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Why every athlete should need Yoga in modern life

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Abstract

Yoga has been practiced for around 5,000 years. 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. 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. The attention to breath during yoga can be considered one of the most important benefits to athletes. Learning to stay focused and centred through uncomfortable poses by concentrating on even inhalations and exhalations sets up the athlete to stay focused during a race or challenging workout. 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

Especially today when there is an increase in privatization, globalization and urbanization, competition is also raised. Today everyone wants to work with blue chip and white collar organizations. Thus with rising completion stress is also shooting like anything, here yoga plays most vital role in balancing equilibrium between your mind, body and soul. Meditation and breathing exercises help to combat organizational and family stress and pressure. This helps in achieving long term goals with high productivity, wealth maximization, and profit maximization that too within optimum resource utilization. Yoga is a discipline that seers and saints have been practicing since ancient times to bring flexibility to the spine and joints, to keep the muscles of the body pliable and youthful, increase circulation in arteries and strengthen internal organs. And yet, yoga is so much more than this. Yoga has been said to help strengthen the power of concentration, to banish constipation, to relieve stomach disorders, improve muscle coordination and reduce excess body fat. Yoga has also been said to strengthen the mind-body connection, bring calmness and relaxation to mind, enhance self-confidence, strengthen self-discipline and self-resolve, reduce stress anxiety and increase vitality and energy throughout the body. Evidently, it would appear that yoga has extensive benefits and can help us to be a more balanced, relaxed, focused, efficient and effective person. The benefits of yoga can thus be applied to a variety of disciplines including professional sporting athletes. This paper will highlight the benefits for professional athletes through the practice of Yoga and explore how Yoga can significantly enhance their performance.

In order to understand how Yoga can benefit professional sports persons, it is necessary to explore what is required to play a sport and play it well. It is well acknowledged that to play any sport, whether it be tennis, volleyball, surfing, swimming or running, we must develop the basic skills and continually train the body so that we can apply the skill in a refined and polished way. This of course requires considerable time, energy and commitment to practice the skill at hand. Having a body that is flexible, strong and controlled is also another important consideration, if one is not able to move the body with the grace, velocity and speed required, then performance will be lackluster. Similarly, if a person is not able to maintain endurance or stamina for the required duration, the performance will be diminished. In order to play a sport well, it is also necessary that a person is able to focus and concentrate with confidence on the task at hand without distraction or timidity. As such, in addition to being able to maintain mental poise and balance, it is essential for a professional athlete to have a high degree of alertness, concentration and focus throughout the sporting match / event. How then can yoga assist in strengthening the mind and body to allow a sports person to perform at their highest potential?

Yoga is the application of physical postures, control of breath, purification and relaxation of mind / body and spiritual principles aimed at bringing greater unity and balance to the mind and body. Yoga teaches a person how to link the mind and body and to come into the present. The use of pranayama and breathing techniques prescribed in Yoga enables a person to focus on breath and helps to calm and still the mind and cultivate concentration ability.

Yoga practice and proper diet can help to improve the flexibility and strength of musculoskeletal system. Yoga is a timeless pragmatic science evolved over thousands of years dealing with the physical and spiritual being of man as a whole. Yoga training is a technique of harmony and also a preparation for the total integration of human personality. Yoga is a system of attaining perfect physical and mental health. The body is the temple of soul and to attain harmony of mind, body and spirit, the body must be physically fit. Yoga controls one's senses resulting in an integrated personality. Positive changes in the life style of people can be brought through by yoga. Behaviors can also be molded properly leading to balanced personalities. It clearly reveals that there will be a sound mind only in a sound body. To keep our body in good condition, it is essential that the various organs and systems of our body must be in good condition. Yogic exercises play an important role in the maintenance of the above systems. The practice of yoga not only develops the body but also enhances the mental faculties. Moreover, the yogi acquires mastery over the involuntary muscles of his organism. Yoga can help a whole range of ailments including asthma, high blood pressure, lower back, arthritis, menopausal changes, menstrual problems stress, anxiety and depression on yoga movements stretch all the major muscle groups and release built up tension. Through posture work, as the body's circulation increase and bone are properly aligned, age related rheumatism and arthritis can be prevented. The practice can be low impact but it can also very demanding. The beauty of yoga is that it is accessible to everyone, as the session can be adapted to each person level of fitness or state of health. For those love yoga it became a way of life whether your path is physical, mental, and spiritual or a combination. Yoga is for everyone. In sports yoga is good for your posture and structure balance (leading to mental balance) it promotes flexibility and suppleness. When you breathe slowly and deeply, more oxygen circulatory through the blood during exercise the cells of the body receive a fresh supply of nutrients and oxygen, so increasing energy, vitality and the flexibility of youth.

