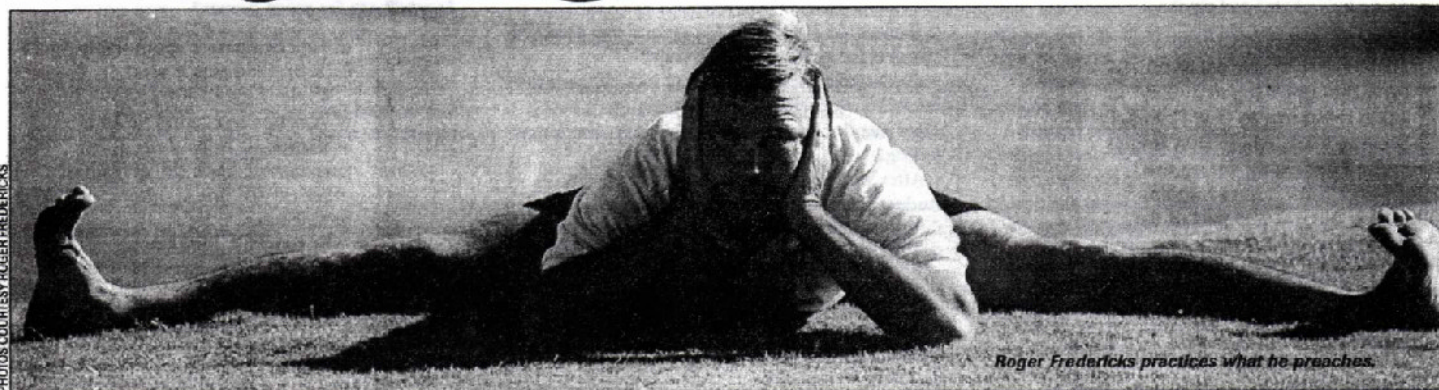


# Golfweek

The game's global news report, compiled by Golfweek magazine

## For your game



Roger Federer practices what he preaches.

By James Achenbach

LA QUINTA, CALIF.

**A**t the Feb. 28 grand opening of SilverRock Ranch, the City of La Quinta's new golf facility, Arnold Palmer stood before 2,000 people and made a startling pronouncement.

"I feel so good physically, I think I will play in the tournament (Bob Hope Chrysler Classic) next year," said the 75-year-old King. SilverRock, created by Palmer's design firm, is slated to be one of four courses used for the Chrysler event in 2006.

Why did Palmer feel so good? He answered that one, too: "I have a new stretching program. I'm working with Roger Federer, who knows more about stretching than anybody. I just wish I had done this 20 years ago."

In recent years, Palmer has looked tight and inflexible. His swing has looked restricted. Now, with the aid of Federer, he is trying to do something about it.

Who is Roger Federer, anyway, and how did he find his way to this pantheon of the golf gods? He has worked with golf's aging Big Three—Palmer, Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player (less with Nicklaus, more with Player and most with Palmer). He also currently helps hundreds of amateurs and more than 50 touring pros with their swings and/or flexibility.

Federer, 54, is a golf professional who has taught primarily in California and Hawaii. He lives in Encinitas, Calif., and runs a golf school at Hodges Golf Learning Center in San Diego.

As a collegiate golfer at Arizona State, Federer dreamed of playing the PGA Tour. Then he broke a bone in his wrist. Two surgeries later, he had a new wrist, with bone transplanted from his hip. That was the start of his medical adventure. He also had two knee surgeries and was plagued by lower back pain.

"I was a physical wreck," he said. "My left knee was killing me, and I sort of limped around. I went to every kind of health practitioner there was, including a faith healer. Here I was, a potential tour player who had become an 8 or 9 handicap. It was 50-50 whether I would break 80."

## STRETCH FOR SUCCESS

Then he met two people who would change his life. The first was Ric McDonald, at the time the head trainer for the San Diego Chargers football team. The second was Pete Egoscue, the longtime friend and trainer of Nicklaus.

"Basically I followed their advice, and my whole life was different," Federer said. "I went back to playing the best golf of my life. As my body got functional, my golf game got functional. Right then I knew what I wanted to do: I wanted to help other golfers."

Federer appears to be tireless in teaching the golf swing to his students. He is always thinking about flexibility in the swing, so much so that he has a long-standing motto: "Your body is your swing."

"Tour players have 50 (percent) to 100 percent more flexibility in their torso than the average golfer," Federer said. "They have much more hip rotation,

too. That's why a lesson (for the average golfer) only goes so far. Without proper flexibility, there are some moves that a golfer simply can't make."

When someone studies under Federer, the first step is to videotape the golf swing. The second step is to take some basic flexibility measurements.

