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Benefits of yoga in sports - a study

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Abstract

Yoga has been practiced for around 5,000 years. Several schools and organizations of yoga have emerged over time to time. It can be overwhelming at first to find a style of yoga that resonates with you. If you are a competitive athlete, it is best to tailor your yoga practice to your training schedule because a particular sport can develop certain muscle groups while ignoring others. Over time, this process causes imbalances in the muscles and joints leading to overuse injuries. Yoga helps the muscles, tendons, and ligaments move through a full range of motion, thus cultivating balance and core strength which is a huge benefit to athletes in their chosen sports. A tri-athlete from San Diego, Heidi Resiert said, "I'm glad I found yoga and added it to my weekly workout routine. Not only do I feel stronger, but I also feel more confident that I will continue to be injury free." Another essential element in yoga is breath work (*pranayama*). The attention to breath during yoga can be considered one of the most important benefits to athletes. Learning to stay focused and centered through uncomfortable poses by concentrating on even inhalations and exhalations sets up the athlete to stay focused during a race or challenging workout. The mind-body connection in yoga is essential to helping athletes develop mental acuity and concentration. In addition, yoga helps you to relax not just tight muscles, but also anxious and overstressed minds. Yoga works not just in the sagittal plane but, in the frontal and transverse planes as well, ensuring well-rounded development. Being more relaxed will also aid in athletic performance. So, why not enhance your game performance and prevent injury by adding yoga to your training plan now.

Keywords: Athlete, yoga, injury, muscle, performance.

1. Introduction

Many athletes are having more injuries that require surgery because of the increased focus on strength training with weight resistance. This method for increasing strength and muscle mass is highly effective and efficient, yet it dramatically decreases flexibility. However, if **yoga** or other types of prolonged stretching are practiced in combination with strength training and practical application exercises (using the body in a way that mimics the movements of their particular sport, while performing a balancing or core movement), injury can be minimized during engagement in other competitive sports that call for the athlete to be more spontaneous with their bodies, calling for overextended reaches, lunges, falls, etc., all of which increase the odds of injury, opposed to the safety of controlled mechanical motion used in weight room workouts. With **yoga**, the athlete will not only increase flexibility but also increase poise and balance from the practice of the yoga holding/balancing poses. When balancing poses are mastered the athlete is then conditioned to unconsciously recover from any imbalances their body may experience, staying centered in action, moment by moment during play. This is when the athlete begins to perform miraculous stunts. He is able to use his body in ways he never thought possible while remaining centered and injury free. **Yoga** also helps strengthen connective tissue, break down adhesions (tiny scar tissue) from old injuries and over-training that have tightened as we age thus helping create mobility of the joints and an anti-aging posture. The deep rhythmic breathing performed in yoga also creates and builds up one's life force energies or Prana, also called Qi or Chi in Chinese healing and martial arts. So, one actually creates more energy than is expended during a yoga session. The type of energy that is not from the caloric intake of our diet, but a cosmic energy. Repetitive movements, a necessary part of many sports, can lead to tight muscles. If your Muscles are too tight when you are playing, you could be at risk of a tear. Yoga is a great way to increase flexibility, which can help to protect your muscles and joints by increasing the range of motion. While you may think that simply stretching before and after athletic activities is enough, yoga goes beyond simple stretching moves, working the muscles through the full range of motion and activating the lesser-used supporting muscles in the body. By increasing your flexibility, you can increase

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your power by making your movements more efficient. Yoga can also help to improve your balance by strengthening the core. It is important for athletes and nonathletes alike to have a strong core, especially as we age. The core muscles help to support the spine, helping you to keep correct posture, which can in turn reduce your risk of back problems. Yoga can also help with recovery. By stretching and relaxing your muscles during yoga, you increase blood flow, which can help to speed healing of broken down muscle fibers. Many athletes also find that yoga helps with endurance and mental

toughness. Breathing is a very important part of yoga and helps to promote the connection between the body and the mind. This type of breathing can help an athlete stay calm, focused, and relaxed. Yoga has been popular with women, both athletes and nonathletes alike, for quite some time. However, more and more male athletes are turning to yoga to increase power, control, and muscle function. In fact, several pro athletes and teams, including Shaquille O'Neal, Lebron James, the New York Giants, and the Seattle Seahawks have been known to incorporate yoga into their routines.



