

The cutting-edge physical training philosophies of **Kai Fusser** helped Annika Sorenstam achieve legendary success, and now his expertise is available to members at Ginn Reunion Resort

# PHYSICS OF Fitness



BY JEREMY V. JONES

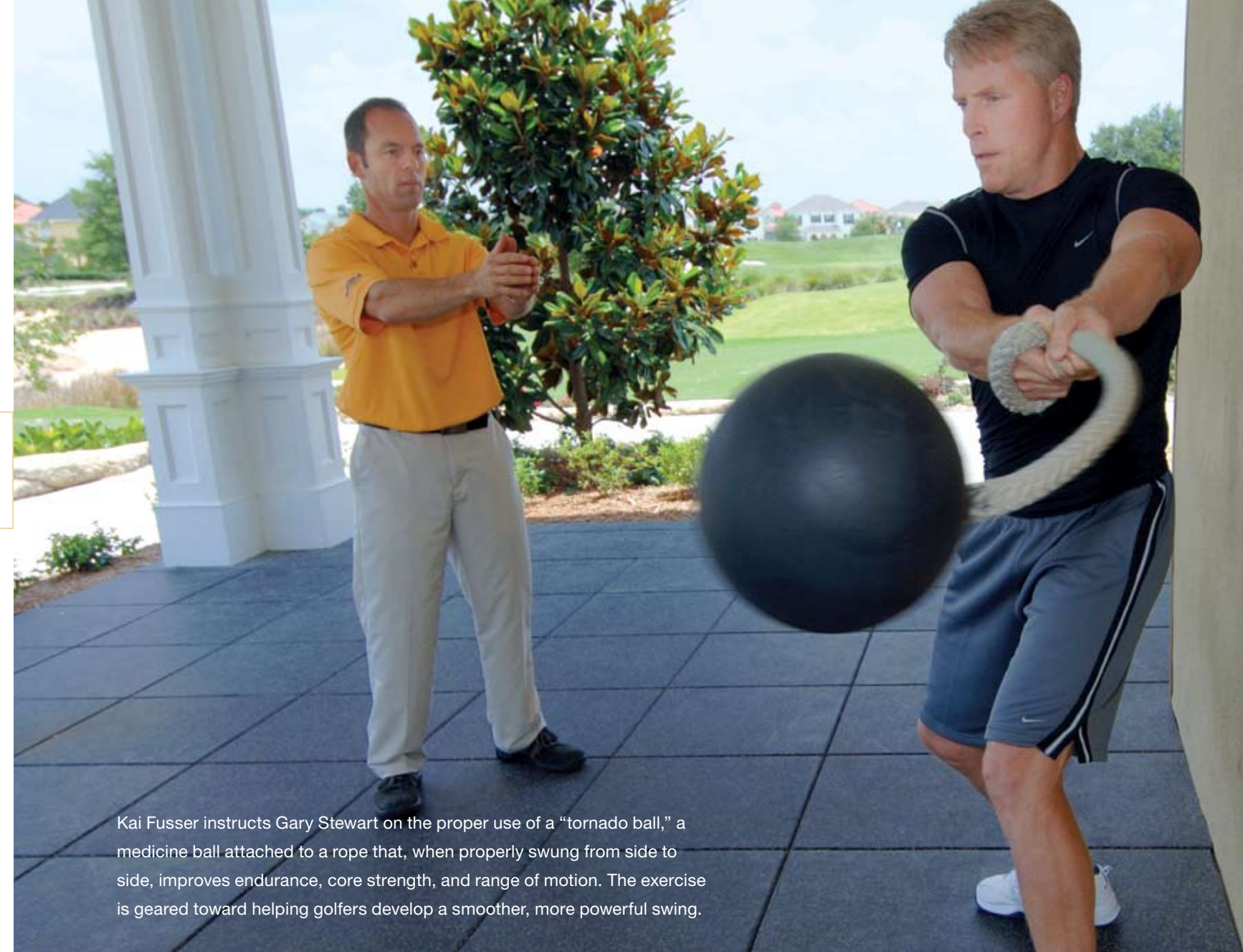
**T**he stout climbing rope is the first thing you notice upon entering the gym in Annika Academy at Ginn Reunion Resort outside Orlando, Fla. Everyone seems drawn to the rope. Athletes, members and staff all talk about it or try to pull themselves up, though most are unsuccessful.

