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Lyoid Christopher K

M.Phil. Scholar, SRMIST,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Dr. SJ Albert Chandrasekar

Assistant Professor, Department
of Physical Education, SRMIST
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Yoga and sports performance

Lyoid Christopher K and Dr. SJ Albert Chandrasekar

Abstract

Every athlete irrespective of sport or discipline has the potential to enhance their ability by adopting a consistent yoga practice. Today's top athletes have a unique ability to consistently perform at their highest potential in comparison to their competition. For high school, college and professional sports, most athletes are very similar in physical abilities, so how are some athletes able to consistently dominate their competitions. The most important benefit of yoga is physical and mental health therapy. The ageing process which is largely an artificial condition, caused mainly by autointoxication, self poisoning, can be slowed down by practicing yoga, by keeping the body clean, flexible and well lubricated. According to medical scientist, Yoga therapy is successful because of the balance created in the nervous and endocrine systems, which directly influences all other systems and organs of the body. Yoga acts both as a curative and preventive therapy. The very essence of yoga lies in attaining mental peace improved concentration powers. Through the practice of yoga we become aware of inter connectedness between our emotional mental and physical levels.

Keywords: Yoga, sports

Introduction

Routine and consistent practice of the various yoga Asana helped to build strength and improve lean muscle mass. Most notably with respect to several muscle groups under-utilized in the 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. Looking for a new way to get in your resistance work? You might be surprised to find that yoga makes a perfect companion for athletes of all sports as well as the "Jack-of-all-trade" fitness enthusiasts. Yoga can help you develop better a breathing technique while it improvises your balance, flexibility, core strength, and endurance.

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 dead lifts. This is 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 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:

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.

Correspondence

Lyoid Christopher K

M.Phil. Scholar SRMIST,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

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 efficient.

Better Injury Prevention

Of course, we all know that the one thing that stalls progress even more than inadequate training is an 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. As Ultraman world-champion, Rich Roll states, "When you look at the highest level of sport, all athletes are incredibly talented and train extremely 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.

Athletic Performance Benefits of Yoga: 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:

- **Standing Poses:** Build leg-strength as well as flexibility in the hips and hamstrings.
- **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.
- **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.

- **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.
- **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.

Summary

Yoga can be helpful to know that some traditions are more athletic and intense while others are more meditative and relaxing. It is the simplest way to get strength and resistance training, while improving range of motion and balance, yoga may be a good addition to your workouts. Yoga may be the perfect cross-training method for athletes of all sports. Yoga can help athletes develop better breathing techniques while it improves balance, flexibility, core strength, and even endurance.

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