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 sledgehammer 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. Yoga plays an important role in sports. In yoga Asana, Pranayama, Suryanamaskara, Meditation and kayotsarga are usually performed by sportsperson for various purposes in Sports. Yoga improves

their concentration. It helps in developing physical fitness and it is also good for relaxation, good for rehabilitation after injury.

Yoga Benefits in Daily Life

1. **Improves concentration** - some yogasana [balancing pose], Pranayama like anulom-vilom, bhramari etc., Meditation helps to increase concentration.
2. **Weight control** - Sportsmen often gains weight during off-season. This can easily be prevented by practicing all yoga techniques.
3. **Increase immunity** - Yoga also increase the immunity.
4. **Improves all systems** - Yogasana, Pranayama and suryanamaskar improves all body systems.
5. **Improves glandular function** - Daily practice of yoga improves glandular function.
6. **Develop fitness** - Yoga asana, pranayama, suryanamaskar develops high level of physical fitness especially flexibility and endurance.
7. Tone up muscular and nervous system
8. The breathing exercises of yoga help to control the breath which is very important for sportsperson.
9. Meditation, relaxation poses and some pranayama cure stress and anxiety.
10. It cures all components of physical fitness like speed, strength flexibility etc.

Yoga Benefits in Sports

Increase Flexibility

Heavy training loads without adequate stretching can result in a loss of range of motion around joints as muscles become tight. This may result in a reduction in mechanical efficiency and cause muscular imbalances that reduce speed, power, balance and agility, and increase the risk of injury. Yoga postures improve flexibility by moving the body through a range of dynamic and static stretches that encourage a relaxation response in muscles and fascia, restoring joint range of movement.

Enhance Strength

Yoga poses require significant muscular effort. Integrated body movements are encouraged, including core control, as you move through the sequence. Improving strength through full range of movement helps reduce the risk of injury. Core muscles and stabilizing muscles are recruited throughout the practice, providing a solid foundation on which to build further sport specific strength and power.

Improve Co-ordination; Balance and Agility

Co-ordination can be improved by maintaining contraction and relaxation of different muscle groups. Yoga poses require integration of the whole body and draw on your balance skills. Co-ordination allows muscle groups in the body to relate to one another, and balance allows you to relate to your environment. Improved co-ordination enhances balance, and balance improves agility.

Reduce Fatigue and Recovery time

certain postures are known for their calming effect on the nervous system. Relaxation allows the body's organs to rest

and recuperate, improves digestion and absorption of nutrients, and reduces the harmful effects of stress hormones. A specific set of postures post competition or after heavy training can encourage repair within the body and facilitate the recovery process.

Increase Mental Balance

The ability to create a stress free mind is a significant benefit of yoga practice. The physical practice is used as a tool to enhance breath control, which helps improve focus and concentration, allowing clarity of thought and clear decision making. A valuable tool in any sporting arena. Mental practice in any sport will teach you how to gain control of your emotional states, so arousal levels and anxiety don't impede your performance. Meditation is a mental practice proven to:

1. Reduce anxiety and stress
2. Reduce cortisol levels and increase calming hormones
3. Improve cognitive function
4. Reduce blood pressure and heart rate

Increased Power

We all know power, strength, and speed are directly related to proper body-mechanics: when our body is properly aligned, we can transmit force much more efficiently and perform better across the board. Whatever your sport, by returning your body to its optimal alignment, yoga can help you reduce power-leakage in your deads and cleans, improve running gait and efficiency, and help you punch, jump, or throw more explosively.

Better Endurance

By opening posture, yoga significantly increases respiratory capacity; in fact, many have overcome asthma and other respiratory conditions through regular practice. Obviously, this is invaluable to athletes. Yoga has also been proven to dramatically enhance circulation, digestion, and efficiency of motion, which all further improve energy and endurance.

Better Balance/Proprioception

Along with opening the body, yoga builds greater body-awareness, including balance, stability, and proprioception. As a result, not only is performance enhanced but our training becomes far more effective.

Better Injury Prevention

Of course, we all know that the one thing that stalls progress even more than poor training is injury. By improving body-mechanics and awareness, yoga dramatically reduces the risk of injury, both in training and competition, in turn increasing competitive longevity and allowing more consistent progress in our sport.

