

Toward the golfing athlete

By Gary Stebbing

“It’s not about the short hitter anymore. It’s about guys who are big and athletic. Wait until you get kids who are athletic, who aren’t fat and out of shape, and the sport they play is golf.”

Tiger Woods quoted in The Times 06 March 2006

“They’re coming and Tiger knows it”, is how Golf Digest magazine began its article in June 2004 on the future golf-athlete. Indeed, Tiger has known it for some time and now the question about conditioning is no longer why.....but how!

Tiger may have said it but European Tour Professional Simon Khan knew it too when he contacted me in early May 2002 after having read “Fitness for golf performance” an article I wrote for Profile magazine. He was aware of the importance of physical conditioning in his golf game, but was not clear on the best route to take. He knew the time had come for a serious commitment and to seek expert help.

This article provides an overview of the conditioning work I have performed with Simon between May 2002 and the end of the 2005 season.

Let’s begin by looking at his performance data from the European Tour (figure 1) and how it has progressed.

Simon Khan – European Tour Statistical Overview

Variable	Pre intervention May 2002	End season November 2005
Stroke Average	73.12	70.86
Driving Accuracy	62.4	66.28
Driving distance (yds)	273.6	285.36
Greens in regulation	66.6	67.07
Ave. putts per round	30.6	29.33
Putts per GIR	1.84	1.78
Round 1 stroke average	72.88	70.43
Round 2	72.94	72
Round 3	74.50	70.29
Round 4	72.62	70.53
Total driving ranking	141	17
Total putting ranking	172	49
Shot accuracy ranking	56	22
Overall stats ranking	150	26
Position Order of merit	237	40
Career Earnings	52,378 euros	1,664,790

No matter how you cut the statistics - and they don't mention his maiden European tour victory in the Welsh Open at Celtic Manor including a course record 61 - he has radically improved his performance in the last 4 years. So what conditioning has he done to help with this change?

Developing a conditioning programme for performance enhancement in golf involves three key phases, building the initial profile or current reality, creating the workouts or programme and then evaluating the results.

- **The Initial Profile**

1. **Training status**

Simon's overall conditioning experience was quite basic particularly regarding resistance exercise. Though he had worked with weights, he had tended to perform the same range of exercises, few of which were likely to be of help going forward. A significant amount of general training would be needed to build a strong foundation of physical ability for Simon. This did not mean Simon neglected exercises more relevant to his golf development but that his overall pathway was geared to establishing a more complete and integrated whole body condition. With this in place he could reap the benefits over the long term.

2. **Current and previous injury history**

Simon identified injury concerns relating to a minor wrist problem, some previous low back pain and ongoing weakness in his upper left leg, which he felt, was linked to incomplete rehabilitation from knee surgery in 2000.

3. **Relevant testing and evaluation**

Golf creates an interesting challenge for the conditioning specialist since many of the performance tests traditionally used bare little relevance to overall golfing performance. Although we did explore some of Simon's physical abilities (e.g. flexibility) I decided to allow performance statistics on the course and his perception of his physical ability to be the measure of progress. Improved on course performance is ultimately how the golfer measures results.

Simon had concerns regarding his rotational ability in the pelvis, low back and hip areas; these related to specific elements of his swing, which he felt, needed development. We performed a simple assessment of his range of motion (static) and findings were considered alongside evidence he provided from his video and swing analysis (dynamic) with his technical coach Matt Belsham. I then spoke with Matt to discuss the findings and establish his observations on any areas he felt Simon needed to address physically.

4. **Building The Vision**

Simon outlined in detail his needs, objectives, goals, and areas of concern relating to his physical condition. We also discussed his playing schedule and structure of his

professional life to ensure his training was organised and managed in the best way for him, and his golf.

- **Programme Design**

The first stage is the development of overall working capacity. The objective is to increase general capability within all the major fitness abilities for example strength, cardio-vascular endurance, muscular endurance and flexibility. This gives the golfer a more complete level of 'all round conditioning' and provides a broader and stronger base on which to build subsequent levels of more specific development.

