

Sport-specific training benefits longevity in golf game

Golf fitness adds yards and years
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Photo By Mike Bailey/For the Chronicle

Pam Owens, the director of fitness for Redstone Golf, supervises Gary Janik's training session.

Gary Janik was pretty fit when he started training with Pam Owens 2½ months ago. The 56-year-old petroleum engineer rides his bike and runs regularly. He had even ordered a golf fitness program over the Internet and worked out on his own.

But when he went to see Owens, the director of golf fitness for Redstone Golf, he realized the value of an expert's supervision.

"Even though these exercises look simple," said Janik, a 6-handicapper at **Sweetwater Country Club**, "they're quite a challenge."

There is a difference between being fit and being golf fit. The latter incorporates the muscles and sequencing of the golf swing, and these days better players are increasingly going to golf fitness experts like Owens to train, not only to improve their endurance and stamina but their golf swings as well through golf-specific exercises.

Not only does the training provide distance gains, but it's critical for endurance. Janik plays about 200 rounds a year, often 36 holes a day, and he believes golf fitness

gives him an advantage over his competition.

"For the guys who spend most of their week behind a desk, that last nine holes can be pretty tough," Janik said.

Owens came to golf fitness about 10 years ago when **Kevin Kirk**, who now heads up the **Golf Performance Center** at **The Woodlands Country Club**, sent her one of his golf students.

That's when Owens started looking into something called the **Titleist Performance Institute**, an initiative set up for golf-specific physical training.

Focus on the glutes

TPI incorporates strength, cardio, flexibility and balance training as it pertains to the golf swing. Owens became the first TPI Level 3 fitness professional in Texas. She heads up the golf fitness programs for all of Redstone's Houston-area facilities — including Shadow Hawk and The Houstonian golf clubs - and this year she opened studios at **Redstone Golf Club** as well as Black Horse.

Owens points out the golf swing is an asymmetrical motion, and golfers tend to develop muscle imbalances and flexibility issues. Swinging a golf club also requires lot of force and produces stress on the body, she said.

"Fitness will give you longevity, help prevent injury and provide endurance, conditioning and stamina to play the game," she said.

When a golfer comes to Owens for training, the first thing she does is a fitness assessment. Based on a series of tests, she conducts a golf fitness handicap. Janik's, despite his level of overall fitness, was a 12.8. Most amateurs come in a little higher than that, although most competitive younger players are single digit because they've been raised in the golf fitness culture.

"Most people don't use their glutes," Owens said, referring to what she says might be the most important muscles in the golf swing. "Because the glutes are the power base. They are the initiators of the correct sequence in the golf swing."

Strong gluteus muscles, combined with flexibility, allows hip separation from the torso, a critical element in the athletic swing.

Just as important, she said, are the core muscles, which is why so much of TPI focuses on developing good core strength. Balance training and core strength go hand-in-hand, and there are exercises that help develop both.

Proper nutrition essential

TPI training benefits can be diminished, however, without another important element - nutrition. For those who battle a weight problem, it is especially important. No matter how much you exercise, proper nutrition is imperative.

"You can easily out-eat your workout," Owens said.

Some basic guidelines to nutrition include eating five small meals a day (two are nutritious snacks) with the majority of the calories coming early in the day. A good balance of protein and healthy carbs will help golfers arrive at and maintain a healthy weight.

Owens conducts between 20 and 30 training sessions a week. Individual and group sessions, including clinics and golf Pilates are available. For more information, you can contact Owens at powens@redstonegolfclub.com.

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