



Golf is in Mid-Season; Are you in Full Swing?

By John Jones, MSPT

Phil Mickelson is commonly viewed as a tour favorite amongst golf fans that follow the PGA. Phil will turn 45 years old on June 16th, 2015 and he has publicly announced he has been battling psoriatic arthritis since 2010. Those factors combined with the need to compete at the highest professional level make it essential that Phil follow a regimented pre-golf routine. It has been published by PGAtour.com that Phil arrives to the practice range fifty minutes prior to his scheduled tee-time. His pre-golf routine is split up into segments and begins with a sequence of gradual progressive iron and hybrid shots. This is followed by a trip to the chipping area and putting green for 27 chips of different types and 22 total putts. Finally, he finishes with a return to the driving range to hit his fairway woods and his driver just prior to walking out to a loud applause at the first tee. Overall, his routine consists of 83 shots broken down into 34 full swings, 27 chips, and 22 putts with sixty-seven percent of his practice shots travelling distances greater than 100 yards. Given that golf is Phil's profession, it is likely that he participates in a committed stretching routine with the assistance of an athletic trainer or physical therapist prior to heading out to the practice range.

Unfortunately, an average amateur golfer spends less than 15 minutes warming-up prior to a day on the links. The normal golf swing requires flexibility, core strength, high-speed trunk rotation and terminal stretching of peripheral joints to their end-ranges repetitively over several hours. The cold-turkey approach to stepping on the first tee ice cold isn't good for anyone, let alone the average amateur golfer whose body may not be in peak condition to handle the repetitive micro-trauma induced on the joints, ligaments, muscles and tendons during a 4-5 hour round of golf.

Golf is arguably one of the most popular sports amongst middle-aged adults. Recent demographic research has indicated that the average age of the 29 million golfers in the United States is 46. Many golfers also strongly desire to play the game well into their retirement years. Flexibility subtly decreases with aging. Aging muscles shrink in size due to a loss in quantity and size of muscle fibers, which is enhanced by a less active lifestyle. Chemical changes can alter pliability of muscle tissue and tendons typically lose water content thus making muscles stiffer. History of previous injury can also drastically limit flexibility because of adhesions within soft tissues. Loss of flexibility inherently increases stress on joints and enhances the risk for joint pain, arthritis, and inflammation. The result of not warming up prior to golfing is increased joint pressure, reduced club-head speed from an incomplete swing, and an increased risk for injury causing a loss in playing time. Golfers most commonly seek physical therapy for back, shoulder, and elbow injuries.

Overall, the purpose of an adequate warm-up prior to golf is to elevate your heart rate and get blood flowing throughout your body. Muscles and tendons will become more elastic after the blood gets pumping and your joints will also gradually loosen as joint capsules and ligaments become looser with dynamic movement. This will occur during a gradual progression of short-to-long irons in the practice range performed in conjunction with approximately 10 min of golf specific stretching. These gains in flexibility and joint mobility will ultimately allow for a more full and fluid golf swing. Now the amateur golfer will be ready to take full swings with fairway woods and their driver. With the implementation of an organized pre-golf warm-up performed routinely, an amateur golfer should ultimately find more consistent shot-making ability on the course and possibly a reduction in their golf handicap in the clubhouse. Most

importantly, the occurrence of nagging aches and pains should reduce with proper warm-up and therefore healthy rounds of golf throughout the season will be more plentiful.

I myself try and play one round of golf per week from April through September. I generally strive to arrive at the course a minimum of 40-45 minutes prior to teeing off. When I step on the first tee I want to feel good physically and I want to have the mental confidence that my shots will be more concise the moment I strike that first tee shot as I don't allow for "mulligans" in my game. My routine is structured similar to Phil Mickelson's warm-up sequence in that it's gradual and progressive in swing intensity working from low irons to hybrids and finishing with woods. The majority of my pre-round shots will be full-swing shots in the range. Unlike the twenty minutes Phil dedicates to a variety of chipping and putting, I typically short-change myself in this area and only spend five minutes practicing these key fundamentals...I guess I've accepting I'm getting too old for even a run at the Champions Tour. However, as a physical therapist I do understand the importance of making an effort to incorporate a stretching routine and pre-round warm-up into my golf ritual. After all my main objective is to play consistent healthy rounds of golf.

If you or someone you know is an injured golfer, consider calling **Blue Hills Sports & Spine Rehabilitation**. We help injured golfers live life on their terms every day by limiting joint stress, minimizing soft tissue inflammation, enhancing core strength, and optimizing range of motion needed for a healthy golf swing to generate more distance and endure a full season with a potentially lower handicap. Or if you or someone you know is a healthy golfer, consider checking out the following websites to devise a pre-golf routine that works. Please remember all exercise should be performed pain-free.

<http://www.sport-fitness-advisor.com/golf-stretching-exercises.html>

http://www.yourgolf.com/golf_tips_warmup_print.html#.VWfOOFL3bCQ

<http://www.golf.com/video/stretches-try-playing-round-golf>

<http://www.pgatour.com/video/2015/05/05/phil-mickelson-s-pre-round-warmup-routine.html> to see Phil Mickelson's warm-up in a 2 min and 36 sec video summary.