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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 centred 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 international football clubs, American footballers and rugby, golf & cricket clubs in Australia, South Africa, New Zealand & the US have used this centuries-old practice from India as a progressive training technique for some time. Yoga is both preventive and therapeutic and has shown to offer both physical and mental benefits to the body and mind. Yoga is distinctly different from other kinds of exercise as it generates motion without causing strain and imbalances in the body. Therefore the practice is an ideal complement to other forms of exercise and an extreme advantage to any sport. The "postures" are the physical positions that coordinate breath with movement and we hold these positions to stretch and strengthen different parts of the body. They systematically work all the major muscle groups, including the back, neck, and shoulders, deep abdominals, hip and buttock muscles and even ankles, feet, wrists and hands. Although most poses are non aerobic in nature, they do in fact send oxygen to the cells in the body by way of conscious deep breathing and sustained stretching & contraction of different muscle groups. Yoga can help to check any imbalance in muscular development and will enable the body to function more efficiently. If the body is flexible and supple, it will be less prone to sports injuries as the joints will be kept lubricated. "When the surface of a lake is still, one can see to the bottom very clearly" this is impossible when the surface is agitated by waves. In the same way, when the mind is still we can control mental agitation by focusing on perfect concentration. When a player, in any sport, is trying to fulfill thousands, hundreds of thousands or if playing for their country, millions of people's expectations their minds are completely stressed and their natural efficiency diminishes. No amount of coaching or training can prepare for doubt or worry entering the mind of a player during a game. By holding steady postures, and concentrating on deep abdominal breathing we can increase body awareness, relieve chronic stress patterns in the body, relax the mind, center ones attention, sharpen concentration and "stay in the zone!" Many athletes are having more injuries that require surgery because of the increased focus on strength training with weight resistance.

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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.

2. Fitness and Yoga in sports

i. 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.

ii. 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.

iii. 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

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.

iv. 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.

v. 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.

3. 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 24bliss, sorrow in to joys, and failure into success and sickness in to perfect health. Determination, patience and persistence lead one to goal.

4. 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

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.

5. 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 increases
16. Energy level increases
17. Weight normalizes
18. Sleep improves
19. Immunity increases
20. Pain decreases

6. Yoga Improves

- Strengthens deep connective tissue preventing or minimizing injury.
- Creates an overall body flexibility. Increases range of motion and mobility.
- 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.
- Improves circulation, massages internal organs and glands for optimum health.
- The yoga breath circulates and detoxifies the LYMPH FLUID to speed up recovery time from training 15% faster, eliminating fatigue.
- The yoga breath builds up increases one's life force energy.
- Enhances sensory acuity, mental focus, concentration, mental clarity, will power, and determination.
- Dissolves pre competition anxiety and stress. Helps to balance & manage emotions that could cloud focus, concentration & judgment.
- Trains the athlete gets and stays in the mental zone.

7. 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 have improved 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 leaves and yoga helps us a lot.

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