

## GETTING FIT TO IMPROVE YOUR GAME

**By Karen Harding**

When Gary Player was once asked what fitness had added to his playing career, he answered in one word: longevity.

Player was one of the earliest proponents of golf-directed strength and conditioning which he claims not only set him up for success but allowed him to play almost all his career without injury. At the time he was very much the odd man out on the professional tour but these days it is rare to find a Tour player who does not visit the fitness trailer regularly, an indication that modern golf is now considered an athletic activity.

But what of the average club golfer? Can doing the same exercises as the top players help improve his/her game too? The answer, according to Darren Lay, is yes.

Lay is senior physiotherapist at Ramsay McMaster's Melbourne Golf Injury Clinic which prescribes individualised rehabilitation and improvement programs for golfers of all ages - male or female, senior or junior, elite or ... not.

Prior to the clinic opening in 1992, these programs were available to elite and Tour players only. These days, golf specialist physios are much easier to find but it's fair to say that McMaster is the one who started it all, visiting many different golf clubs and spruiking the benefits of golf-specific fitness.

Before that, many golfers wanting to improve thought that bulking up would return extra distance off the tee and were perplexed when it did not or, worse, their game went south altogether.

But the core of modern training is literally that – the core.

“A lot of people think core stability is just about abdominal strength, which it isn't,” says Lay. “Core stability is really those deeper muscles which protect and control spinal movement, and they're the vital ones. They're the ones that you

don't see on the outside- transverse abdominus, multifidus, glutes, pelvic floor muscles, lower scapula muscles....”

Screening tests identify physical capabilities - strengths and weaknesses – as well as flexibility, control and stability, and risk areas in each individual, after which a personalised exercise program is prescribed.

“There are different levels of screening, from the very basic, which just look at postural control and awareness, to the more advanced which check range of movement, control in different areas, motor patterns. With the state squads and VIS guys, we do quite advanced screening and really take their body apart,” says Lay.

McMaster and Lay's exercises are designed to be done at home – or for elite players on the road, in a hotel room – with very little equipment. Lay says that within six to eight weeks of working on certain exercises, players should start seeing benefits but it can sometimes take a little longer to translate into lowered handicaps.

The point is this: any golfer can get the most out of his/her game through appropriate preparation. Look at it this way – lower injury risk, improved game....why wouldn't you give it a go?