



Golf 'whispering' in Europe

Europe is fast catching up to Australia as a force thanks to their golf-specific physiotherapy regimes.



England's Lee Westwood (pictured) has won twice in Europe and Denmark's Soren Hansen (opposite page) has entered the world's top 50 since they undertook a strength and conditioning program designed by Ramsay McMaster.

and Belgium. I found the Europeans to be very receptive to new ideas about training for golf.

The best example occurred at the European Tour's Alfred Dunhill Links Championship at St Andrews. Given that I only spend a few weeks on tour, it allows me to notice subtle differences in attitudes. It was a very warm greeting this time, whereas in the past we tended to shuffle around the locker room. People were much more interested in what Ryan and I had to say about golf-specific training.

Typically, when we first started, players asked if we could give them something they could do in 10 minutes. Now, we undertake intensive sessions and provide very specific drills that are multi-functional, which they can get more out of and feel like they're charged up for golf.

We did a lot of work at the tournament, which we've never done before, setting up winter training programs for European players. Ryan and I see players four times a year, giving them 10 to 15 hours of intensive work – which includes a postural screening, physiotherapy, biomechanical analysis and 'integrated coaching' (that is, working alongside some of the world's leading PGA coaches).

By establishing a fitness program in October, they will have done several months of winter training when we see them again in Dubai early in 2008. We also exposed them to different styles of treatment with 20-odd choices to train for golf: for example, a golf-beach program, golf-basketball program, golf-gym program and golf-soccer program with 'crab football'.

I've seen a huge change in the mentality of the players. Before, they used to run off to the next tournament. Now, they're starting to train for golf. They understand the importance of working the golf muscles – that is, getting the right 'feels' in those muscles and then training them for the golf swing so their muscles function the way they want.

Different – and improved – attitudes

In fact, there has been a big change in attitude and it's apparent at all levels of the European Tour. More people are keen to embrace three-dimensional biomechanics. Players want to

look at their swings when they're playing well and get some data. And so the tour plans to have a second fitness van with a biomechanical unit and all the latest technology at each tournament. It wants consultant physios exchanging ideas with the European Tour medical team in order to learn more about what an individual player needs. Europe has also embraced technology from other sports, like soccer. For instance, it has been analysing sleep for golfers, using this new "tremor watch" which can measure sleep patterns and match them up against fine-motor skills.

Probably the most innovative coach in Europe is Pete Cowen, who had 18 players in the field at the Dunhill and about a dozen players who earned more than €1 million last year. Several years ago, Cowen felt there was something missing in his teaching. So he invested a lot of time coming to Australia, accessing three-dimensional biomechanical technology as well as the Australian golf fitness systems. He feels the combination of integrated coaching and sports science is the future of the game.

Cowen is so highly regarded that a lot of coaches are trying to follow his lead and are looking closely at what he is doing. The drills are different (at tournaments his players have '3D' sensors attached all over their bodies). Other players are asking their coaches why they aren't doing that. So there's a lot of "golf whispering" going on about why Cowen's players are suddenly doing so well and having a greater success rate than before.

Cowen believes that in 10 years' time there is going to be 20 players with the attitude of Tiger Woods. You're going to see guys who are totally motivated to train and seek out the best information – in the same way as Roger Bannister did more than 50 years ago when training to break the four-minute mile. Now it is golf's turn to produce Olympians. I've seen it already with the amateur teams. The Scots used to prefer sitting at the bar rather than raising the bar. Now they have one of the best programs in the world and are motivated to be the best they can.

The pyramid of competition is getting larger. All of the 'baby countries' are very serious about what they're doing in golf. They are employing specialists to oversee their programs. The Flemish golf team in Belgium, the Danes, the Norwegians, the French

– these countries are producing players who desperately crave success, like Martin Kaymer from Germany. The Dutch aim to have two Ryder Cup players in the next 10 years!

Furthermore, several of the older European players are approaching fitness seriously. Thomas Bjorn and Andrew Coltart are trying to get on board with a proper program, having seen the results of Lee Westwood and Peter O'Malley. These guys want to stay in the game. I think some of them were reluctant to begin a fitness program because of the fear that it might alter their swing. And I think they were right, as there was so much rubbish and false information out there 10 years ago. The difference now is that the theory behind golf-specific fitness is far more quantifiable and golf training has evolved markedly.

Westwood is a totally different person since he began a strength and conditioning program. As someone who used to completely disregard fitness, he told me: "I'm doing six real keystone sessions a week. If my body is in synchronicity with my golf swing, I'm going to play well."

Why Europe is leaping ahead

Instead of going into the American college system, the new generation of elite European golfers is tending to stay in England and Scotland, Sweden and Denmark. They train in Europe and visit America to play. But they don't need to live in America to gain experience because the systems and development programs are in place at home where they can also go to university in Europe.

They have good access to golf-specific people, who have embraced a lot of the programs that we've developed in Australia through golf institutes and the PGA of Australia. For instance, we've been able to help the Europeans adapt to golf-specific screening systems and identify breakdown areas in young golfers, which in turn has fast-tracked their learning curve.

While most of the European golf federations have development programs, the United States Golf Association is primarily involved with rules and regulations. The American college system is good for competition but has virtually no emphasis on golf-specific training as they are influenced by American football. Likewise on the professional scene, the US PGA Tour is cut and thrust. It's highly competitive but, on the downside, people don't have the opportunity to look at other programs from different countries in the same way that the Europeans have cross-pollinated their ideas.

European golf is in a very healthy state. They haven't overtaken Australia yet but we've got to keep raising 'our bar'. We were 10 steps ahead, now we're two steps in front. The first wave of Australian players has done well and now the sports scientists and human-movement specialists are travelling to work with the best players in Europe.

You could argue we're losing the intellectual property, however we'll benefit from a cultural exchange by getting access to other countries, tournaments and players. And, our 'service providers' can bring that information back to Australia and use it for our PGA coaches and trainees as well as Golf Australia and the institute of sport players. It's a win-win situation. The race is on to find the next Roger Bannisters of golf.

For more information about Ramsay's "Train As A Tour Player" golf camps, contact The Melbourne Golf Injury Clinic on (03) 9569 9448 and 0407 432 282 or e-mail golfphysio@ozemail.com.au



Four McMaster devotees – Marc Warren, Brett Rumford, Hansen and Westwood – triumphed over four consecutive weeks on the European Tour last September.

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