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A holistic approach to a hole in one

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“Maybe you should just shoot me!” jokes the middle-aged golfer on the examination table.

“Hey, your injuries are nothing,” fitness guru Pete Bommarito says. “You should see the banged-up football players who come through here.”

Bommarito, one of North America's top sports trainers, is the star attraction of the new golf fitness centre at the Fairmont Turnberry Isle, a luxury golf resort in North Miami Beach. Designed as a one-stop shop for golf performance training, injury rehabilitation and nutrition counselling, the facility offers the services of physical therapists, muscle activation specialists, chiropractors, golf pros and other professionals who work as a team to send golfers home with both better swings and a blueprint for healthier living.

“Most of the golfers we see are average players eager to improve but who are being held back by physical limitations,” Bommarito says.

Inspired by Tiger Woods, Annika Sorenstam and other elite players who raised their games to new heights by dramatically improving their fitness levels, many weekend golfers are also eating better, working out and finally addressing the nagging injuries that once served as handy excuses for terrible rounds. Golf resorts have responded by expanding their gyms and introducing golf-specific massages and other treatments in their spas. A few have gone even further by creating golf programs that place an equal emphasis on swing mechanics and training for strength, flexibility and endurance. But the Fairmont Turnberry Isle's concentrated focus on golf fitness (and overall health), together with the superstar athletes who daily pass through the doors, stands above the rest.

More than 200 professional athletes are clients of Turnberry Isle's Bommarito Performance Systems and the fitness centre's other headliner, USA Sports Therapy, led by sports medicine specialist Matthew Cooper. Football quarterbacks Tony Romo and Eli Manning, baseball stars Ryan Howard and Miguel Cabrera, and retired hockey players Mike Van Ryn and John LeClair are among the famous faces.

Bommarito, who has helped to provide training programs for the highly regarded David Leadbetter Golf Academy, predicts that the majority of his clients will be resort guests like the golfer who has been going through an exhaustive biomechanical assessment on the examination table.

“The body needs to move fluidly through a sequence of motions during the golf swing. But if your body can't do it, all the practice in the world won't help,” he says.

The client, though outwardly healthy-looking, is growing discouraged as he receives mostly low to failing marks in tests that range from toe extensions and pelvic tilts to an examination of his knee, hip, shoulder and neck functions. His right leg and knee movement is declared impaired and his right shoulder blade misaligned due to an old hockey injury. Bommarito also points out a slight sway in his upper back.

“You’re a hideous freak!” jests a friend of the client from the sidelines.

But Bommarito has no doubt that the clinic’s team of specialists can quickly help his patient improve both his mobility and golf game.

Just a few minutes later, following a series of gentle stretches and manipulations, his leg is already showing a greater range of movement.

“What I’ve learned from working with so many professional athletes,” Bommarito says, “is that surgery to repair injuries should always be the last option. Check the mechanics to get to the root of why the pain is happening in the first place.”

An intensive one-on-one biomechanical assessment (at a cost of \$200) is usually enough to pinpoint deficiencies and help formulate a treatment program. Clients leave with detailed training, nutrition and rehabilitation programs and can phone or e-mail for continued counselling.

Golfers with more time can make return visits to the fitness centre, located in the hotel’s Willow Stream Spa, for additional counselling and treatments (from \$65 an hour) between rounds on the resort’s two lushly tropical parkland layouts, the Miller and Soffer. (Shorter at 6,417 yards, the Miller course plays around Lake Julius, an Audubon-sanctioned bird refuge that is home to a flock of flamingos. The far tougher Soffer, meanwhile, stretches 7,047 yards and features a 64-foot man-made waterfall at the island-green 18th hole.)

Launched in tandem with the fitness centre is a rebranded golf academy, now under the direction of Canadian-born teaching pro Bill Forrest, who works closely with Bommarito and Cooper.

“This new holistic approach to golf fitness and instruction is definitely the wave of the future,” says Forrest, a past PGA of America Teacher of the Year who has worked with golf stars Seve Ballesteros and Grace Park.

When an older golfer recently complained that disc damage in his lower back was severely restricting his swing, Forrest had him flare his front foot to create more of a lateral swing. This took pressure off his back, a suggestion that helped immediately.

Forrest also spent time with the middle-aged resort guest examined earlier by Bommarito. Just a day later, their client was seen blasting a long drive down the first fairway of the Soffer course, a biomechanically realigned – and apparently rejuvenated – golfer.

For more information regarding TPI screenings and program designs for golfers, contact Mindi Boysen, owner of *Fit For Golf! Fit For Life!*

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