

Muscling up

Clubs add a wide range of fitness options to attract health-minded members.

BY MIKE STETZ

At the Desert Mountain Club in Scottsdale, Ariz., members will soon be able to get training tips from three-time Ironman World Champion Mirinda Carfrae.

That's like getting golfing advice from Jordan Spieth.

Wait a sec ... Triathlons? At a club that features six — count 'em, six — Jack Nicklaus golf courses? Well, the club found the sport is popular with people of significant influence, such as CEOs and other business types. The Financial Times even calls it “the new golf.” So, that fitness trend is being incorporated into Desert Mountain.

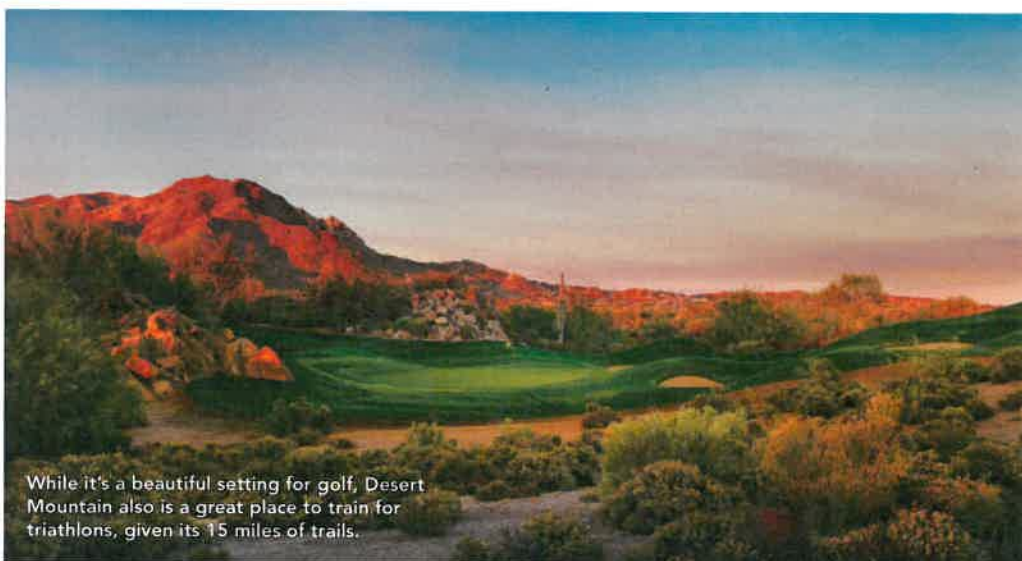
Is this the new hot thing? Muscling up fitness? Some golf clubs are increasing their offerings, hiring personal trainers and ramping up ancillary components, such as wellness services and spa treatments.

“For a lot of our members, working out is a daily part of their lives,” said Robert Jones, Desert Mountain COO and general manager. “Fitness and working out and spa time: That’s in their wheelhouse.”

Desert Mountain is the perfect place for adding a triathlon feature, he noted. The competition consists of three events: swimming, biking and running. At Desert Mountain, there’s a 15-mile trail system at an elevation of 3,000 feet, and there’s a lake on the grounds.

When Carfrae comes onboard, she will host biking, running and training events for interested members. She’ll give dieting tips, too.

A club member who a triathlon enthusiast suggested the idea. Jones had doubts until he learned how popular the sport was with many people, particularly those in their late 40s to early 60s.



While it's a beautiful setting for golf, Desert Mountain also is a great place to train for triathlons, given its 15 miles of trails.

“It centers around their goal of staying in very good health,” he said.

The club is bullish on other fitness offerings too. It’s expanding its Sonoran Spa & Fitness Center, adding more than 17,000 square feet. When polled, 60 percent of members considered it the club’s top capital improvement project.

The club is hardly neglecting golf, Jones noted. Rounds are going up.

“Golf is our No. 1 amenity,” he said.

