

Met Methods

Winter Games

Keeping your game in shape can be easier than you think

BY MARK WOOD
WITH PETE WOFFORD

Whether you're sitting behind your desk at work, lounging on the couch at home, or flying south for the winter, your mind will no doubt wander toward next season's golf game. Many of us imagine that, if only we could get that new high-tech putter or supercharged driver, our games would be launched to a new level altogether. It's a nice dream but of course almost certainly just that. For the vast majority of us, the key to significant improvement is not in our equipment, but in our mirrors.

The truth is, if we want a better game we have to be better athletes, meaning we need to exercise. There, I said it, the "E" word dreaded by so many golfers. But the fact is, much as you might resist them, there are literally dozens of easy exercises specific to the golf swing and capable of producing genuine improvement in your game. For the purposes of this article, I have identified five key movements in the golf swing and five exercises/stretchers intended to improve your ability to execute them.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEONARD KAMSLER

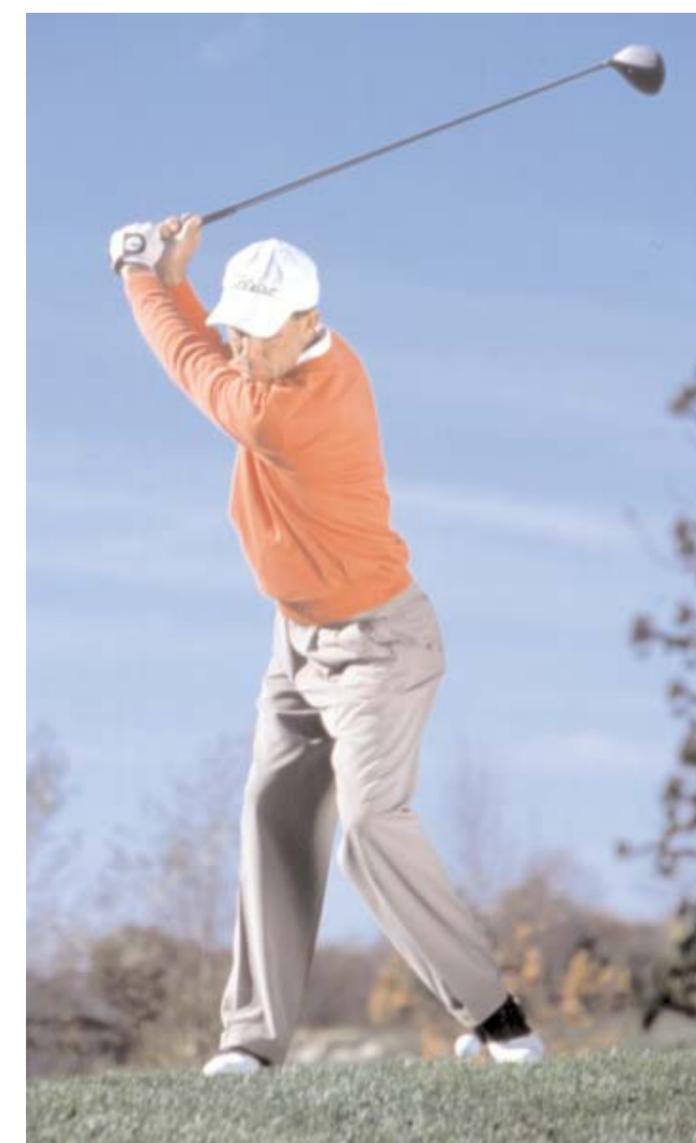
Stretch To the Top

The length of your backswing is directly related to your hips, torso, and range of motion in your shoulders. A series of excessively tight muscles from your hips to your shoulders and neck will not allow the rotation needed to complete the backswing. A common resulting fault is the clichéd "short and quick" swing. As your round of golf nears the final few holes, the swing gets even shorter.



The Stretch: Sit on the ground (floor), with one leg extended flat and the other leg crossed and knee flexed, foot flat on the ground (above). Keeping your back straight, extend your arms and rotate your shoulders horizontally. With the arm opposite to the flexed leg, position the elbow against the outside edge of the knee, and extend the other arm and place it on the ground behind your seat, creating a twist. As you improve your range of motion, you can push against your knee with your arm to add additional stretch.

Notice in my seated position how my shoulders have rotated well past 90 degrees, allowing a complete turn in the backswing. Remember I have been doing this for years. And remember to switch legs and rotate in the opposite direction as well.



The Swing: On a vertical plane you can see how much my hips, torso and shoulders have rotated (above). The length of my backswing is no longer limited by my flexibility. I can comfortably stop at the top, with the shaft parallel to the ground.

Notice the limited amount of backward motion I'm able to achieve on the bad—or less flexible—swing (right). This will require me to make adjustments elsewhere in my swing to pick up any kind of swing speed or consistency.





Posture Perfect

Posture is one of the most critical elements in the swing, and one in which a diminished range of motion can easily be identified. For example, if your hamstring muscles are too tight you will have a tendency to stand too upright (above) thereby reducing the dynamic flex in your lower body.



The Stretch: Kneel on one leg with the opposite foot positioned immediately in front of the bent knee. Using your hands to support your weight on the arms of a chair, slowly



The Swing: At impact a flexible golfer can maintain the drive of the legs through the ball. The golfer with tight hamstrings will stand taller, and rise up on to their toes at impact.



stand and extend your legs. Keep your back straight and head up, looking forward. The goal is to extend both legs, locking the knees without too much tension.

Left Arm Straight



Maintaining the radius of the left arm in the backswing is important in producing a repeatable and well-timed swing. The resultant tension free right arm also allows a freer follow-through.

The Stretch: Standing, simply interlock your fingers. Then twist your wrists inside out. Now, with your back straight, and keeping your arms extended, slowly raise your arms high over your head with the goal of creating a vertical line with your upper body and arms (right).

The Swing: The stretching of the arms overhead helps in the extension of the left arm in the backswing and the right arm in the follow-through. Too many amateurs with limited flexibility will start out with their left arm straight only to bend the elbow (left) in an attempt to create a longer swing.



Muscle Memory

A weighted golf club is a great tool for golfers. Simple exercises involving mini-swings can accomplish many goals. Here I use a short club, with extra weight just below the pre-formed grip on the club. The exercise is isometric so long as you keep the range of motion slow and you stop and hold the key positions of the golf swing. I'll stop my back swing in the left arm horizontal to the ground position (left), and hold the weight for 30 seconds. Then I'll release and rotate my swing before holding for another 30 seconds in the follow-through position, again just parallel to the ground.



Putting Memory

A day without putting is a lost opportunity for improvement. An easy drill to reinforce the natural arc of the putting stroke is to simply rest your clubhead along the curved edge of a training aid like the Putting Arc (left). With or without balls, the gentle ride of the clubhead along the arc allows you to focus on the rhythm and pace of the putting motion, instead of on the squareness of the clubhead. Focusing on the motion instead of the target also lessens the tendency to follow the results of the putt with the movement of your head. You can't miss from inside 10-feet with this guide. ■

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