

# YOGA IN SPORTS: AN EXPLORATION

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## Abstract

Yoga and sports are often seen in opposition, by nature of the quite approach in yoga in contrast to competitiveness of sport. Yoga symbolizes the practice and sport is dynamic in nature and emphasis is given to training hence, yoga is not directly related to the field of sports and games but physical fitness is the basic requirement for participation and good achievements in sports. The practice of yoga can make a significant contribution in this direction by helping a sportsman to maintain and improve his health and fitness. In fact yoga plays a vital role in the field of sports by improving health and fitness of sports persons. Though it needs extensive experimental research but due to its proved wide ranging benefits of various yogic practices like Asanas, Pranayama or Meditation in general can ensure it may play vital role in the field of sports by reducing fatigue, muscle tension, stress and balance and also improve health, flexibility, strength and body posture. These are directly related to sports efficiency of a player. In this article, the role and benefits of Asanas, Pranayama and Meditation in the field of sports and games would be discussed.

**Keywords:** Asanas, Pranayama, Meditation

## Introduction

Physical fitness is the basic requirement for participation and good achievements in sports. The practice of yoga can make a significant contribution in this direction by helping a sportsman to maintain and improve his health or fitness. Yoga trains the body, mind & spirit to become strong and flexible, release stress and create inner peace and calmness, while developing a deep connection with one's spirit, intuition and personal power. With yoga, the athlete will not only increase flexibility but also increases poise and balance from the practice of the yoga holding/balancing poses. By replenishing the body on a regular basis with yogic breathing exercises along with a clean diet, the bodies' immune system is boosted, the blood is purified, and this results in increased health and vitality.

Yogic asanas and pranayamas have been evolved to exercise every muscle, nerve and glands of the body. Yogic asanas stimulate the endocrinal glands directly and help in regulating the respiratory, circulatory, excretory and nervous systems. These are therefore an excellent form of exercises for keeping the inner body functions in harmony, without taxing the cardiovascular system. It is an accepted fact that yogic asanas keep the joints healthy and develop flexibility in the body. Development of strength and flexibility of muscles and joints can not only help sportsmen to perform well but can also help in preventing injuries on the sports fields.

In yogic practice the practitioner usually performs certain yogic postures (yogasanas), breathing exercises (pranayamas) and various meditation and relaxation techniques. While doing yoga practice, the practitioner starts with a state of complete willingness and readiness, which further leads to modification in his body, mind and spirit. Yogic postures and pranayamas rebalance the physical, emotional, pranic, mental and psychic aspects of being.

Success in sports can be achieved only through constant practice. For this, determination, perseverance and concentration are required. In order to develop such traits of physical discipline the guidance of hatha yoga and Dharana can be of great help.

Obedience of rules, fair play, courtesy and modesty are found lacking on the sports fields today. Moreover deception and use of unfair means for achieving success in sports have become a source of worry. Yoga, by laying emphasis on Yama and Niyama which lay emphasis on moral discipline and self purification, can help in tackling this menace up to some extent. This is where the athlete's game is fully benefited by the physical aspects of practicing yoga asana, pranayama and meditation. The body is available to move beyond old limitations to peak performance.

### **Method**

Keeping in view the nature of the study, the literature was collected from the secondary sources including books, magazines and websites related with yoga.

### **Analysis**

The collected information has been critically explored, discussed and presented here to provide information about yoga in sports.

### **Results**

#### **Role of Asanas in Sports**

Asanas which are considered to be very important constituents of yoga are intended to keep the body healthy. An unhealthy body cannot concentrate, meditate or attain Samadhi. Therefore, asanas were considered as the first and the most important stage of yoga. The importance of asanas lies in the fact that they help in exercising every muscle, nerve and gland of the body. Regular activity of these body parts is very important for the maintenance of health and fitness of the body. Thus, asanas can play a very important role in the field of sports.