This provides a record, a baseline, to be used in the appraisal of future improvements.

"When I run people through five or six really simple tests," Federer said, "it tells me what the tendencies will be in their golf swings."

The secret of golf, according to Federer, is educating students. "You can get it all back," he said. "That's the good news. If you're doing the right stretching the right way, you will see dramatic results. Most people are stretching completely incorrectly, and they're not getting acceptable results."

How much time is required for proper stretching?

"At least five or six times a week," he answered. "Probably an average of 20 minutes a day. I seldom give any two people the same flexibility menus. Some people really need a lot of time in the beginning, other people don't. There is always good news: The more flexibility people attain, the less (stretching) they have to do."

Federer began working with Palmer in November 2004. In a series of sessions, they worked diligently on exercise routines.

"I showed him videos of the old Arnold and today," Federer said. "In the old days, he had the greatest shoulder turn of anybody who ever lived. He had a big hip turn, too. When he saw this, it just motivated him to get it back."

Stretching for golf is nothing new, although Federer has introduced a cautionary note. "A lot of golf instructors don't really understand physiology and kinetic change, and most physical trainers aren't really experts at golf instruction," he said. "As a result, golfers sometimes get confused. To find a person who understands both the body and the swing is really an advantage."

Touring pros have been at the vanguard of the flexibility movement, and the PGA Tour's fitness trailer has become a popular gathering spot.

## The Downward Dog

Roger Federer on one of his favorite stretches:

"One of my pet peeves about giving tips for stretching is that one or two stretches aren't going to provide any spectacular results—a golfer needs to stretch all the muscle groups.

"Even if a person has limited time, it is important to do at least one stretch for each of the three major parts of the body: legs, torso and shoulders. Always breathe deeply and fully into the stretch.

"Although I don't believe in prescribing

one stretch, the Downward Dog is a wonderful exercise that hits all the major muscles of the body at one time. To start, get down on all fours with your hands directly under your shoulders and your knees directly under your hips.

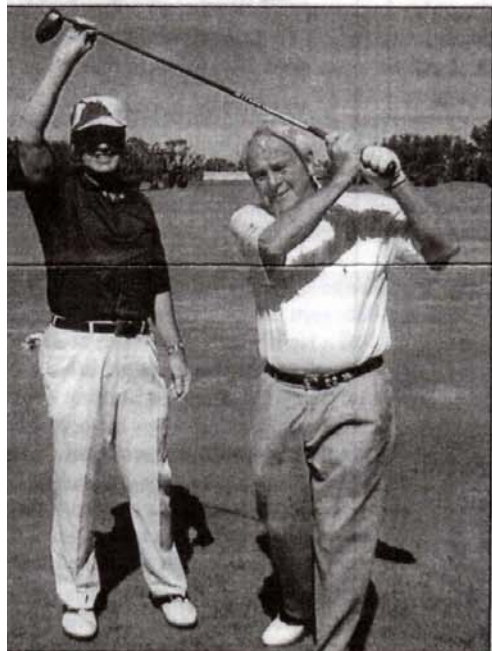
"Now raise your legs and midsection by straightening your knees. Your hands and feet remain on the ground. Your body should look something like an upside-down V. Try to keep your heels flat on the ground. If you can't, your calves and hamstrings are too tight."

before there was a fitness trailer, Mac O'Grady would sometimes stretch so extensively before a round that he felt confident in skipping the practice range altogether. He would step to the first tee with a driver in his hand and rip it.

Greg Norman and Davis Love III are among the PGA Tour stars who have talked at length about their exercise programs. Before hitting warmups, they stretch 30 to 45 minutes in their rooms. Stretching machines and devices have become prominent in golf, from the \$30,000 Golf Gazebo ([www.golfgazebo.com](http://www.golfgazebo.com)) to the \$275 Somax Power Gym Trainer ([www.somaxsports.com](http://www.somaxsports.com)) to the \$39.95 GolfGym ([www.golfgym.com](http://www.golfgym.com)). The Golf Gazebo, from Summit Life Systems of Grosse Ile, Mich., contains a series of stretching stations under a permanent roof. Purchased mostly by golf clubs, it normally is placed near the practice range or first tee. Fredericks stresses that no golfer should rely too heavily on machines. "I'm different because I concentrate more on stretching out all of the muscles in the different muscle chains," he said. Sometimes machines don't do that. They tend to isolate different muscles in their respective chains. "Exotic routines for exercise and stretching are all around us. In addition to weight training, they include yoga, Pilates, and a new one called Gyrotonics. Jim Colbert, 64, has become a follower of gyrotonics, which features pulleys, light weights and full range-of-motion stretching. He has dropped 100 pounds and has been able to postpone left hip replacement surgery that once seemed unavoidable. Meanwhile, Fredericks continues to encourage his 75-year-old student.

