

BALANCE and Strength

Sports enthusiasts frequently experience upper body injuries. Sports such as golf and tennis demand a great deal of strength through the upper body and arms, stability at the joints, and integration of movement with the rest of the body.

Shouldering the Load

The shoulder girdle is a particularly complex area, including the scapulae (shoulder blades), clavicle (collar bone), and humerus (upper-arm bone) along with associated muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Although the shoulder girdle is highly mobile—allowing for impressive golf swings and tennis serves—this range of motion sacrifices stability around the shoulder joint, which is second only to the knee as a site of joint injury.

The scapula acts as an anchor for the arm. It floats on the back of the rib cage, held by a “sling” of muscles. This arrangement allows for great freedom of movement, but it also means that the scapulae rely heavily on the strength and patterning of the surrounding muscles. If there is a misalignment or too much movement in one direction or too little in another, compensation will occur at the shoulder joint—usually compression and subsequent inflammation of the soft tissues or injury to the rotator cuff muscles. Ouch!

Core Strength

The Pilates system of exercises can help athletes prevent injury to the shoulder girdle by building the optimal balance and strength in the



Prevent Upper Body Injuries with Pilates

Moira Merrithew

muscles of that area. Individuals undergo an assessment of posture, muscle balance, and movement patterns when they start training. As they continue and progress, they are constantly reassessed.

Pilates first isolates movement in a particular area to create awareness and correct imbalances. Once a certain amount of movement awareness, strength, and stability is achieved, that area of the body can be reintegrated into larger movement patterns.

Achieve Balance

Bringing the musculature back into balance reduces stress and strain on the tissues during daily activities and when playing sports. The core stability achieved through Pilates also builds strength that helps integrate movement and allows a transfer of forces from the lower body to the upper body, crucial for all sports.

While creating the stability around the joints and through the core, Pilates exercises maximize range of motion without sacrificing stability. This flexibility is integral for preventing sudden injuries and assuring that the upper body remains in top form for all sports activities. ☆

Moira Merrithew is the cofounder and Executive Director of Education, for Stott Pilates.