Objectives of Yoga in Sports

Health, physical fitness and emotional stability are the objectives which bring yoga and physical education on a common platform for the benefit of human individual. Health is a more general and comprehensive term conveying the 'feeling of well-being', while physical fitness is a more specific term. Physical fitness is the capacity of an individual to perform a given task at a particular time. Health and physical fitness are not static. They are always changing they follow the law can be maintained only by carefully selected physical activities which are called 'exercise'. The utility of the particular exercise program can be evaluated only in forms of the effects that one obtained in promoting a particular factor of physical fitness. Trough constant practice of yoga, one can overcome all difficulties and eradicate all weakness pain can be transmitted in to 24bliss, sorrow in to joys, and failure into success and sickness in to perfect health. Determination, patience and persistence lead one to goal.

Fitness and Yoga in sports

The Athletic Performance Benefits Of Yoga

Of course, if you've looked at a few yoga videos or articles, you might be skeptical about the benefits; obviously, even the most intense yoga routine doesn't compare with something like interval training or deadlifts. This is absolutely true and part of why, even as a teacher and practitioner, I still include things like sandbag training, hill sprints, and sledghehammer work in my routine. The point is not that yoga can replace conventional (or unconventional) training, but rather how it can enhance it. By improving not only flexibility but also posture, body-mechanics, and awareness, yoga can literally make every form of training you do more effective and efficient. In my experience, a regular yoga practice can give you the following and more:

1.) Injury Prevention.

Athletes experience stress on their bodies during their training. This repetitive overuse of certain muscle groups will cause imbalances in strengthening and lengthening. Tighter muscles pull at the ligaments and joints. If an athlete falls, muscle tightness puts him/her at a greater risk of tearing due to the muscle's resistance to movement; more pliability and flexibility in the muscles can prevent injuries. Yoga is designed to work the muscles around the joints for stability and full mobility and rotation in the joints, making an athlete's movements more fluid.

2.) Increased Performance.

Better flexibility and range of motion can translate to increased performance in athletes. For example, one female athlete said she could lunge lower for ground balls in her softball games with her new flexibility and she could throw farther distances with more complete shoulder rotation. She also found that she had a quicker response time with an improved mind-body connection.

3.) Body Awareness.

Proprioception is often referred to as the sixth sense. It is the ability to perceive our body internally without our eyes, but with our minds. We can perceive the body in its position in space, the direction and speed of its movement. Through subtle actions addressed throughout a yoga class we gain an understanding of how our body moves in various ways in relation to its parts with a sense of keen awareness. This understanding of anatomy and body mechanics not only helps with reaction time, but with balance and injury prevention as well.

4.) Balance.

Yoga is designed to alleviate the law of compensation. The law of compensation states that our bodies will default to the path of least resistance when unconscious in our activity. Generally, the path of least resistance is the most flexible and often weakest area in our bodies. Yoga allows us to see

where we have been compensating and helps to balance the body by placing special attention to symmetry. In aligning our body and stacking our bones, we discover our weaknesses as well as our strengths. A martial artist said his improved balance greatly increased his abilities to perform, especially with high kicks.



5.) Core Strength.

Stretching and strengthening of the abdominal, par spinal and pelvic muscles, commonly lumped into the term “core” are extremely important to maintaining a healthy spine. When muscles in these areas are healthy and strong, they can take pressure off the spine and help prevent injury. Core strengthening is one of the cornerstones of yoga.

