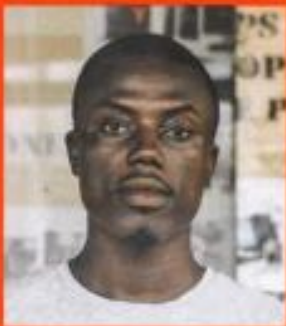


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Sea Island golf resort  
on the Georgia coast

## THE STRONGEST YARD

Want to fix your swing? Sea Island resort's new performance center wants to fix your body first. *By John Paul Newport*

Inside the new multimillion-dollar Golf Performance Center at Sea Island, Ga., I'm standing on one leg, arms folded across my chest, trying to rotate my upper body without toppling over. I can manage a few turns with my eyes open, but it's hopeless when they're closed.

Randy Myers, Sea Island's director of fitness, isn't surprised. Balance, he tells me, is the biggest physical difference between the pros and me. Almost all the PGA Tour players Myers has worked with—more than 70, including Dustin Johnson and Davis Love III—can not only make full-speed swings on one leg with their eyes closed, they can also do it while standing on top of an inflatable Bosu Balance Trainer ball.

Luckily, Myers isn't trying to turn me into a tour pro. Today he's merely assessing my physical limitations so he can customize an exercise regimen that will help me improve a notch or two. I've been stuck at the same level for years, and my shoulder surgery over the winter has kept me off the tees for five months.

Sea Island is already one of my favorite golf destinations. In addition to playing the luxurious resort's three courses—or

exploring the many non-golf activities, such as deep-sea fishing and skeet shooting—visitors can sign up for clinics and individualized lessons with an all-star teaching staff that includes Phil Kenyon (putting whisperer to Justin Rose and Francesco Molinari); mental game expert Morris Pickens (who's coached three major champions); LPGA standout instructor Gale Peterson; and master club fitter Craig Allan. The instructors consult with one another about a person's needs and progress, then prescribe plans that golfers take home to work on with their local instructors. "Many clients come back every year for what amounts to annual checkups," Allan says.

The resort hopes to turn the 17,000-square-foot center into a kind of Mayo Clinic for golf: Hitting bays open out to a manicured range with views of the Atlantic, and golfers can wire up to have their swings analyzed electronically. You can putt on an artificial green that generates its own humps and swales, complete with laser-beam projections of how they'll break. It's part of a \$30 million investment over the past year in the resort's golf facilities. When I saw the performance center had opened in March, I was eager to sign up.

Myers, 55, who's been at Sea Island for 15 years, is widely

credited with being the first, in the 1990s, to bring a scientific approach to golf fitness. His master's thesis demonstrated how easily golfers can add 10 yards of distance with a regular stretching program, plus another 10 yards with sport-specific strength training. He's been the director of golf fitness for four U.S. Ryder Cup teams. "Fitness can make a big difference more easily than people think," he says. "But it needs to be individualized, golf-specific fitness, because everyone's body is different, and everybody's goals are different."

When he's not working with tour pros, Myers sees a lot of amateurs like me whose once-proud games have gone south for various reasons—injury, age, lack of time to play. Despite expensive lessons, the best equipment, and hundreds of rounds of golf, we've been unable to regain our form. For those who stay at the resort for a week (rooms start at \$395 a night), he offers a package of five 30-minute sessions for \$675. A single 90-minute assessment with a take-home plan is \$575.

Within minutes, Myers has identified my most glaring limitations: poor balance, stability, and hip turn on the left side that makes it difficult to properly finish the swing my instructor back home has been patiently teaching me. This lack of symmetry, it turns out, is the second-biggest difference between amateurs and pros. The latter are able to rotate to the right (for right-handed players) on the backswing with as much strength and flexibility as to the left on

## A Stretch in Time

Four "lifesaver" exercises from Sea Island golf guru Randy Myers to do before a round.



**Back** Place your hands on top of a golf cart or wall and bend down to straighten your arms and lengthen the spine. Twist your hips to the left and hold for three or four seconds. Repeat on the right.



**Shoulders** Assume a golf stance with your hands gripping a golf cart or pressing against a wall on your left. Then stretch your shoulders by rotating your hips as far as you can. Repeat on the right side.



**Hips** Holding a horizontal bar, cross your right ankle over your left knee. Then lean back into a sitting position with your arms fully extended to stretch through your hips. Repeat with your left leg.



**Legs & balance** Balance on your right foot and bend forward, arms across your chest, then twist your shoulders to the right and left. Repeat with the left foot.

the finish. "The swing is an arc," Myers tells me. "When you have limitations on either side, the swing plane collapses, and the result is swing flaws."

Afterward he prescribes a few simple exercises for me to do every day, as well as every time I play or even practice golf. They take about 10 minutes to complete. Most involve turning my hips and torso while in a golf stance. "The hips are the engine of the swing," he says. "The world's best players get their power from loading and unloading their hips, whereas amateurs try to get it by using their arms and shoulders."

He also gives me a handful of "performance" drills with weights and resistance bands to do at home or the gym, and adapts many of the rehab exercises I was already doing for my shoulder to serve as golf-specific drills. These aren't the sort of exercises you'll find in a CrossFit gym. Here, your goal isn't to bench-press 20 more pounds or cut two seconds off your split time. Instead, they're about movement, balance, and postures that mimic the swing.

"You need a body that is capable of doing what it needs to do, in balance and in posture, and has the energy to keep doing it to the end of a round," Myers says. Stamina is underrated in golf, where rounds can last more than four hours. "If you can finish your swing

in balance on the 18th hole," he says, "I guarantee you'll be playing the kind of golf that you want to be playing."

It sounds good. But in the first week or so back home, I find many of Myers's performance drills physically uncomfortable and annoyingly difficult to perform correctly. They seem simple—standing with one foot 18 inches behind the other, say, while pulling a resistance band and making a golf turn—but I struggle to keep my balance and maintain the right posture.

The more I do them, though, the better I get and, most important, the more I understand their relevance to my swing. I no longer dread them. In fact, I've added single-leg squats and a few other Myers-sanctioned exercises to my repertoire, and my consistency with irons has already significantly improved.

The biggest gain has been greater awareness. I can now feel how the weakness on my left side (caused by long-ago football injuries and several left-knee surgeries) affects my swing, and, knowing this, I'm less frustrated by my bad shots and more confident of my future progress. I'm not an idiot, it turns out: My body simply can't quite make the moves required. At least, not yet. **D**



Hitting bays at the performance center to measure swing flaws