbeing. They take reports and recommendations from their team to build a holistic blueprint for their players.

As coaching has evolved with sports science, it places greater emphasis on communication within the team. With so much information available, it's essential to give 'clarity' to the player. And it's the job of the coach to make sure the

RAMSAY'S ADVICE

If you are really serious about improving your golf, the one piece of advice I'd give would be to get your club pro to organise a golf camp – over two days for six or seven golfers with access to a golf coach and a physio/trainer as well as biomechanist. That means you're receiving 'concentrated' golf, which will have greater influence on your golf than a couple of half-hour lessons.

message is clear. It can't be too much information and it can't be too little. This has been a significant trend at the top level just in the past year.

I call this "filtering and blending", ensuring the correct amount of information is given at any one time and then assimilating this information subtly into the player. As Cowen says, "Don't change the golfer, improve them."

There are going to be new ways of training golfers with specific physical benchmarks. For instance, golfers will strive for things like "prolonged neuro endurance". By that I mean the brain has to stay connected with the body under pressure for longer periods. The challenge will be to keep a golfer's nervous system as fresh as possible over 4½ hours of golf. This will allow them to control their body sequencing a lot better, which translates into more consistent golf.

Working in 'compression' is going to be another paradigm shift in golf training. There's also going to be a lot more emphasis on recovery. Studies on sleep patterns in Switzerland and Harvard reveal the biggest effect on performance is inadequate sleep. Other studies will suggest ways for athletes to deal with jet lag, which will also assist corporate golfers.

So the trickle-down effect means that all of this coaching and sports science will be available to club golfers who will reap the health benefits from what is undertaken by the pros. It's going to help people to play more golf, pain free. I think biomechanical feedback about the way we move, sequence and 'fire' neurally will have a massive effect upon enhancing concentration. Potentially, it may help sufferers of Alzheimer's. And it may assist in slowing down factors associated with the ageing process (poor mobility, balance, rotation and functional strength).

The downside of technology is that I've noticed the posture in young people has deteriorated compared to previous generations. Probably 75 per cent of kids I have screened in Asia, America, Europe and Australia have right-side scoliosis (right shoulder low) due to excessive computer and mobile phone usage. The body becomes twisted due to spending two to three hours a day on internet sites like Facebook and playing with iPhone applications. It also means kids are not socialising affectively. Several practitioners I've met are worried about virtual reality and how

it affects the mind (poor concentration levels) as well as the body (longstanding spinal and soft-tissue damage). And this deterioration has occurred in the past couple of years.

So I think playing golf and exercising outdoors will assume greater importance in years to come. Providing kids with postural drills based on biomechanical feedback is a key. So too is the simple act of getting people out onto golf courses where they talk to each other and socialise – rather than having 500 pretend friends on the web.

In other developments, I think it's significant that Victorian coach Bann is teaching a 12-year-old Korean and has mapped out a 10-year plan for the child's progress. Without doubt, the Asian 'Tigers' are coming. Korea has already taken massive strides in women's golf and Thailand is showing great interest in the game.

Personally, it's quite exciting to see somebody like US professional Bobby Gates coming into golf from an American football background. He's got a great balance of intelligence, physical prowess and maturity as a golfer. At just 25 years of age, Bobby has a long-term plan about what he wants to get out of the game. It will be interesting to watch his progress as a rookie on the US PGA Tour in 2011.

My fondest memory of 2010 was Peter Fowler's return from career-threatening injuries (involving hip and groin surgery). He's probably hit more golf balls than any other Australian professional golfer. It was truly amazing to see Pete in a crippled state at the start of the year, then to watch him contend at the Australian PGA at the age of 51. It summed up what I feel golf is all about. Playing, competing and thoroughly enjoying the common passion that serious golfers have for the game.

For advice on a golf-specific training program, contact Ramsay McMaster on 0407 432 282. To purchase a golfer's 'Fitness Survival Kit', call the Melbourne Golf Injury Clinic on (03) 9569 9448.

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