With this all round conditioning in place the opportunity to develop the specific elements of golf conditioning become more relevant. That is not to say you cannot do specific exercises during your general training, rather it refers to the overall training time devoted to general vs. specific exercise.

Figure 2 shows an example of a golf fitness specific performance profile that I have developed, this further refines the fitness abilities relevant to golf and is excellent as a tool for assessing training progress, establishing objectives and developing programmes going forward.

Once the competitive season begins, the options for high quality physical training narrow. The priority is golf performance and much of the players' energy should be focused on the events. They may be competing Thurs-Sunday and both the physiological and psychological stressors may be high. If training and fatigue are not well managed, the risk of injury and/or a drop in level of performance is increased.

Based on our initial profile and discussions regarding these factors it was decided to prioritise at this time and Simon began with a flexibility programme only to perform daily alongside his practice. The goal was to make improvements in range of motion through the season and then look to make a fitness jump over the following winter by addressing other fitness abilities. The results were marked and he increased ROM in all areas statically tested along with improvements in his dynamic ROM (i.e. in his swing). An unrelated but very positive additional benefit was that he also noted improved recovery between rounds, and a decrease in fatigue when performing his flexibility routine each evening during tournaments.

As with any golfers playing at a very high competitive level management and organisation of training is one of the keys to success. Our target was to work hard at conditioning through the winter period and then look to maintain progress through the season. We acknowledged that Simon may see a small drop off in physical ability during this period, but he would re-focus on this during the breaks he took between events (usually 1-3 weeks). Training during the competitive period was restricted to one short intense session, normally on a Tuesday. Flexibility work however was continued daily. Simon was given exercises to perform 2-3 x per week during extended breaks between events, he performed most of his training on his own, we would meet periodically for review and his new programmes would be designed and sent to him accordingly.

Selection of Exercises

His programme has been built around a staple diet of bodyweight, free weight and cable type movements. In addition tools such as medicine and stability balls have been used from time to time.

In the early phases of his programme he focused on general core or structural exercises with a smattering of more specific movements. As he has increased his experience and ability the range of exercise options has developed. His favourites have been the explosive power movements that he has worked with.

Although highly relevant to success it is beyond this article to detail specific content regarding exact workouts, exercises, sets, reps etc....

- **Evaluation**

It is possible to perform a plethora of assessments related to the abilities identified in figure 1 and use them to measure changes in performance. My choice depends on the client or golfer. Golf as a game of numbers lends itself well to generation of statistics and the performance analysis (figure 1) is a clear method of assessing progress. I also like to use a subjective tool such as a performance profile (figure 2) this allows the player to explore key fitness elements in their own way and relate it to how it feels when they play.

Example of a Conditioning Performance Profile for Golf

<u>Physical Ability</u>	<u>Profile No.</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>
Power	(1)	■	■	■	■	■	■				
	(2)	■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
Power Endurance		■	■	■	■	■	■				
		■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
Strength		■	■	■	■	■					
		■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
Strength Endurance		■	■	■	■						
		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
Static Flexibility		■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
		■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
Dynamic Flexibility		■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
		■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
Balance		■	■	■	■	■					
		■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
Cardio-vascular		■	■	■	■	■	■				

Endurance		■	■	■	■	■	■						
Fatigue Resistance		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				
		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				
Skill Endurance		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				
		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■			

(Figure 2)

Toward the future of the golfing athlete

What has been presented here is an overview of physical conditioning for golf and its application with an elite player. Although physical conditioning is only one element in the development of the golfer, it is now a fundamental one.

As a very famous man once said, “it’s not about the short hitter anymore. It’s about guys who are big and athletic. Wait until you get kids who are athletic, who aren’t fat and out of shape, and the sport they play is golf.”

If you would like more information about, Performance Development or how to become a Golfing Athlete, please contact Gary Stebbing on 07949 472142 or visit his web site at www.garystebbing.com