Hanging front and center from ceiling to floor, the rope may trigger memories of physical education classes past, but don't let it fool you. This is no throwback gym; it's a state-of-the-art fitness facility custom-designed by Kai Fusser, the professional trainer who has shaped Annika Sorenstam into arguably the strongest player on the LPGA Tour. Every piece of equipment — from the various free weights and benches to the treadmills and exercise bicycles — has been handpicked by Fusser to suit his specific intentions. Though you won't find many gyms offering a climbing rope, the tool represents Fusser's commitment to training techniques that integrate multiple muscle motions and whole-body efficiency. In the fitness wave that has swept professional golf in recent years, Fusser is a revolutionary.

## Cutting edge

Few Tour players, men or women, were working out seriously in 2001 when Fusser took the helm of Sorenstam's training program. Conventional wisdom had held that strength training would build muscle mass that would only interfere with a golfer's swing. Today, Fusser works with more than 15 professional golfers, including Laura Diaz, Karen Stupples and Reilley Rankin of the LPGA and Graeme McDowell of the PGA. (Other clients include the NBA's Grant Hill, wakeboarding pioneer Darin Shapiro and numerous other pro wakeboarders and water-skiers.)

Sorenstam credits the strength gained under Fusser's tutelage for much of her legendary success — 69 victories, 38 in



Kai Fusser instructs Gary Stewart on the proper use of a "tornado ball," a medicine ball attached to a rope that, when properly swung from side to side, improves endurance, core strength, and range of motion. The exercise is geared toward helping golfers develop a smoother, more powerful swing.

five years while training with Fusser. "He looks at [fitness] from an engineering standpoint," Sorenstam says. "It's always about how we transfer the weight, how we get the energy going."

Before becoming certified as a personal trainer and sports nutritionist, the German-born Fusser earned a degree in engineering. He also has been invited to several universities to present his theories on harnessing the laws of physics to improve athletic movement and performance. His presentations draw upon his own past experience as a professional water-skier as well as that of training world-class athletes.

Such broad experience has helped to shape Fusser's unique fitness philosophy, and it's what drew Sorenstam's interest. "I was looking for someone who was knowledgeable about the body and sports," Sorenstam recalls. "I didn't want to do golf specifics because I'm already kind of uneven."

In Fusser's view, golf is a sport; its players are athletes. "A lot of people ask me about golf-specific this and that," Fusser says. "I don't quite see it that way. You have to stand. You have

to rotate. Speed is a factor in creating power. Balance is very important. Range of motion is important. So [golf] is really like any other sport, just different intensity maybe."

## Precision

In a phrase, Fusser's fitness philosophy is this: "Efficiency through perfect movement." As a result, much of his program revolves around progressive periods of training to improve balance, strengthen the core (the muscles of the torso, including those of the abdominals and lower back), increase range of motion and develop muscle speed and efficiency of motion.

To be more golf specific, Fusser maintains that greater strength lengthens drives, better balance improves the short game, endurance breeds consistency and enhanced range of motion generates smoother strokes.

Those are just the tangibles.

"If you look at the stats, I'm hitting the ball farther; I've improved in general," Sorenstam says. "But it's the way I feel.

My shoulders are a lot stronger overall. My arms, my back, everything is even, and I feel like that can prolong my season and my career just by being generally fit.”

When asked about naysayers who claim that muscle mass interferes with a good golf swing, Fusser responds, “Theoretically it could happen if you build the wrong kind of muscles. Obviously, you don’t want to look like a body builder. What I’m after is creating fast-twitch fiber muscles and stimulating them and making them strong. Fast-twitch fiber muscles are more efficient, smaller and a lot stronger. You can create a lot more speed.”



What exactly does that look like in action? During one day I spent in Fusser’s gym, LPGA hopefuls from as far as Japan and Venezuela, current LPGA Tour player Reilley Rankin and one professional water-skier performed a variety of cable-pulling rotations, lunges on and off balance boards, squats, and free-weight dumbbell and barbell lifts — usually with light to moderate weight and never in sets of more than eight repetitions. There

“What the body does, it will remember,” Fusser told Hiroko Fujishima of the Japanese Tour. “Every rep needs to be perfect every single time.”