Proper flexibility can give new hope to any golfer of any age," Fredericks said. "It is a real joy for me to see people get so excited about this." And that's no stretch.

For more on Roger Fredericks, visit [www.roger4par.com](http://www.roger4par.com).



Roger Fredericks, left, who began working with Sam Snead last November, is attempting to return Snead to the swing of the King.

To explore the relationship between flexibility and the golf swing, Golfweek instruction editor Jim Achenbach talked extensively with Roger Fredericks on two occasions. Here are some of the highlights:

► **Golfweek:** Do most golfers lack the flexibility needed for a proper golf swing?

► **Fredericks:** Absolutely. They lack the necessary flexibility to perform a fundamental golf swing. They just don't have it. I see this every day in my testing.

After videotaping my students, I run them through some basic flexibility tests. I can show them how their lack of flexibility in a particular stretch has caused a golf swing flaw that we just saw on video.

► **Golfweek:** How do you respond to golfers who say they're too old to stretch?

► **Fredericks:** I say they're too old not to. The oldest student I've had was 93. I get people in their 80s all the time.

As we get older, our bodies begin to lose more cells than they generate. We lose some bone density and muscle mass. By stretching properly, we can actually retard the aging process so our bodies don't wear down so fast.

► **Golfweek:** What do you say to a golfer who claims to rely on strength rather than flexibility?

► **Fredericks:** I say that's an inaccurate assessment. Some people do get away with being strong, but it's a compensation.

What is "being strong" anyway? People who overindulge in strengthening without proper flexibility training can develop tight muscles. They also can get out of balance.

Tight muscles obviously restrict movement. In my opinion, a muscle that can't move is a weak muscle.

Anyone who has attended an NFL Alumni golf tournament probably has noticed that the shortest hitters and worst players usually are the linemen, the guys who can bench press the most.

Strength training should be done very slowly and meticulously. If you start strengthening a body that is already out of alignment, usually you're just strengthening the dysfunction.

► **Golfweek:** How important is proper breathing?

► **Fredericks:** Breathing is everything. The whole purpose is to get oxygen to your cells. I can see people and tell if they have done their stretches that morning. They have a certain aura, a glow, a confidence, and their golf swings are alive and free.

► **Golfweek:** Is the golf swing bad for the back?

► **Fredericks:** It is not bad for your back if you have flexible hips. If you have tight hips, which most people do, it can cause degeneration of your spine over time. This usually occurs in the lower back, the lower lumbar.

Sam Snead was super-flexible all his life, and he never had back problems.

► **Golfweek:** What, in your opinion, are the key ingredients for more power?

► **Fredericks:** A more functional lower body. A stronger and more flexible lower body will invariably lead to more power. Pelvic rotation comes from the foundation – good footwork, strong functional legs. Golf is a lower body game. I think most instruction is geared around upper body positions, yet the lower body dictates what is happening with the upper body.

► **Golfweek:** Should golfers swim as part of an exercise program?

► **Fredericks:** Swimming is a fabulous exercise. It is terrific for injury recuperation, and it provides a great cardiovascular workout.

But there is a downside to swimming as it pertains to golf. Because of the lack of gravity in the water, there is less resistance, which means less oxygen gets compressed into the cells. As a result, swimming will have a tendency to tighten people up. To test this, go swim about 40 laps and then get right out of the pool and go play golf. You'll feel like you're wrapped in Saran Wrap.

► **Golfweek:** Do you recommend that golfers stretch during a round, particularly a slow round?

► **Fredericks:** I give my students different stretches to do when they're out there, especially when riding in a cart. When you ride, your hips will start tightening up. The exercises take 30 seconds or less.

**Golfweek:** Will the golf instructor of the future be an expert in several disciplines?

► **Fredericks:** Let's hope so. Instructors are starting to get incredibly knowledgeable about the golf swing, but not that many of them really understand anatomy. When an instructor understands how the body works, then you have a complete teacher.

► **Golfweek:** Do you have any advice for golfers with arthritis?

► **Fredericks:** Proper flexibility will help. When the body is in perfect posture, the circulation of the body will be going the way it's supposed to.

Nutrition is a key element. Eating more raw foods, especially more leafy, green vegetables, is important. We should be eliminating as many toxins as possible.

► **Golfweek:** What do you recommend for people who travel?

► **Fredericks:** I give different menus to my students. I usually start with a long version, a short version, and one for the road. We are constantly upgrading the programs, depending on the progress of the individual student. Over time, they're weaned off me. By the time they're done, they come up with their own programs. ○