

# THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

## Stretching to save strokes

**John Davis**

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You have bought the best equipment available and taken lessons from a qualified teaching pro, but your golf handicap index is stuck in a holding pattern.

One reason may be that you haven't practiced enough. Another, golfer and yoga instructor Katherine Roberts says, is that your body won't allow you to take full advantage of your clubs or your swing.

That's where yoga comes in.

"You can have all the titanium in the world," Roberts said, "but if you can't physically execute the golf swing, it doesn't matter what equipment you've got."

Kat, as close friends know her, is a nationally renowned speaker and instructor who has developed a yoga program specific to golfers.

"Golf, like yoga, is a union of the mind and body, and that's why they work so well together," said Roberts, who grew up playing at an exclusive Philadelphia country club.

It also is why yoga has become highly popular with pro golfers such as David Duval, Annika Sorenstam, Brad Faxon, Ty Tryon and Gary McCord. Gary Player, who has defied age, has been practicing yoga for 40 years.



Nick de la Torre/The Arizona Republic

Katherine Roberts demonstrates the Dancer Pose. Roberts is a nationally renowned yoga instructor who has developed a yoga program specific to golfers.

Los Angeles Lakers coach Phil Jackson also is a disciple, and the New York Knicks and the Jacksonville Jaguars are among pro teams that have yoga programs as part of their regular workouts.

Another example is Ken Green, a former bad boy of the PGA Tour who struggled for the past six years with clinical depression and financial woes while he toiled on developmental tours.

Green, who was known for his cursing, club-tossing and green shoes during his prime, says yoga has helped him "kill the demons." Last month he regained his tour card at age 44 at PGA Tour Qualifying School, which may be the toughest test in golf.

Tiger Woods stays mum whenever he is asked to reveal his workout regimen, and Roberts says there's a very good chance that yoga is included.

"When you talk about the combination of strength, flexibility and mental control, you can't find a better example," she said, "and that's what yoga does for you."

Yoga, the oldest form of isometric training, is a series of prolonged stretching exercises that enhance flexibility and strengthen parts of the body responsible for a good golf swing, without adding muscle bulk.

Yoga also involves visualization, and what sets it apart from other exercise programs are the breathing techniques.

"It's like the old joke, when you ask someone on the tee when they breathe during their swing to try to break their concentration," Roberts said. "When I asked them in my classes, nine out of 10 either don't know or they say they hold their breath."



Nick de la Torre/The Arizona Republic

Instructor Katherine Roberts, demonstrating a rhomboid stretch, says, "Golf, like yoga, is a union of the mind and body."

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### How yoga helps golfers:

- Improves flexibility, strength, balance, posture and breathing.
  - Helps prevent back problems caused by twisting the spine.
  - Enhances body rotation so a proper swing can be fully executed.
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"Breathing properly increases the blood flow to your extremities, which is where you really need it in golf."

Yoga is particularly helpful in preventing back problems that result from weak abdominal muscles, bad posture and tight hamstrings. Back pain is very common among golfers, Roberts said, because the upper and lower body coil and rotate in different directions during the swing.

Along with her studio and workshops, Roberts has joined with the Kostis-McCord Learning Center at Grayhawk in Scottsdale to create a program unique to Arizona, in which golfers receive a combination of personalized yoga instruction and golf lessons and personalized videos of each.

"I think it's a good combination," said Paul Trittler, the head of instruction at the golf school. "If I'm asking a student to do something they can't physically do, they won't succeed. If someone's hip flexors are tight, for example, there's no way they can get the proper turn in their golf swing."

As golfers become older, injuries and soreness become more pronounced, because most people begin losing flexibility at about age 30.

"The older you get, the more you need to maintain flexibility," Roberts said. "It's like I say in my video: 'Your body doesn't get a mulligan.' "

More information is available at [yogaforgolfers.com](http://yogaforgolfers.com) or 1-888-313-9642.



Nick de la Torre/The Arizona Republic

"Your body doesn't get a mulligan," says Katherine Roberts, who cites many pro athletes and teams as having benefited from yoga instruction.