

PREPARE TO WIN!

by Larry Castro

Do you give yourself enough time to warm up before your round? While most amateur golfers don't allow themselves adequate time to hit practice balls at the driving range, fewer exercise before they play. This lack of forethought dramatically minimizes their potential. Worse yet, it will open them up to the risk of injuries.

I am amazed at what happens on the driving range when golfers prepare for a round. Most arrive and automatically hit their driver in an effort to impress their friends. These Tiger Woods' wannabes rush to the range, grab a bucket of balls, and start rapid firing. They'll hit one good ball and feel as though they are ready to play.

Upon arriving at the range you are usually stiff, and will have a hard time getting into the proper positions to swing the golf club.

Unfortunately most people build their whole golf game around those limitations. Their bodies are not stable

and they cannot find the rhythm and balance necessary to play properly. Some of the problems that occur from these limitations include over compensation—such as sliding or over using the legs and arms. That is why we see a lot of golfers start to play better after the third or fourth hole and then get tired about the 14th hole.

During the golf swing, the club moves at an average of 100 miles per hour, and at impact feels like 150 pounds. Amateur golfers reach approximately 90 percent of their peak muscle activity during the full golf swing. The average golfer takes a full swing 50 to 60 times a round with comparable intensity. The level of exertion and muscle activation equates golf with such sports as football, hockey, and the martial arts. The difference? Athletes in these other sports include athletic development as an integral part of their game plan.

PGA, Senior PGA, and LPGA Tour

players always arrive at the course well before they play. Most pros give themselves an hour on the practice range and putting green. This allows them enough time to work their way through their golf game, and to find rhythm and balance.

Many of the pros choose to visit the Tour's Player Fitness Centers, where they go through a warm-up and stretching exercise program. Typically, their exercise routine consists of 20 minutes of stretching the legs, trunk and shoulders. They start the program by raising their body temperature by riding the stationary bike, stair climber, or by using the treadmill for 10 to 12 minutes. Increasing the body's core temperature allows the contractile and connective tissue to extend more easily and makes stretching more effective.

Professional athletes in all sports take time to physically prepare themselves for their training or competition. For you to find your true potential in golf you should also do this. Of course, such an attitude



Lunge with chest stretch (left and right leg forward). Complete lower body stretch covering many areas such as hamstring, quad, groin, etc and upper body chest, shoulders, back etc.



X factor stretch covers rotation, stability and balance



Completing the X factor stretch to a complete balanced finish. The X factor stretch should be done slowly with good tempo.

For proper instruction and a list of exercises contact your Professional Golf Fitness Association professional or go to www.USGFA.com for a list of PGFA instructors in your area. Larry Castro is the founder of USGFA/PGFA, and is a PGFA Master Instructor. He may be reached at 760-291-1093.

will be only a part of reaching and finding that potential, the other key areas being mental approach, visualization, nutritional, and of course proper golf instruction from your golf coach.

So you are asking yourself, "What can I do to prepare like the professionals?" Follow the steps below for proper pre-game preparation.

CHECKLIST FOR A PRODUCTIVE WARM-UP

Professionals don't arrive at the club 12 minutes before their tee time, rush to the range, hit a half-dozen drivers, and then hurry to the first tee. Professionals have found that for peak performance they must employ a systematic warm-up.

Thirty pros were surveyed from the PGA and LPGA Tours to find out how they prepare for competition. All of them stressed that a warm-up is not a "practice session." It's not the time to try new equipment or work on swing changes. Follow this step-by-step guide and you'll be heading down the first fairway ready to play your best.

Don't Rush. Every pro we interviewed arrives at the golf course at least one hour before his or her tee time. "Everything has to be slow going to the first tee," explains PGA Tour member Grant Waite. "If you're rushed or unorganized, your anxiety level will rise."

Eat Light. There is no one perfect pre-golf breakfast or lunch, but the pros are careful not to eat too much to avoid feeling sluggish. They also dine at least 90 minutes before their tee time. Fresh fruit, muffins, and cereal are the preferred breakfast choices. Afternoon tee times call for a simple sandwich and some fruit. Most of the players avoid coffee or soda because those drinks often contain caffeine. Water is the drink of choice.

Stretch Before Swinging. Only two of the players interviewed didn't have a specific stretching routine as part of their warm-up. And both of them said they loosen up with a series

of long, slow swings with a weighted club before hitting any shots. The rest of the pros either stretch before leaving their hotel or in the locker room. This is a key to injury prevention.

Swing To Find Balance And Tempo. Pre-round swings are all about finding a comfortable tempo and balance. "It's tempo you're looking for," says PGA Tour veteran Russ Cochran. "That's why pros hit lots of wedges and short irons before a round and only a few woods." Adds rising PGA star Brian Henninger, "If I'm struggling to find a good tempo, I'll hit a few sand shots. The tempo needed for good bunker shots transfers well to the full swing."

Keep Swing Thought Down To One Or None. The pros try to avoid overloading on swing mechanics before the round. "I may change my swing key from one week to the next," says former U.S. Open winner and Senior PGA

Tour standout Tom Kite, "but I try to stay focused on one thing all day."

Check Alignment. "Everything on the course is target-oriented," explains Masters winner Larry Mize. "So it's very important to focus on alignment during your warm-up."

Start With The Shortest Club. Shorter clubs put less strain on the body at impact. Save the driver until your muscles are completely loose and your swing is on track. As you work through the bag, hit a few fades, draws, and knockdowns to gauge the sensitivity in your hands.

Don't Overdo It. Most pros hit only 35 to 45 shots divided evenly among seven or eight clubs. A typical progression is sand wedge, pitching wedge, 9-iron, 7-iron, 5-iron, 3-iron, 3-wood, and driver. Most Tour players hit their odd-numbered irons one-day and their even-numbered irons the next.



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