

Conditioning for Golf

General & Specialised Physical Preparation

In considering the physical conditioning requirements of the golfer we must begin by considering the philosophy that the development of training programmes for all sport, requires that the total training exposure be sub-divided to maximise performance improvements. In order that the development of the physical abilities of the individual takes place sequentially the concept of General Physical Preparation (GPP) and Specialised Physical Preparation (SPP) has developed. Although much of this would seem logical, research and writing on its practical application has predominantly been the domain of the Eastern Europeans (e.g. USSR). This approach is closely linked to the theory of periodisation of training, the development of which has also been accredited to the Soviet Union, more specifically Matveyev.

General Physical Preparation (GPP)

The first stage in the development of conditioning for sport is to establish the athlete or individuals GPP. This requires the development of a persons overall working capacity, with the purpose of increasing capability within all the major biomotor abilities required in all sport (i.e. strength, endurance, agility, flexibility etc.). This gives the individual a more complete level of 'all round conditioning' (Siff 2000) Research and training specialists agree that the broader and stronger this base the greater subsequent level of development possible (Bompa 1999; Yessis 1982).

It is also believed that the all round base of GPP may have a fundamental impact on the ultimate level of technical mastery an individual reaches (Yessis 1982). This concept has specific relevance when we consider the development of athletes or individuals within all sport. In simple terms, an athlete should aim for high levels of GPP in order to create the optimal environment for the application of specialisation training as they progress. For example young athletes should arrive at their chosen sport with significant development of all physical qualities. Practical examples of this can be seen in athletes who excel in several sports - which at one time was very common (classical GPP method) - and only at a late stage decide on the sport within which they will focus or 'specialise'. This seems paradoxical to the current philosophy prevalent in many sports of selecting talented individuals and encouraging specialisation from earlier and earlier ages (e.g. academies) often at the exclusion of other sports.

The specific length of time required to develop adequate GPP can vary, factors such as specific sport, the age athlete or individual began the sport, existing physical preparation levels and injury background are relevant here. Within different scenarios this period may contain additional elements. It may be used to develop some additional muscle tissue or lose excess body fat, may contain specific rehabilitation exercises, or could deal with specific 'imbalance' issues that may be present (Siff 2000). Regardless of absolute specifics of content, the overarching principles remain the same, the development of an increased overall level of whole body physical condition as a basis or foundation for more advanced or specialised training.

Specialised Physical Preparation (SPP)

Although seemingly independent, the development of GPP and SPP are interconnected and the transition from one to the other gradual. The SPP phase normally begins in the latter stages of the GPP period (Bompa 1999) and indeed some GPP can be appropriate within an SPP training phase itself for variation (Siff 2000). The major purpose of Specialised Physical Preparation is to develop the specific skills and abilities required within the sport of choice. This means training sessions or workouts are selective and have a high correlation to the sport, the approach to training exercises is dictated by the requirements and needs or

demands of the sport (Yessis 1983). Training focuses on specific joints and muscles determined by movement analysis, considers types of muscle action, speeds of movement, specific loading and patterns of movement (Bompa 1999).

The overall success of this phase is determined by the level of GPP on which it is placed and in turn, specialised training is the basis for success in the chosen sport (Yessis 1983). It is predominantly during this phase that the individual must take the physical training improvements they have made and integrate them with the specific technical sporting skills and tactical abilities required for overall sports success.

The SPP period can vary in length although will broadly be between 1 and 3 months in length. This will be dependant on the individual, the preceding level of GPP, level of ability and schedule.

GPP, SPP & The Golfer

The application of the information discussed so far requires clear classification regarding needs/abilities of each individual entering the physical training process. This requires you to make your own decisions or judgement calls and is beyond the scope of this discussion. That said some simple principles could be applied regardless of individual differences.

The foundation of long-term golfing improvement is high levels of GPP. This may mean spending significant periods of time developing a range of physical abilities with the individual, interspersed with brief but progressive phases of SPP. If the training philosophy proposed within this article holds true for your client, you should see steady improvements in GPP, leading over time to improvements in SPP and ultimately improvements in sporting performance.

There is no reason you cannot include more 'specific exercises' identified by your movement analysis within your GPP phases to provide variation and it is likely to be useful to encourage your client to continue practicing and developing their technical abilities as their physical abilities improve (Yessis 2000). Once your golfer has established suitable GPP levels then more and more time must be spent in developing SPP, this increased SPP becomes the physical foundation for the highest levels of technical mastery.

In conclusion, it is often very attractive and tempting to go straight to 'advanced' or 'specialised' techniques with our clients, however we must not underestimate the benefits of basic or general training within our practice. The overall training process includes elements of both GPP and SPP, specific and non-specific methods applied appropriately either in sequence or concurrently to suit a given individual at a given time in the preparatory period (Siff 2003).

References and Suggested Reading

Bompa, T. (1999) *Periodisation: Theory and Methodology of Training*. Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics

Siff, M.C. (2003). *Fact and Fallacies of Fitness*, (5th ed.). Denver USA.

Siff, M.C. (2000). *Supertraining*. Supertraining Institute, (5th ed.). Denver USA

Verkhoshansky, Y.V. (1985) *Programming and Organisation of Training*. Livonia, Michigan Sportivny Press

Yessis, M. (1982) "The Role of All-Round General Physical Preparation In The Multi-Year and Yearly Training Programmes" *NSCA Journal* Oct-Nov.48-50

Yessis, M. (1983) "The Role of Specialised Training in Multi-year and Yearly Training Programmes" *NSCA Journal* January 10-11 & 36.

Yessis, M. (2000) *Explosive Golf* Lincolnwood, Illinois: Masters Press

© Gary Stebbing 2005