

Programming Forum Pilates and Golfers: A Great Revenue Stream for your Facility

by Ken Endelman

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In past issues I've talked about creating niche or "specialty" Pilates group exercise classes for your members or clients. These classes are a great way of getting people with similar interests together. Many of them are sport-based, as in Pilates for tennis players or Pilates for cyclists. One sport, golf, seems to draw a particularly large interest from members both male and female.

Whenever I talk to golfers I am always surprised at how fanatic they are about the game. They'll look for any kind of an edge that will make them better. And they're willing to pay for it. That's where Pilates comes in.

It is well-documented fact Pilates benefits of length, strength and agility can help increase athletic performance. It is rapidly becoming a crucial strength and conditioning adjunct for top-level athletes. This includes teams in the NFL, NBA and MLB as well as a host of Olympic athletes. These athletes are finding that they can run greater distances or hit the ball farther - and do it while reducing the risk of injury.

These benefits apply to golfers as well. And progressive clubs are capitalizing on the opportunity by offering fee-based Pilates for Golf classes.

The synergy between golf and Pilates revolves around the center or "core" (the trunk, shoulder girdle and pelvis) of the body. As we know, the Pilates method of exercise is based on building core strength while the basis of most golf movements come from the core. Golfers participating in Pilates will see improved hip rotation, range of motion in the shoulders, and back stability. This will lead to more powerful and accurate golf shots.

In addition, Pilates can help both heal and prevent injuries that affect accuracy and stamina. A golf shot puts a tremendous amount of torque on a golfer's body. It is also repeating essentially the same move in the same direction over and over again. As a result some muscles become overused and others weaken, causing an imbalance.

These muscle imbalances can affect the legs, hips, arms, shoulders, and the lower back, which will obviously have an effect on a golfer's game, particularly for those over the age of 50. Drives may become shorter, fairway shots may be less accurate and it becomes harder and harder to finish a round without pain and exhaustion.

The lower back is probably the chief ailment golfers face. A limited range of motion in the spine and hips area can cause stress to the lower back. The right Pilates exercises can develop the muscles that support these areas that are responsible for generating both accuracy and power. The core muscles will help maintain proper spine angle and as well as balance, which golfers will need in order to perform their best.

In addition, many of the mind-body elements of Pilates - like enhanced breathing - can help heighten a golfer's concentration level. All golfers know this is a major key to success on the course.

Pilates for golf group classes can be done on a mat, a Reformer, with props, or a combination of all three. The Reformer offers more assistance than the mat (which basically uses an individual's own gravity as support) and can make a workout as easy or as challenging as the instructor or client wants. In a club setting, Reformer-based classes usually incur an additional fee. However, regardless of the apparatus issued, most sports-based specialty classes are also fee-based because, as mentioned, clubs and studios have found that members will pay extra to improve their athletic performance.

For any Pilates for golf class, it is imperative that the instructor leading the class has some background in the sport (that really goes for teaching any kind of sport-related specialty Pilates class). It's the old "walk the walk" scenario. If your instructor doesn't have a solid understanding of golf, it will hurt the credibility of the class and your members or clients will not want to come back.

From an exercise standpoint, your instructors should have an applicable repertoire of the proper exercises designed to improve your member's golf game. There are several tools out on the market that can help do this. One such tool is the *The Hole in One Pilates* DVD from Pilates for Golf. This DVD is mat and prop-based and shows a wide variety of exercises need to improve a golfer's game. Many of the exercises can be translated into Reformer work. The DVD can be purchased at www.pilatesforgolf.com or www.pilates.com.

If you have the instructor resources and would like to start a Pilates for Golf class, poll your members to gauge interest. If the interest is there you'll need to determine pricing (group classes can run anywhere from \$20-\$50 a session, per person), and class duration. Usually classes run twice weekly for 6-8 weeks. However, you might want to call clubs with similar programs and see what they're doing.

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