Without putting any cardiovascular strain on the body, asanas help in maintaining and improving health. They make our muscles strong, joints flexible and regulate other systems of the body. The special contribution of asanas towards health and fitness lies in the fact that these postural exercise directly effect on all the body systems, endocrinal glands and the organs that, keeps them healthy and efficient to meet emergencies. Therefore along with other workouts, the practice of asanas can play a very important role in field of sports.

#### **Role of Pranayam in Sports**

Pranayam is the branch of yoga that deals with breath control. The deep rhythmic breathing performed in yoga also creates and builds up one's life force energies 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 is not from the caloric intake of our diet, but a cosmic energy.

Through practicing of slow, deep, rhythmic and fast breathing, a person can strengthen the cardio-respiratory system, purify his blood and soothe his nervous system. A part from these factors, pranayams invigorates the liver, spleen, pancreas and the abdominal muscles. The yoga breath circulates and detoxifies the lymph fluid to speed up recovery time from training and eliminate fatigue. As a matter of fact pranayama develop vital capacity, endurance, soothe the nerves and tone the entire system. Thus, it plays a vital role in sports performances. Sporting activities put a great stress on respiratory and cardiovascular systems of our body, therefore their health and proper conditioning is necessary in the lives of sportsmen.

### **Role of Meditation in Sports**

Meditation is also termed as Dhyana in yoga. In yoga, it refers to the concentration on the all-pervading divinity in order to be transformed into the likeness of that divinity. In general it can be called as an exercise to develop concentration on a specific object, sound or action like the concentration of Veer Arjun and Prithvi Raj Chauhan in Indian mythology. The objective of such a practice is to eliminate unwanted, undesirable and destructive thoughts appearing in the mind so that a calm and healthy state of mind is achieved. In fact meditation also helps in controlling our thoughts and behavior.

Meditation helps in stabilizing cardio-respiratory and autonomic activity of the individuals. It helps in developing concentration and focusing of thoughts. These days, several players and teams have started relying on meditation in order to remain focused on their goal or game. The quality of concentration and focusing thoughts on a targets or objective does not develop easily. It needs a lot of practice. However, meditation can play a very constructive role in sports if it is practiced regularly.

Yoga can help you develop better a breathing technique while it improves your balance, muscular system, flexibility, core strength, endurance etc. The benefits of yoga are unlimited.

### **Benefits of Yoga for Sportspersons:**

#### **1. Develop Deep, Relaxed Breathing**

If you participate competitively in sport or simply join the occasional fun run on a whim you are aware of the impact breathing can have on performance. Deep, relaxed breathing is the foundation of reducing performance anxiety and improving concentration. Yoga will help you develop a habit of breathing correctly. Yoga practice integrations the mind-body connection and athletes can benefit from this combination of skills training.

#### **2. Reduce Fatigue And Recovery Time**

Yoga practice have known for the 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 asana after the heavy training or competitions can encourage repair within the body and facilitate the recovery process.

#### **3. Increase Core Strength**

Yoga poses are all about building core strength. The slow, focused movements require a strong mid-section and the isometric contractions of many exercises will add a new form of resistance training to your typical machine-based workouts.

#### 4. **Increase Flexibility and Range of Motion**

Yoga routines incorporate slow, steady flexibility exercise that is ideal for athletes. Frequent yoga training may increase flexibility, and range of motion while relieving muscle tension. Whether you are a runner or a golfer, improved range of motion can often help improve performance.

#### 5. **Enhance Strength:**

Yoga poses require significant muscular effort. Integrated body movements are encouraged, including core control, a movement through a sequence. Improving strength through full range of movement helps to reduce the risk of injuries.

#### 6. **Improve Balance**

Yoga is a perfect way to incorporate balance exercises into your training routine. Balance exercises are often overlooked by athletes, but are one of the most effective ways to correct muscle imbalance or body mechanic problems. With most sports and weight training routines you tend to perform repetitive motions that develop some muscle groups while others are ignored. Yoga can fix these imbalances and dramatically enhances physical balance by developing the athlete's awareness of his body's center place, thus keeping their body balance in action, moment by moment, giving to recover from or prevent falls, while enhancing agility and maneuverability.

