SOUND MIND, SOUND BODY COLUMN
Functional training can aid in sports

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As spring approaches, many people dust off the tennis racquets and golf clubs for another season of recreational or competitive play.

During the off-season, it is vital to keep bodies active for the summer sport; however, people need to functionally train in the gym or outdoors.

According to the American Council of Exercise, functional training is defined as, "the use of exercises to specifically designed to improve a client's performance of functional activities outside the training environment." Functional training differs from regular strength training in that it involves multiple muscle groups to mimic a real-life movement such as a golf swing or an overhead serve. The mind-body connection comes into play as functional exercises use coordination, balance and muscle control to perform the movements.

Functional training assists the person to condition for the sport or event. It should not replace training for the actual event. For example, to become proficient at running a marathon you need to run outdoors on various terrains going with or against the wind. Adding swimming to your fitness routine will aid your cardiovascular endurance along with relieving impact on the lower back, hips and knees. However, swimming will not assist your ability to add on miles; Only running longer distances each week can help you run 26.2 miles. This same rule applies to golf swings, tennis serves, baseball/softball specialty pitches and outdoor hill cycling.

When training for the sport, it is vital to avoid injury. The speed that the exercises are performed can either support or hinder the purpose. Players, coaches and trainers should first understand the mechanics of the sport movement prior to designing a program. For most sport movements, the power and or explosion starts with the feet. This kinetic energy chain shoots up through the lower legs, upper legs, gluteals, core, chest, shoulder, arms and finally forearms.

This is a perfect example of how energy and power is transferred through the body in a tennis forehand swing. Every tennis player has a different stroke philosophy; however, the backward motion of the swing uses less force and power than the actual forward strike of the ball.

Functional training assists muscles in staying strong throughout the off-season. If you

have injuries consult your doctor or a personal recommendation for a functional training program. This style of training challenges clients to excel in sport-specific training as they would be challenged on court or course.

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