



## Sports Performance Through Yoga

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### Abstract

*The main purpose of yoga is to bring together the body, mind and soul through asanas, pranayama and dhyana. If yoga is properly practiced, the growth and development of players' skills in various sports and games will reach the peak. Yoga should be properly channelized with systematic guidance for ultimate benefit.*

**Keywords:** ROM, Proprioception, core strength, weird.

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### Introduction

The word yoga is derived from Sanskrit which means 'yuj' meaning to bind, attach, join or yoke. Yoga is an ancient art based on harmonizing systems of development for the body, mind and spirit. The continued practice of yoga will lead to sense of peace and well being, and also the improvement of physical, physiological, mental and psychological abilities of human being.

Let's begin by putting a few preconceptions about yoga on the table: Yoga is... "...stretching." "...putting the body in weird and wonderful positions (mostly weird)." There is good reason why yoga has recently experienced such a boom – it works. Top athletes are now incorporating yoga into their training programmes and achieving amazing results. The Indian cricket team, Indian hockey team, Grand master V.Anand, Andy Murray, Andy Roddick, Venus and Serena Williams, Carl Lewis, Cathy Freeman, Ian Thorpe has incorporated yoga into their training. Tiger Woods is another sportsman who takes advantage of what yoga has to offer. Apart from being a great example as to how yoga can benefit the game. Tiger Woods is an even better example of the effect of yoga can have on the libido.

### Benefits of Yoga

- Improves strength – physically and mentally
- Improves body awareness and bio mechanical efficiency.
- Improves balance, coordination, agility and speed.
- Prevents injury.
- Improves concentration and relaxation.

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If it's more flexibility or strength is needed then yoga will be the best. If it's better concentration is needed - yoga will sharpen the mind. If it's de-stressing is needed - yoga will chill out. If it's a stronger core or improved mental strength is needed - yoga will toughen up. And on top of that it'll massage and refresh the organs, get the metabolism going, the energy levels in balance, make breathing right and make body look fit. There is so much to be gained from doing yoga, especially for sportsmen and women.

Improved FLEXIBILITY is one of the most important benefits of yoga to the athlete. Tight muscles restrict range of motion (ROM) at a joint. They are unable to contract to their full potential and on top of that, they increase the work of their respective antagonistic (opposing) muscle/s. Tight muscles place undue strain on other areas of the body, reduce efficiency of movement and are more injury prone than muscles at optimal flexibility. Sportsmen and women tend to experience muscle tension due to the high intensity and sheer volume of the training they do, little attention being given to developing flexibility and insufficient rehabilitation after injury. Often too, muscle imbalances develop as a result of repetitive exercise, which can cause the body to become misaligned, heightening the chances of injury.

Yoga not only improves flexibility but it develops incredible CORE STRENGTH as well as muscular strength through a joint's full ROM. This is an important fact as in our typical sports and strength training regimens we most often develop strength through a limited ROM. Yoga uses body weight to safely and effectively develop functional strength (strength that is practical for the sport). This is not to say that yoga should replace an athlete's current strength training programme, yoga will be a great complement to weight training and should allow the athlete to gain more from it. Good core strength is a huge asset to any athlete. As well as providing support and protection to the spine, our

core plays a huge role in energy transfer through the body and contributes enormously to an athlete's power output. In essence, a strong core enables an athlete to move more powerfully and quickly, with greater stability and with less likelihood of being injured.

Yoga also increases BODY AWARENESS. This in itself plays a role in injury prevention. Increased body awareness will enable the athlete to identify areas of weakness, tension and imbalance more readily, allowing for action to be taken to correct the concern. Proprioception (an awareness of where the body is in space) is also an area which is developed through yoga practice. Again, helping to prevent injury, enhance form and improve efficiency of movement by developing balance and body control.

Movement in yoga is closely linked with the breath. BREATHING is essentially what makes yoga and more than just a series of stretching and strengthening exercises. Breathing is our life force, without air we cease to exist. It is imperative to our physiology. It is logical then, that if we were to starve our bodies of oxygen by breathing to only one half or one third of our full lung capacity we would consequently function at a suboptimal jargon level. Surprisingly, this is how most people live their lives. Rapid, shallow breathing causes a person to feel stressed and out of balance, slow, deep breathing leaves a person feeling calm, composed and in control. Maintaining focus on only the breath and the body while doing yoga achieves stillness of the mind, similar to what athletes call being in 'the zone'. Yoga teaches awareness of the breath and the correct breathing technique, both of which will help athletes to perform better physically and mentally and also to maintain composure in times of stress during competition. Increased anxiety causes tension in the body and negative energy in the mind. This has a detrimental effect on performance, which further increases anxiety-creating a vicious cycle. By bringing the mind to focus on the breath, negative thoughts will lessen, anxiety will be replaced with a feeling of composure, muscular tension will dissipate and the athlete will be able to continue performing at his/her optimum.

BEYOND THE PHYSICAL benefits of strength and flexibility yoga has an enormous amount to offer everyone, especially the athlete. Yoga leaves a person feeling relaxed, calm and rejuvenated. In today's non-stop world, stress being the leading cause of disease, how valuable is a means of de-stressing and learning skills to maintain that state? Yes, it's valuable. Health is valuable. Just scratching the surface of the yogic philosophy is enough to cause profound changes in your outlook on life, and your reality. Yogic philosophy teaches us to focus on the positive side of everything (especially yourself). This immediately shifts your perceptions, opens you up to opportunities, and gives you the freedom to be yourself, to express yourself, to discover within yourself the resources you need to achieve what you set out to achieve. An important point to make in any discussion about yoga is that it is not a

religion. This is often an area of concern to people considering incorporating yoga into their training plan. Yoga is a philosophy which promotes living a peaceful, fulfilled and healthy life in which you strive to be good to those around you and be good to yourself.

Yoga, as we know it- a series of postures or asana (Hatha Yoga) - is only one of eight limbs of Patanjali's yogic philosophy. Within that limb there are many different types of yoga: Iyengar, Ashtanga, Sivananda, Bikram, Kundulini to name but a few. All are unique. Some are stronger, more physical forms of yoga, others are slower and less physically demanding, some are focused primarily on the physical, others place greater emphasis on the meditative side of yoga practice. What one person may enjoy may put another person in yoga for life. What is beneficial for a football player may not necessarily be as beneficial for a hockey player or a cricketer. There is something for everyone; however a fair amount of open-mindedness and experimentation with different styles of yoga is necessary. When one finds the style that suits him, he will not be disappointed-guaranteed. Ensure though, that one find a properly qualified instructor whose class is enjoyable and who gives guidance as to correct alignment- like with any form of exercise there is potential for injury if done incorrectly, and so much more to be gained from it when done correctly. For this reason, make sure that the class attended has minimum number of learners. It is very difficult for an instructor to give all students the necessary personal attention when in a big class.

### Conclusion

It is important to note that, when beginning yoga leave ego in the change room. For most of the learners first yoga class is a humbling experience. Hence, it is yoga practice. The potential for yoga is to improve not only sports performance but also quality of life is enormous. So it is the right time for the players to practice yoga with a proper guidance under qualified persons. This will ensure the players not only in improving the skills but also the ethics in the game. In higher level to improve the performance players use the short cut method - doping which is very harmful. By regular practice of yoga players can improve their performance even in higher level competitions without doping.

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