

golfwales All the news and views from the Welsh golfing scene – EVERY FRIDAY

Yards better – without stretching the truth

Despite forearms more like Olive Oyl than Popeye, **Paul Williams** feels the benefit of the Elite Fitness treatment

EVER since Tiger Woods started pushing back the boundaries – as well as the back tees at Augusta – tour professionals at every level have been spurning the 19th hole for the gymnasium as they bid to keep up with the athletic strides made by the world's No 1 golfer.

Even Darren Clarke and Lee Westwood have been trimming the pounds from their considerable frames, but when Elite Fitness in Cardiff asked me if I'd ever considered getting in shape for golf – even promising to add 20 yards to my drives – I thought they'd bitten off more than they could chew.

If Paul Casey has forearms like Popeye, mine are more like Olive Oyl's. And the only six-pack I ever come close to is the one that has an opposite effect on the firmness of the belly.

But former Cardiff City fitness coach Simon Harling had some reassuring words on my first assessment.

"The last thing we're going to do is get you pumping weights," said Harling.

"The biggest improvements we can make are to your flexibility. Golf is known as a non-aerobic sport and it's true that people of all ages and sizes can play it.

"But there are as many working body parts in a golf swing as any other sporting action I know of, so it's important you are able to make all the necessary turns and weight shifts."

Sounded good and the warm-up did not entail going any faster than a brisk walk on the treadmill, much to my relief.

"Now, have you ever had any broken limbs?" asked Harling, who set up Elite Fitness in Fairwater last year.

Fit it to your game

GOLFERS wishing to take Elite Fitness up on its pledge that it can trim shots off your game can take advantage of a special three consultations for the price of two offer on quoting this article in the *Western Mail*.

While managing director Simon Harling and his team specialise in one-to-one coaching, group discounts are available if a small number of like-minded members want to embrace the challenge together.

To book your introductory session or for further details on any aspect of Elite Fitness, call 029 2055 5272.

"No."

"Any chronic injuries or little niggles?"

"No."

"Good, right turn your left chin so it's above your left shoulder."

CLICK.

"Argghhh! OK, so I may get a bit of neckache from sitting hunched over a keyboard and computer screen all day."

"That's all right, it's very stiff but we can do something about that."

So, a million miles removed from my fears of press-ups and 10-mile runs, I've spent a month on a programme of stretches that include trying to rotate my head through 180 degrees. It wins a few anxious looks at the bus stop, that one.

There are some more athletic lunges and squats to practise in order to build a solid foundation around the backside and hamstrings for all this increased turn



COLD SHOULDER Sports performance consultant Jo Elphinston tries to coax a fuller shoulder turn from my creaking joints

I'm going to be creating. But it's manageable, tailored to my own needs and supply-challenged frame and, most significantly, it's all making perfect sense.

It was probably coincidence but, when my first round of the season yielded a score an incredible nine strokes below my handicap, I threw myself into my fitness regime with renewed gusto.

I returned for my second consultation positively bristling with enthusiasm and eager to show off my progress.

But a first look at my practice swing had sports performance consultant Jo Elphinston tutting her way back to her clipboard.

"Do you always leave your weight on your right side like that?" she asked.

So that's why I nearly fall over at the end of some of my shots. And the more I went through my practice swing, the more a key fault I'd never noticed before became apparent.

In truth, it is not 20 yards I need to add to my length off the tee – ball-striking being one of the few strengths of my rusty game. It is more the 20 yards I need to shave off the wayward direction left or right of the fairway.

"Transferring your weight through properly will help with consistency," advised Elphinston.

"Look, you load your weight on the right side fine on the backswing but you're not able to make a full hip rotation because you're not getting over to the left



PILLAR OF STRENGTH Elite Fitness trainer Simon Harling despairs at the initial limitations to my flexibility, but soon made a difference

side enough through impact and follow through."

This is the sort of technical analysis you expect from your golf professional but, crucially, they can't always tell you the body mechanics to make the necessary improvement.

Harling added, "I think club golfers who take a lot of lessons without making much progress could gain a lot from a few consultations with us.

"They're often trying to implement swing changes which their bodies are not able to adjust to. I'm confident we can knock a few strokes off the game of any golfer, whatever their standard."

Harling created Elite Fitness to fill a void between the expert advice and cutting-edge facilities enjoyed by the professional

sportsman and the run-of-the-treadmill gym experience the rest of us have to put up with.

Taking advantage of a fully-equipped sports laboratory, clients include the Glamorgan cricket team, members of Wales' Grand Slam-winning rugby squad and the nation's leading golfers.

"Phil Price has been in and we've done a lot of work with the Welsh women's squad," said Harling. "But what we can offer is the same standard of expertise and facilities to everyone who walks through the door."

"From the European Tour professional to the 28-handicapper, we provide one-on-one consultation to help everyone get the most out of their sport."