



PGA superstar Dustin Johnson, a student of Randy Myers



Driven to SUCCESS

TODAY'S UP-AND-COMING GOLFERS ARE REAPING THE REWARDS OF TARGETED PHYSICAL CONDITIONING, NUTRITION AND HIGH-TECH EQUIPMENT.

BY SCOTT KRAMER

Tour pros are getting bigger, stronger and more powerful. And that's not by accident.

Golf legend Gary Player is hitting balls at a private driving range, when the conversation turns toward the size of blossoming PGA Tour pro Nicolas Colsaerts, a muscular 30-year-old who averages 307 yards off the tee.

"Look at how far the ball is going," Player says. "It's so obvious to athletes that when they see what kind of money golfers make these days in tournaments, they'll want to go in this direction. We will soon see the day when 400-yard drives on tour are commonplace."

In fact, PGA Tour pros are hitting the ball farther than ever—21 of them averaged 300-plus-yard drives in 2012, led by Bubba Watson with an astonishing 315.5 yards. At one point during the year, Watson belted a tee shot 442 yards. Yet that was only the second-longest on tour last year—Gary Woodland hit one 450 yards.

Player, the pioneer of golf fitness, attributes all of this might to golfers' athleticism, conditioning and nutrition. Randy Myers, director of fitness at Sea Island Golf Learning Center, has spent 20 years training and cultivating prospective PGA Tour pros as well as seasoned athletes, including Player.

Golfers coming Myers' way are generally raw athletes who have set their sights on becoming professional golfers. "They're getting bigger and taller, like Dustin Johnson and Chris Kirk, and they've played baseball, football and hockey," Myers comments. "There are (size) exceptions like Brian Harman, who's one of the best drivers around (he's 5-feet-7-inches tall and weighs 150 pounds)—but for

the most part, they're better because they've been multiple-sport athletes."

By the time Myers gets to help these aspiring tour pros, they've already played soccer like Jonathan Byrd, or tennis like Matt Kuchar, up to the time they're about 15 years old. "Their eye-hand coordination is more sophisticated, and their ability to use both sides of their body symmetrically is better," Myers explains. "They're just committing to play golf, and they usually have a pro golfer they already emulate."

Focus on Fitness

Without question, today's prospective tour pros put themselves through intense physical conditioning—much like players of team sports. This has come about as research data has proven a correlation between better body conditioning, longer shots and more endurance. At Sea Island, the up-and-comers



Randy Myers working with Lucas Glover



Tiger Woods

are spending less time hitting balls because they're more fit, and their swings are more sophisticated, Myers says. "Ultimately, they can play more effectively. They're traveling with their trainers. I travel 20 weeks a year. It's totally changed from golfers being scared to work with weights (a few years ago) to high-level, high-intensity, cardiovascular, anaerobic-based weight training programs focused specifically to what they're doing with their golf swing.

"Rory McIlroy has transformed his body in three years into a golf machine," Myers continues. "We're just scratching the surface of this. Guys are learning how to prepare for a tournament, how to maintain their body during tournaments, and how to work to the maximum level during the offseason."

The list of pros working out used to be short—Player, Greg Norman and Tiger Woods—but now most pros are conditioning themselves for a number of reasons. Take the case of Brandt Snedeker, a Sea Island regular who went from being one of the tour's shorter hitters to being longer than average. An injury and two hip surgeries forced him into a training regimen in order to recover.



Brandt Snedeker



Todd Anderson teaching Snedeker

Optimizing Performance

No matter a player's physical prowess, he or she still has to identify goals and limitations. "If their ideal swing is not cohesive with their physical capabilities, their instructor needs to modify the program to what they can do physically," advises Myers, who uses sophisticated swing data capture systems to measure a golfer's swing speed, club angles, ball speed and spin rates, launch angles, et cetera. "When we test golfers and they don't hit it far enough, we go back to where they lose their power. Generally with kids, it's their lower body, or maybe their core strength or other limitations."

Most youngsters want to learn how to crush the ball further, but that's not necessarily the right focus. "I never [had] a tour player come to me who sets a priority to hit it further," Myers says. "It's always kids who aren't physically developed enough yet and spend way too much time hitting 6-irons on the range."

Myers says that up-and-comers can learn a thing or two from long-hitting veterans like Davis Love III, who spends plenty of time paddleboarding and working out, and Johnson, who works hard in the gym to generate speed. "Johnson understands total body control," Myers says. "Kids need to model their programs—both the technique and efficiency

of their swing—after the best players in the world. When you see these guys hitting the ball obscene distances, it's good technique, equipment, instruction and fitness. They're improving because they have a plan—and instructors who monitor the plan."

