



ISSN: 2456-4419

Impact Factor: (RJIF): 5.18

Yoga 2018; 3(1): 11-13

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www.theyogicjournal.com

Received: 04-11-2017

Accepted: 08-12-2017

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Benefits of yoga in sports

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Abstract

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.

Keywords: Yoga, flexibility, self-confidence, strength, and stress

Introduction

The practice of yoga was first developed in India and has evolved over thousands of years. Yoga disciples use poses, or asanas, to prepare their bodies for meditation practice much as an athlete would prepare for a sports competition. The poses also serve as a means to alter one's consciousness and mental focus in the spiritual quest for "enlightenment." This spiritually transformative process is, in fact, the overriding purpose of the practice of hatha yoga. In essence, yoga is designed to bring body, mind and spirit into balance. Through the practice of yoga, elite athletes and weekend warriors alike can benefit from this type of balance. This is especially true when athletes have pushed their bodies to the max, resulting in weakness or injury. Yoga can restore a weakened body and build it back up. Yoga postures, breath work and inner focus can help rebalance, strengthen and restore overtaxed muscles, joints and ligaments. Through this restoration process, athletes can increase their career longevity and develop an inner balance that will last a lifetime. Balancing the mind, body and spirit is a primary philosophical principle of yoga. It is considered the true way to honour the body. Athletes in all sports are finding that yogic conditioning not only elongates tight, shortened, fatigued muscles but also brings calmness and clarity to the mind. Some athletes begin the practice to rehabilitate an injury and to gain more flexibility, stability and strength. Others take it up to increase their powers of concentration and quiet the mind. And some do it because they don't want to miss out on what everybody else is raving about! The reasons are many, but the results are consistent.

Fitness and Yoga in sports

1) Improved Strength

Routine and consistent practice of the various yoga asanas has helped me build strength and improve lean muscle mass. Most notably with respect to several muscle groups under-utilized in my chosen athletic disciplines of swimming, cycling and running. These gains have enhanced core body stability and significantly impeded overuse injury by strengthening the supportive but otherwise under-developed muscles surrounding the more utilized muscles, creating a more balanced and optimally functional overall strength.

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2) Balance

As a swimmer, I have always been rather flexible. But my balance is historically horrible. But through a consistent yoga practice, my coordination and balance have improved immensely. Why is this important? Better balance and coordination means enhanced control over how I move my body, which in turn leads to better technique and form -- the brass ring every athlete spends a career refining, whether your focus is a swim stroke, golf swing, running stride, and jump shot or wrestling move.

3) Flexibility

Yoga invariably improves joint and muscular flexibility, which is crucial to the body's overall structural soundness. Enhanced joint and muscle pliancy translates to a greater range of motion, or an increase in the performance latitude for a particular movement or series of movements. For example, a swimmer with supple shoulder and hip joints is able to capture and pull more water than a swimmer with a more limited range of motion. The result is more forward movement per stroke as well as enhanced muscular economy. In turn, this increased range of motion provides a greater ability to strength condition muscle strain; relaxes the mind and body; centers attention; sharpens concentration; and frees the spirit. Western doctors and scientists are discovering additional health benefits of hatha yoga. Studies have shown that it can relieve the symptoms of several common and potentially life-threatening illnesses; such as arthritis, arteriosclerosis, chronic fatigue, diabetes, AIDS, asthma and obesity. Many believe it even fends off the ravages of old age. a particular muscle group due to the amelioration in overall force that can be exerted with each movement. And although there is some dispute about the advisability of "over" stretching (for runners in particular), I remain a huge advocate, finding that the more I work to maintain my flexibility (something that wanes with age), the less likely I am to suffer an overuse injury.

4) Free Your Mind

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.

5) Meditation is a mental practice proven to

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

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 the 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 the 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 24 bliss, sorrow in to joys, and failure into success and sickness in to perfect health. Determination, patience and persistence lead one to goal.

Health and Yoga in Sports

Yoga has both preventive and therapeutic benefits. It has been shown to offer both physical and mental benefits to the body and the mind. The many physical benefits of hatha yoga are: it improves flexibility and muscle joint mobility; strengthens, tones, and builds muscles; corrects posture; strengthens the spine; eases back pain; improves muscular-skeletal conditions such as bad knees, tight shoulders and neck, swayback and scoliosis; increases stamina; creates balance and grace; stimulates the glands of the endocrine system; improves digestion and elimination; increases circulation; improves heart conditions; improves breathing disorders; boosts immune response; decreases cholesterol and blood sugar levels; and encourages weight loss. The mental benefits include: it increases body awareness; relieves chronic stress patterns in the body; refreshes the body by relieving

Health Benefits of Yoga

1. Stable autonomic nervous system equilibrium, with a tendency toward parasympathetic nervous system dominance rather than the usual stress -induced sympathetic nervous system dominance.
2. Pulse rate decreases.
3. Respiratory rate decreases
4. Blood pressure decreases (of special significance for hypo reactors)
5. Galvanic Skin Response (GSR) increases
6. EEG-alpha waves increase (theta, delta and beta waves also increase during various stages of meditation)
7. Cardiovascular efficiency increases
8. Respiratory efficiency increases (respiratory amplitude and smoothness increase, tidal volume increases, vital capacity increases, breath -holding time increases).
9. Gastrointestinal function normalizes
10. Endocrine function normalizes
11. Excretory functions improve
12. Muscular-skeletal flexibility and joint range of motion increases
13. Posture improves
14. Strength and resiliency increase
15. Endurance increase
16. Energy level increases
16. Weight normalizes
17. Sleep improves
18. Immunity increases
19. Pain decreases

Yoga Improves

1. Strengthens deep connective tissue preventing or minimizing injury.
2. Creates an overall body flexibility. Increases range of motion and mobility.
3. Dramatically enhances physical balance by developing the athlete's awareness of his body's center place, thus

keeping their body balanced in action, moment by moment, giving the ability to recover from or prevent falls, while enhancing agility and maneuverability.

4. Improves circulation, massages internal organs and glands for optimum health.
5. The yoga breath circulates and detoxifies the LYMPH FLUID to speed up recovery time from training 15% faster, eliminating fatigue.
6. The yoga breath builds up increases one's life force energy.
7. Enhances sensory acuity, mental focus, concentration, mental clarity, will power, and determination.
8. Dissolves pre competition anxiety and stress. Helps to balance & manage emotions tha could cloud focus, concentration & judgment.
9. Trains the athlete gets and stays in the mental zone.

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, 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. Yoga can help a sportsperson to have evenness of mind and control of their thoughts even during stress and/or adversity. Yoga is able to help a person have control over their body through control of their mind. As such, 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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