However, Jones said, a more balanced amenity package is what members desire.

It’s working. The club has attracted 570 new members since 2011.

Today, many golf clubs have quite the fitness choices. Check out Orchid Island Golf and Beach Club in Vero Beach, Fla. It offers Aquatics, Athletic Stretch, Barre, Chi Gong, Cardio Circuit, Core Fusion/Yogalates, H.E.A.T. (High Energy Athletic Training), Indoor Cycling, M.E.L.T. (Myofascial Energetic Length Technique), Pilates Mat, Pilates



Plus, Power Pump, Stability & Mobility, Strength Training, Yoga and Zumba.

Whew ...

Fitness centers are hardly new to golf clubs. As many as 61 percent have them, according to Club Benchmarking, a Boston-based firm that offer business intelligence for private clubs. However, a number of clubs are embarking on even more ambitious projects and programs.

The number, though, is still not all that



large, said Bill McMahon, chairman of the McMahon Group, a private club consulting firm.

“Yes, the fitness and wellness centers in our country clubs are growing, but I would not say they are getting over the top,” McMahon said. “They are still staying small in size and not trying to com-

pete with the big, for-profit fitness clubs.”

The trend of bigger fitness centers is more likely to be seen in “mega-community communities,” he said.

Regardless of club size, fitness has become a priority.

“Clubs have been answering the call for some time,” said Whitney Reid of Reid Consulting Services. “This goes hand in hand with healthy menu choices, continuing education and family time at many clubs.”

Clubs are offering more activities for the whole family in order to attract the coveted 35-to-49 age group, she said.

“Fitness centers are a natural fit for that, in terms of attracting members,” Reid said. “Because of that, many clubs have put some type of fitness program into their capital plan.”

Check out Myers Park Country Club in Charlotte, N.C. It recently completed a 24,000-square-foot sports center and has more than half a dozen personal trainers on staff.

Many clubs sport the latest equipment, as well. Fountaingrove Golf & Athletic Club in Santa Rosa, Calif., is “committed to refreshing equipment no less frequently than every three years, meaning our offerings always will be state-of-the-

art,” according to its website.

Weston Hills Country Club in Weston, Fla., notes how its fitness center is equipped with Technogym, the official equipment of the 2008 Olympics.

Clubs boast of having “shock-absorbent wood flooring” or “expansive floor-to-ceiling windows” or “a multi-functional Icarian Trainer station ...”

However, it’s not just about having top-of-the-line facilities and equipment. Clubs need to adapt to their members’ changing fitness wants, which can be rather fluid, said Kirk Kokoska, vice president of golf services at BlueStar Resort & Golf, which manages a number of high-end clubs.

“Variety is certainly important, but at our clubs, we’re finding it’s both a function of quantity and quality,” he said. “By that, I mean that we seem to need to constantly update our programming to stay current with the expectations of our members. We’ve seen trends with spin, dance, aquatics and more, each requiring specific equipment and instruction.”

Right now, for instance, high-intensity interval training is big.

“So we’re working now to introduce more classes akin to what’s offered in Orangetheory or CrossFit,” he said.

Demand sometimes depends on location, he added.

“Our club in Tahoe, which largely services younger Bay Area families, is being challenged to innovate more than our club in Peoria, Ariz., which is more geared toward boomers,” Kokoska said.

Clubs are also offering individualized training to help members do a most amazing thing: improve their golf games.

That’s a big part of Desert Mountain’s strategy. In addition to its new fitness offerings, it has a \$1.6 million golf instruction facility. It sports state-of-the-art equipment such as a four-camera video motion analyzer, so golfers can better visualize their play.

“We want to get people into golf,” Jones said.

And boy, will they be fit ...

FITNESS FACTS

16%

Clubs where 50%+ of members use the fitness center

34%

Clubs where 25 to 50% of members use facilities

Fitness center revenue per sq foot

\$7	\$26	\$59
25th%	Median	75th%

From Club Benchmarking