7.) Mental Focus.

Yoga is a Listening exercise and an opportunity to be present. In a yoga class, we listen to the teacher and then translate the information into our bodies. Having a yoga practice forces us to be present and to focus our minds on the tasks at hand. When we can learn to observe our minds and its patterns we can start to remove obstacles that would otherwise hold us back if we weren’t conscious of them.

6.) Breath Awareness.

Yoga teaches us to become aware of the quality and length of our breath. It allows us to gauge when we are active or relaxed so we can accurately manage our own nervous systems and bring them back to balance in any situation. This attention to breath also allows us to strengthen the diaphragm and expand our lung tissue to its full capacity. When we breathe at full capacity, we increase the amount of oxygen that feeds the body and the muscles which also aids in increasing our endurance.

8.) Stress Relief.

Yoga teaches us how to calm the mind and the nervous system while faced with stress and physical challenge. Yoga is called a moving meditation. Since training and competing can increase stress, not only on your body but also our mind, it’s important to be able to perform in a way that does not feel stressful. “In the zone” is that state of complete surrender to mental focus, clarity and calmness of being that allows for optimal performance. Yoga is a great practice before and after any competition. You can adapt a yoga practice to be stimulating for energy or calming for tranquility, but either way, it will be great for mental focus.



9.) Recovery Time.

You can find countless case studies of athletes who came to a full recovery from injury through yoga practice. Some of the founders of the Western yoga, such as Iyengar and Bikram, became such proponents of yoga because it cured them of illness and injury. Yoga therapy is a growing method of physical therapy for injury recovery widely recognized by Western medicine. Not only is yoga a great method for injury recovery, but also helps with post-workout recovery time. After a vigorous workout, athletes often have sore, energy-depleted muscles. Yoga can help move energy through the body and relieve what could have been several days of muscle soreness, with a few poses and some breath work.



Health Benefits of Yoga

- Stable autonomic nervous system equilibrium, with a tendency toward parasympathetic nervous system dominance rather than the usual stress –induced sympathetic nervous system dominance.
- Pulse rate decreases.
- Respiratory rate decreases
- Blood pressure decreases (of special significance for hypo reactors)
- Galvanic Skin Response (GSR) increases
- EEG-alpha waves increase (theta, delta and beta waves also increase during various stages of meditation)
- Cardiovascular efficiency increases
- Respiratory efficiency increases (respiratory amplitude and smoothness increase, tidal volume increases, vital capacity increases, breath –holding time increases).
- Gastrointestinal function normalizes
- Endocrine function normalizes
- Excretory functions improve
- Muscular-skeletal flexibility and joint range of motion increases
- Posture improves
- Strength and resiliency increase
- Endurance increases
- Energy level increases

10.) Endurance.

Endurance of an athlete is measured by the overall physical constitution of an athlete. Yoga aids endurance through all of the benefits offered above. With all of these benefits assisting an athlete, he or she will have increased stamina for competition and a longer career living in a much more healthy, balanced body.

Meditation is a mental practice proven to:

- Reduce anxiety and stress
- Reduce cortisol levels and increase calming hormones
- Improve cognitive function
- Reduce blood pressure and heart rate
- Increase immune function
- These benefits combine to allow for better rest, sleep and recovery, as well as provide the ability to think more clearly under pressure.

- Weight normalizes
- Sleep improves
- Immunity increases
- Pain decreases

Conclusion of the study

As highlighted above, researcher find out that yoga in sports as important as other think it helps us in different ways and different levels in a sports men life. We improves our performance by daily yoga practicing in order to perform a sporting action efficiently and effectively, a person needs to have a high degree of concentration and focus with a mind that is calm and controlled Yoga can help a sportsperson to have evenness of mind and control of their thoughts even during stress and/or adversity. Yoga can play a key role in cultivating mind control and concentration which helps a sportsperson to perform at their peak leves and yoga helps us a lot.

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