Enhanced Recovery

A little-appreciated but significant benefit for athletes is improved recovery. By enhancing circulation and lymphatic flow, yoga not only increases strength and endurance but also allows muscles to process metabolic byproducts more quickly, powerfully speeding healing time and re-growth.

Improved Focus

Finally (and perhaps most important of all), regular practice dramatically enhances our clarity and focus. Why does this matter? As Ultraman world-champion Rich Roll states, "When

you look at the highest level of sport, all athletes are incredibly talented and train incredibly hard. So what distinguishes the Olympic champion from the 'also-ran?' The mind." Practiced regularly, yoga can give you the awareness and mindfulness you need to take both your training and your performance to the next level.

Of course the list goes on and on. In addition to the above, yoga's been clinically proven to improve immune function, balance hormonal balance and improve stress management, all extremely beneficial to athletes. Put together, you can see why so many professionals have come to consider yoga every bit as indispensable to their training as strength or conditioning.

Yoga for Athletic Performance: Key Principles

Along with the basic categories of movement, there are a few simple principles that can guide you in your routine. When in doubt, the following will assure you progress in a constructive way:

1. **Standing Poses** – Build leg-strength as well as flexibility in the hips and hamstrings.
2. **Consistency Beats Volume** – The first key is that practice doesn't need to be long; 10-15 minutes daily is plenty and better than 90 minutes once a week. Daily is ideal, but 3-4 days a week is fine. Likewise, time in each pose can be brief: 20-30 seconds being sufficient, especially at the start. An excellent approach is to hold each pose for five slow breaths: as you become more proficient, the breath will become deeper, and in turn, you'll hold each pose a little longer.
3. **Mindfulness Beats Intensity** – As athletes, it's not uncommon to approach yoga with the idea "more/harder is better," but in this case the opposite is true, our muscles respond far better to "gentle persuasion" than force. Also, remember the primary goal of yoga is building mind-body communication which we can't do if we're "forcing it." In yoga, we often use the expression: "Effort but no strain," very similar to Pavel Tsatsouline's idea of training to a "comfortable stop." Bottom line: like any exercise, we want to challenge ourselves enough to grow but not so much that we're breaking down rather than building up.
4. **Active Respiratory Openness** – Another guiding principle is "active openness." In all our poses, even forward bending poses or twists, our torso can be more "closed" or "open." Obviously, when we're more open we can breathe more fully, so within each pose we try to engage the core and "lengthen" the torso, again, a skill that directly translates to better energy and power during sports performance.
5. **Short-Term Quality, Long-Term Variety** – Taking an analogy from nutrition, we all know that many foods are "highly-nutritious," but we also know that we don't have to eat every one of them every meal. In fact, we tend to digest better and get greater benefits if we spread them out. Yoga is the same; by focusing on "quality work" in a few poses each session and varying our selection over the course of the week, we can be sure our bodies are getting the movement they need in a form that's "easily digestible" for us.

Some Other Benefits of Yoga in a Sportsmen Life

1. Brings down stress and enhances powers of relaxation.
 2. Boosts physical strength, stamina and flexibility.
 3. Bestows greater powers of concentration and self-control.
 4. Inculcates impulse Control.
 5. Helps in rehabilitation of old and new injuries.
 6. Intensifies tolerance to pain and enhances mental clarity.
 7. Boosts functioning of the immune system.
 8. Enhances posture Brings down stress and enhances powers of relaxation.
 9. Boosts physical strength, stamina and flexibility.
 10. Bestows greater powers of concentration and self-control.
 11. Inculcates impulse Control.
 12. Helps in rehabilitation of old and new injuries.
 13. Intensifies tolerance to pain and enhances mental clarity.
 14. Boosts functioning of the immune system.
 15. Enhances posture and muscle tone. And muscle tone.
- Modern sports scientists

Discussion and Conclusion

Yoga is able to mobilize joints, stretch tissues and ligaments, tone muscles, bring flexibility to the spine and strengthen internal organs. Yoga exercises are based on the formula of stretching, relaxation, deep breathing, increasing circulation and concentration. As such, yoga is beneficial to a professional athlete as it enables them to strengthen their concentration ability, foster a calm and relaxed mind, and enhance the mind / body connection allowing an athlete to have greater muscle coordination and fluidity of movement. Yoga is also beneficial to a professional athlete as it positively contributes to the health and vitality of the body, strengthens internal organs such as the heart, lungs and liver and helps to maintain fitness and agility. Yoga also helps to reduce stress and anxiety, cultivate self-confidence and self-belief. All of these elements are pivotal to sporting excellence and peak performance. As highlighted above, 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 level.

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