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Spike on Golf: New physical fitness regime has Palmer feeling better

Arnold Palmer is feeling better than he has in quite a while, thanks to a new set of workouts targeting a specific muscle group.

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ORLANDO - No amount of persuasion from fans and friends could have convinced Arnold Palmer to compete here in the 2005 Bay Hill Invitational last week. Instead, the King has been content in his role as host and living legend here on the course he's owned for more than 40 years.

That's not to say, however, that Palmer might not make a competitive appearance in the next year's Bay Hill Invitational. Palmer left that door open when he recently explained his new exercise regiment that has him feel much younger than his 75 years.

Palmer has been working with well-known health and fitness trainer Roger Fredericks the past four months on a series of stretching exercises aimed at making him more flexible- particularly in his hamstrings, which have born the wear and tear of 65-plus years of walking the world's golf courses.

Fredericks, whose clients have included Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player and Raymond Floyd, emphasizes flexibility before strength by using the "active isolation" system of stretching, in which a player prepares to stretch one isolated muscle at a time then actively contract the muscle opposite the isolated muscle.

"I've had my hips MRI'd over and under," Palmer said. "My hips physically are fine, but when you see me limping up to the hole, it's because of my hamstring muscles. They're too tight. Part of the exercises I'm doing are to stretch those hamstring muscles.

"The guys who have gone through it for over a year swear by it," Palmer said. "Roger showed me some videos of guys even in their 90s now that are using these stretching programs, and I just couldn't believe what they can do as far as their physical exercise is concerned."

Indeed, Palmer is now a convert, saying that he feels better, physically and mentally, every day he practices what Fredericks preaches.

"All my life I've done some kind of exercise, but I didn't really concentrate so much on stretching, but staying strong, lifting weights; things that are little more removed from what I'm doing now," Palmer said. "I'm now back into the weights but under the stretching program."



"I'm not trying to really build a lot of muscle but maintain what I have," he added. "If someone had told me before I started (working with Fredericks), I'd have said, 'You're full of you know what.' But all of a sudden I'm starting to feel things differently."

Palmer said his improvement is easy to spot- just look at the way he walks now as opposed to before he started working with Fredericks.

"If you watched me on TV walk up 18 at Augusta last year, or back in '94 when I came up the last hole at the (U.S.) Open, you saw me walking like this," Palmer said as he slouched his shoulders toward the ground. "Now I'm getting out of it. By the time the nine months are up, I will be standing straight up with my head up. And that's through this stretching."

And, if it's good enough for the King - well, I've got to go now. My hamstrings are calling.