**Personal attention**

Fortunately, Fusser’s well-rounded training guidance is not limited to the pros. His exclusive specialized service can now be taken advantage of by Ginn Reunion members and guests. Opening Annika Academy at Ginn Reunion Resort has fulfilled a dream for Fusser, Sorenstam and hitting coach Henri Reis, bringing under one roof all the elements that have contributed to Sorenstam’s success.

Lying at the far end of the driving range along Ginn Reunion’s Tom Watson Independence Course, the 5,400-square-foot facility helps golfers tune up every aspect of their game and health. Fusser admits that he’s partial to one half of the building, but recognizes that there is much more to the total facility.

“It’s the gym I’ve always wanted, exactly the way I wanted, so obviously that’s my favorite part,” Fusser says. “But it’s just the perfect setting. Everything can be done here within a couple minutes of driving. You can go to the water park. You can play tennis, use the practice facility for golf or play three courses. It doesn’t come any better than this.”

Fusser enjoys working with athletes of all abilities and ages, from children to seniors. He tells me about training kids, teenagers, professionals, beginners — even one 87-year-old golfer who recently began working out because he had lost some distance on his drives.

“For me, it’s a great contrast to train somebody like Annika at the peak of working out, then take a 65-year-old who is just starting and trying to get healthier,” Fusser says.

Unprecedented personal service is part of Sorenstam and Company’s standard of excellence for the Academy, and Fusser is able to give each of his clients undivided attention within Ginn Reunion’s premier environment. When asked how the program compares with other golf academies or resorts around the world, Fusser notes, “The main [difference] is taking care of the individual as much as we can, giving personal attention to every

“What the body does, it will remember. Every rep needs to be perfect **every single time.**”

was no work on any Nautilus-style weight machines; those don’t exist in Fusser’s gym. To isolate part of the body or remove half of it from movement sequences does not fit his designs.

Fusser’s manner is low-key. He occasionally offered calm encouragement or instruction, reminding the athletes to engage their core, to keep their hips and spine aligned and to make the most of every rep.

individual — versus a golf school where you never know who is going to teach you. Here you get the same people working with you who have worked with Annika and helped her get where she wanted to get.”

Don’t worry, they won’t make you climb the rope — at least not right away. Just don’t be surprised when you feel so good that you can’t resist trying. ■

## Three Exercises to Get You Going

Want to start working out to sharpen your golf game or general fitness? Kai Fusser offers these three exercises to get you going.

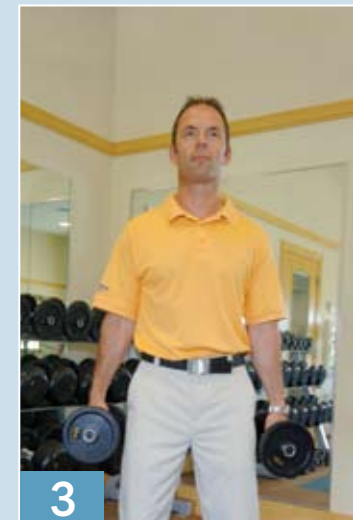
**1 Balance board**  
Simply standing on it strengthens the stabilizing muscles of the legs, hips, abdominals and back and improves balance. Once you master standing, add light dumbbell curls and raises.



**2 Straight cable rotation**  
Using a rope handle on a cable cross machine to twist and pull light weight across your body strengthens your core, especially the obliques. Increasing range-of-motion is great for improving a golf swing.



**3 Hammer curl to overhead**  
Curling, then raising light dumbbells adds arm and shoulder strength. More importantly, focusing on keeping shoulders over hips over legs at all times helps to engage your core and enhance the benefits of each rep.



## Three Keys to Perfect Reps

Being able to execute perfect reps is a vital component of Kai Fusser’s workout program. Here’s how to maximize each one and increase balance and core strength as a result.

**1 Stand dynamically.**  
Bend knees as you would in a golf stance. “Feel” the ground, and stay solid so that no one could push you over.

**2 Stay stacked.**  
Keep your upper body back with spine straight and shoulders over hips over ankles.

**3 Engage the abs.**  
Think of your belly button as your start button. Pull it in and up before every move.

For additional tips, read Fusser’s chapter in the book “The Fitness Secrets of Championship Golfers.”