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BY RON KASPRISKE

TRAINING WITH D.J.

HIS GOLF GAME IS AT AN ALL-TIME HIGH, AND SO IS HIS FITNESS

Justin Johnson is a freak—in a good way. Whether you hand him a golf club, bowling ball or jai alai cesta, it won't take him long to figure out how to use it, and use it well. We remind you of this because Johnson's typical fitness routine isn't necessarily something you should copy. Yep, it's a little freakish, too. The kind of workout only a world-class athlete like Johnson does. Earlier this year, Johnson told his longtime fitness adviser and friend, Joey Diovisalvi, that he wanted to ramp up their workout sessions.

Johnson wanted to see how strong he could get and to fully commit to winning major championships – plural, not singular, Diovisalvi recalls of their conversation.

So here's an overview of what they're doing: Three days a week they focus on power training.

Then they transition to what Diovisalvi calls "neurological training," making Johnson consciously activate and feel specific muscles. They finish the week with an oxymoron: an "active rest" day.

"I call it active rest, because he refuses to take a day off," Diovisalvi says.

"So it's a day where he'll get on the bike and ride a little, do some light exercises, golf-specific movements and then head to the course."

Sometimes Johnson works out twice a day, and occasionally, just to add a little competi-

tion to his fitness routine, he'll race Diovisalvi by bike along the Palm Beach County coastline. Ten miles up, 10 miles back.

Total all that time, and you get 15 hours of vigorous exercise every week. That's more than double what Johnson used to do, he says, and he can't help but think it's part of the reason D.J. won the US Open in June.

"I've been working out harder. I told Joey I wanted to go every day," Johnson says.

"I look at it this way. I want to be stronger and be able to swing the way I swing without worrying about getting hurt."

Monday through Wednesday, when Johnson is training for power, he performs Olympic-style exercises such as deadlifts, rows and cleans. The focus is on strengthening muscle groups on the front and back of the body from his thighs up to his shoulders, especial-

ly to strengthen the body while working from a hip-hinged posture (just like a golf posture). "No surprise, he learned to do these exercises flawlessly pretty quickly," Diovisalvi says. "He starts light and keeps progressing to heavier and heavier weights."

In case you're wondering, Johnson, who is 6ft 4 and 190 pounds, has no problem deadlifting 315 pounds.

Thursday through Saturday the two transition to "muscle awareness" exercises, many of which have Johnson off his feet. He also performs exercises on one foot, or with his eyes closed, or both.

The purpose is to concentrate on feeling a specific muscle contracting, such as a glute or an abductor or the deeper muscles of the body like those that protect the spinal column.

He also does exercises where he has to resist gravity or exter-

nal loads. Resistance training is believed to help him decelerate his powerful swing safely.

Johnson also does a lot of work throwing medicine balls that weigh 12 to 16 pounds.

A favourite exercise is to take a ball and mimic his backswing. He'll laterally step and then slam the ball down in that direction. "That's one I'd recommend anyone can do with a lighter ball. Just remember to throw in both directions," Diovisalvi says.

All of this strenuous work might have you wondering if he's overtraining. Could it lead to injuries to a body that already has to absorb the energy created by swinging his driver 125 miles per hour? The lower part of Johnson's spine is an area of concern because of the torsion it endures.

Diovisalvi laughs at the idea of Johnson overtraining, asking if anyone would ever accuse

gold-medal swimmer Michael Phelps or an NFL running back of spending too much time working out. He says he pays a lot of attention to protecting Johnson's spine and joints, especially his left wrist, which famously bows in his backswing – a stressful position to maintain with a hard swing.

"I even built a special device from PVC pipe and medical tape that lets him strengthen his grip and muscles around that wrist," Diovisalvi says.

So besides that US Open trophy and his other recent successful performances, what are the results of D.J.'s hard work?

"I'd say he's increased his clubhead speed by 2 mph and his smash factor by 5 per cent," Diovisalvi says. "He's longer than ever and hitting more fairways and greens. That's a pretty good combination." 

WANT TO COPY A PIECE OF JOHNSON'S WORKOUT? TRY THE MEDICINE-BALL THROW.

photo by John Loomis