Because they're bigger and stronger, these next-generation pros create swing speed with fewer moving parts than golfers who learned years ago. "Golfers used to make a hip turn with a long, rhythmical swing," says Todd Anderson, Sea Island's director of golf instruction at the Sea Island Golf Learning Center. "Now it's more of a stable lower body, and players create torque by winding the upper body against the lower. They're more flexible and create more dynamic speed and explosive movement as they swing." And that translates to distance.

Anderson says part of the new golf swing is a byproduct of the way equipment is designed. Where players used to use a lot of lower body in their swing to create loft, they don't need to anymore because the current drivers are designed with a lower center of gravity that launches the ball higher. "Therefore, the player can center the lower half of their body to increase stability, coil and power in the swing," Anderson says, adding that it's not all about swinging faster. "Just because you create more clubhead speed doesn't mean you'll hit the ball farther. The player must be able to fully load their body and the club on the backswing and then have the proper sequence of motion through impact leading to solid contact. Your arms, hands and club follow the rotation of the lower and upper body to create maximum speed through impact. Strength is important, but it's more important to have flexibility and the ability to generate explosive speed. This is why a big football lineman may not be a long hitter. Pure strength doesn't necessarily mean distance. Balance, strength, flexibility, and proper sequence of motion, back and through, all help accelerate the club into the ball."

Likewise, aspiring pros today have their gear computer-matched to their swing, so that ball flight is optimized.

Fuel for the Fire

Experts concur that proper diet is also paramount in developing a proper golf game. "Nutrition is on the cutting edge of the next threshold of golf sophistication," Myers says. "Various body types need different things, in terms of protein levels. And players need to know when to eat food and how often. We try to get players to understand what to eat on the golf course. That's the lowest level of sophistication, and it goes all the way to the



Davis Love III

five-star sophistication of guys like PGA Tour pros Lucas Glover and Zach Johnson, who make their first stop at Whole Foods Market when they get to a tournament for almond butter, protein bread, cereal and almond milk."

In fact, tour pros have easy access to proper nutrition. Locker rooms are stocked with egg whites, protein shakes, lean meat and pasta. Dr. Tom Hospel, the PGA Tour's head nutrition advisor, says that players often reach out to trainers, asking them about nutrition. "That's just a natural progression because they're working with these guys daily and getting workout recommendations," he says. "Obviously the topic of nutrition comes up." Some pros even travel with their own nutritionists.

Hospel explains that carbohydrates and protein are the keys to maintaining energy levels on the golf course because they help an athlete's body function more efficiently for an entire 18-hole round. "Carbohydrates are broken down into complex and simple, but complex carbs are the healthier version," Hospel explains. "My rule of thumb for golfers is to focus both the pre-round and during-the-round nutrition to eating complex carbohydrates, and then maybe top it off with a simple carbohydrate. For example, eat fruits and vegetables, and maybe even some bread. The ideal snack is to take a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on the course because it combines carbohydrates with protein. That will provide a significant amount of restorative energy. Other options would be to eat bananas or peaches, combined

with a protein bar at the turn, for optimal nutritional content for a round of golf."

Then there's the matter of hydration. Assuming the outside temperature is 65 to 80 degrees, Hospel tells golfers to drink 1 liter of water on the front nine, then another on the back if they're entering the round with adequate hydration. "I would add a half-liter on the front nine if it's above 90 degrees," Hospel says. "Sports drinks serve a purpose, too, to help top off the complex carbs. If you're eating fruits and protein bars, you're already getting electrolytes."

Many up-and-comers admittedly know little about nutrition, so Myers has them track their diets on both round days and non-playing days—especially noting what they eat prior to their best rounds. He also gets them to understand how their diet affects their sleep patterns. "Generally the guys coming up through colleges that are into nutrition come out a lot further ahead," Myers says. "It's the next big thing in golf."

And it will play a large factor—along with athleticism, conditioning and skill—in defining the next wave of power golfers. The golf world may just be starting to grasp the collective importance of these elements in golf development, but those who devote themselves to each facet will have a clear advantage over the rest of the field. Average players will become good, great players will become outstanding—all will improve.

For more information, download the GOGI (Game of Golf Institute) app for Todd Anderson and Randy Myers' golf and fitness instruction, or visit seaislandgolf.com. ○