

## **Kendal Yonomoto**

### What do golfers want from a golf fitness program?

When golfers ask for a golf fitness program, typically fitness is a secondary goal. What they are really saying is. "I want to play better, if fitness will help me play better, I want to get more fit." The golfer's major objective is much more than just getting fit. They want to get more distance. They want to control their ball. They want to get rid of pervasive swing faults They want to be more consistent.

### Can a strength program help you play better golf?

I have not found any research that supports the idea that getting stronger improves performance. As a matter of fact, several coaches and therapists have informed me of the same findings, they have not found any research that shows conclusively that an increase in strength correlates directly with improvement in performance, in any sport.

Why could this be? Optimal performance in sport is highly dependent on skills. In golf, skills include the physical skills: the full swing, short game and putting, and all the mental skills. The mental skills include: self-management, course management, strategy and knowledge of the game. Any golfer who has ever competed knows that intangibles such as the ability to stay present, focus, and deal with pressure, are also hugely important.

Performances come together as the skills and intangibles come together, these are not dependent on strength alone. A skilled player that is weak may experience a huge benefit from a strength program that allows their skill to be displayed at a higher level. This increase in capacity could mean that the golfer can display their skills for a longer period of time consistently or they may be able to perform a skill with better quality. Increased capacity may also allow the skilled athlete the ability to perform the skill faster, more accurately, with greater stability and less deterioration. However, an unskilled golfer that increases their strength will remain relatively unskilled. The golfer's lack of skill will still be the limiting factor of their performance.

### Golf in Comparison to Other Skill Sport Disciplines

The integration of skill training into a strength training program or the integration of strength training into a skill training program is new to golfers. Golfers have typically focused on the swing and swing mechanics exclusively. It is only very recently that golf and fitness have been linked in the general consciousness. I believe that at some point, golf instructors will be even greater experts and deliver all aspects of golf coaching. They will be able to teach technique and guide the golfer's training; physical and mental, as they recognize the impact that a comprehensive approach can have.

Track athletes and martial artists have a long history of physical preparation that provides a platform for the skills needed in the sport. Coaches in these sports train their athletes very specifically without the need to call it sport specific training. Why would they call it anything else? Sprinters, endurance runner and throwers all have vastly different training programs. It is self evident that this approach will be optimal. In this respect, golf seems more like a game of skill in comparison to a sport or discipline that requires intense physical and mental preparation. This appears to be changing as competitors look for an edge.

### Fitness Enhances Skills

Why was Bruce Lee once of the best martial artists of all time? He was highly skilled and he took his skills to a new level with increased endurance, strength and power. He also had a life and training philosophy that provided him with a set of values to organize his life and prioritize his decision making process. A small number of players on the PGA Tour appear to be attempting to take their game to the next level with the addition of a rigorous, comprehensive fitness program to their normal preparations.

### Golf Fitness Program Design

A golf fitness program should address technique, enhancing strengths and addressing weaknesses. Without a strong understanding of the physical skills required for golf, it is difficult to design a program that is beneficial for golf that enhances the sequencing, coordination, rhythm and speed aspects of the game. It is also too easy to design a program that is counter-productive for golf performance. A poorly designed program may degrade motor skills or impede golf swing mechanics.

The strength coach could default to a rehabilitation program or a general flexibility or stability program. This tactic is a common approach by non-golfers who may have a good understanding of the body, or exercise regimen, but little understanding of technique or a “feel” for golf swing mechanics. The default position is usually one of improving posture or function or both. It is likely that this approach would have some positive effect. The majority of the population suffers from significant postural stress and may have several symptomatic and asymptomatic physical conditions that will benefit from some general pre-conditioning and rehabilitation. But it does not address the aspect that drives or improves performance, which is skill.

### Five Objectives of Our Golf Fitness Programs

In order for our golf fitness programs to have the desired benefit of increased performance we design programs to satisfy a minimum of the following 5 objectives:

1. **The program increases the golfers capacity to do work and increases their resistance to physical and mental stress.** Skill is a cumulative effect of hundreds, if not thousands, of high quality repetitions. This requires a lot of energy or capacity.
2. **The program enhances swing mechanics by optimizing joint range of motion and stability.** This process effectively creates “controlled instability” of an unstable system, the human skeleton. Controlled instability is a concept that optimizes speed and movement with increased neuromuscular control and coordination. This will build a foundation for skill development.
3. **The program improves sequencing, coordination and rhythm with respect to the golf swing.** The general movement patterns and relative timing of movements in the golf swing should be enhanced or improved by the training program. This will positively impact motor coordination skills that transfer to golf.
4. **The program enhances the golfer’s ability to perform their skills with greater precision, consistency, and speed.** The golfer should also gain an idea of how to use their mental and physical assets and physics to their advantage.
5. **The program benefits all aspects of the game including the full swing, short game and putting.** The majority of strokes are taken in close proximity to the hole. Short game and putting skills benefit greatly from training and an applied understanding of strategies to take advantage of body design and physics.