#### 7. **Control on Emotions:**

Harmonization through Yoga teaches to gain control over emotions so arousal levels and anxiety do not impede sports performance.

#### 8. **Reduce anxiety and stress :**

The Yoga meditation creates special ability of stress free mind. It is a tool that enhances breath control, which helps in focus control and concentration, allowing clarity of thought and clear decision making.

#### 9. **Its Great Cross Training**

Yoga is a great low-impact way to cross train. Cross training is necessary for athletes who do the same sport or exercise routine year-round. Adding new exercises can help reduce injury, relieve training boredom, add variety and help recover from hard aerobic or strength workouts. Yoga can be done at a high or low intensity and there are hundreds of postures that can provide a workout for any athletic need.

#### 10. **Something for Everyone**

There are many styles of yoga that range from very dynamic, active, movements that go from one posture to another (and result in a thorough aerobic workout) to more slow-paced practices that hold postures for several minutes and form an intense strength training and balance workout.

Yoga may not be a high impact sport that does not mean injuries do not happen. Though they are low rates, for certain, but bumps, bruises, sprain, strain, dislocations can happen. Fortunately, these are not very serious and are preventable. Proper alignment in poses is key, but it's not the only factor in a safe yoga practice. Here is how to have a safe practice to remain in Aum not in ouch, follow the basic guidelines below.

- I. **Leave ego outside:** It can be tempting to rush into more advanced poses (how tough can handstands be, right?), but pushing bodies before they are ready, is a recipe for injury. Yoga is "about finding where you are and not trying to push to a place where your body may never be able to go."

- II. **Warm up:** It is an important part of any physical activity, and yoga is no exception. Basic stretches (like neck and shoulder rolls and gentle twists) help prepare the body for more challenging poses later on in a sequence.
- III. **Ease in:** No one would expect to run a marathon the first time they lace up their sneakers. Do not expect to do a headstand instead, opt for beginner-friendly exercises that will develop the foundation for more advanced moves.
- IV. **Come out of asnas slowly:** This is particularly important if you have been holding a certain pose for several minutes, a good thumb rule is to work out of a pose as gradually as you moved into it.
- V. **Use props and modifications:** There's no shame in not being ready to hold a pose completely on your own. If there's tightness somewhere in the body, other parts of the body will have to accommodate it.
- VI. **Props and modifications:** allow the body to get a feel for a pose and gradually work up to its full variation without injury.
- VII. **Never lock your joints:** Hyper-extension (locking) is a sure-fire way to wear out joints and cause injury down the road. Focus on engaging the muscles around the joints to gain stability.
- VIII. **Stay for Shavasana:** It's easy to head for the door as soon as the instructor calls for Shavasana (the final resting pose of a yoga flow), but sticking around is good for your health. Shavasana allows the body's nervous system to slow down and brings closure to the practice. Even just two or three minutes can have an effect.
- IX. **Above all listen to your body:** At all stages of yoga practice, stay mindful. Really listen to your body so you can be sensitive to any tightness or strain. Just because you did a particular pose one day, doesn't mean your body will be able to do it the next.

### Conclusion

Fierce competition and hectic life of sportsperson are leading to the development of tensions and boredom in their lives. This is leading to a drop in their performances. Practice of yoga, pranayama and meditation can help in reducing tensions and smoothing the mind. Such a practice can also serve as a diversion from their daily routine and prevent boredom in monotonous sports training. By getting and keeping a sportspersons in their mental zone, yoga practice dissolves pre-competitive anxiety and stress. It also helps to balance and manage emotions that could cloud focus, concentration and judgment. It may concluded that yoga plays a vital role in the field of sports by improving health and fitness of sportspersons.

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