THE ROLE OF YOGA

IN SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY



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**ABSTRACT**

Psychology is the science of behaviour. Afflictions of the mind such as experiencing competitive anxiety, dealing and coping with stress, handling pressure and nerves, staying in the present, remaining focused, coping with negative thoughts, the inner critic, low confidence, self-esteem and belief systems are all common issues experienced by athletes regardless of the sporting discipline. Some psychological interventions recommended that are evidence-based to deal with some of these common issues are developing pre performance routines, introducing positive self-talk, the use of mental imagery, goal-setting, concentration skills and deep breathing and relaxation exercises. Athletes can learn and develop a lot of these psychological skills through the practice of yoga and it is always worth acknowledging the value it can add to any psychological intervention. There are many research studies that show that yoga has the potential to reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Apart from reducing stress, yoga practice promotes feelings of relaxation and enhances subjective well-being. Yoga’s physical postures and breathing exercises improve muscle strength, flexibility, blood circulation and oxygen uptake which not only benefits general physical health but also mental health while also helping the practitioner become more resilient to stress. A intelligent yoga practice, when coupled with sport specific training, will increase mental concentration and significantly reduce levels of stress and anxiety. Yoga can also help the athlete feel better about their body by increasing strength, flexibility, and body awareness. 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. Yoga can restore a weakened body and build it back up. Yoga postures breathe work and inner focus can help rebalance, strengthen and restore overtaxed muscles, joints and ligaments.

Key words: Yoga, Sports Psychology

**INTRODUCTION**

An intelligent yoga practice, when coupled with sport specific training, will increase mental concentration and significantly reduce levels of stress and anxiety. Yoga can also help the athlete feel better about their body by increasing strength, flexibility, and body awareness. It is very difficult for an athlete to encounter a true yogic experience, as they are naturally competitive and hard on themselves. Athletes are likely to push themselves physically, ignoring cues and signs of pain in the body. A yoga practice will encourage a different level of body awareness. Yoga will encourage the athlete to listen to their body and note the difference between pain and discomfort. This will allow the athlete to prevent injury and possibly rehabilitate injury at a more appropriate pace. The yoga mat can offer a safe space for the athlete to remove their competitive nature and receive a much needed mental break from the pressures of the playing field. Yoga plays an important role in sports. In yoga, Asana, Pranayama, Suryanamaskara, Meditation and kayotsarga are usually performed by sportsperson for various purposes in Sports. Yoga improves their concentration. It helps in developing physical fitness and it is also good for relaxation, good for rehabilitation after injury. Yoga is for everyone, athletes included. Yoga works on strength, flexibility, balance, agility, endurance, core, and overall strength, among other things. ... In particular, athletes in sports that require swinging action (tennis, golf, etc.) can benefit greatly. Flexibility in general also helps to prevent injury. Sports psychology is the study of how psychology influences sports, athletic performance, exercise, and physical activity. Some sports psychologists work with professional athletes and coaches to improve performance and increase motivation. The practice of yoga improves the psychological aspects of the individual.

The word 'yoga' means "to join or Yoke together". It brings the body and mind together to become a harmonious experience. Man is a physical, mental and spiritual being; yoga helps promote a balanced development of all the three. Yoga is a method of learning that aims at balancing "Mind, Body and Spirit". Yoga is a practice with historical origins in ancient Indian philosophy. The ancient practice of yoga is thousands of years old. It was first brought to India 3,500 years ago by nomads from central Asia practicing an intellectual discipline they referred to as ‘Yoga’. It was a way of using the mind to restrain the senses and control the body. The main tradition practiced in Western Europe is Hatha Yoga which is based on the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, which is a sort of manual of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras. It describes how to train the body, so that it can be used as a means of enlightenment.

The Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and the Hatha Yoga Pradipika all form the central concepts of yoga’s philosophy of life. Yoga techniques were summarised for the first time by Patanjali so as to bring a practical form of yoga to the people. 195 sutras were written in short, concise meaningful sentences. As in modern day psychology they are explanations of the nature of the mind, how it works and the obstacles, difficulties and emotional disturbances that can affect its functioning in terms of self-knowledge and reflective action. Patanjali recommended an ‘Eight-Limb Path’ as a way to change the mind positively. He believed that one of the minds fundamental characteristics was its inability and refusal to stay in the ‘here and now’. He described it as a monkey jumping from one branch of thought to another. As you will hear me describe in any of my classes, the mind is always wandering and being rebellious, never focussing on the moment, but instead getting distracted by past events, future plans and all the sensations it has to process in the meantime. As it is the mind’s job to think, it is relentlessly interpreting everything that is seen, perceived and experienced. It is led by thought patterns, habits, doctrines, perceptions and conditioning which have been learned and instilled over the lifetime of the person. These behaviours, thoughts, attitudes have been reinforced through repetition, regardless of whether they are good or bad, right or wrong.

**Eight limbs of Yoga**

Yamas – dealing with the world around us. This is our moral code of conduct. These are the moral principles that govern the way you treat others and the world around you.

Niyamas – dealing with yourself. These are five observances or rules of conduct, by which we should live our lives i.e. purity, modesty, contentment, discipline, self-study and acknowledgement of our own limits.

Asana – dealing with the body. These are the physical postures or exercises in yoga.

Pranayama – dealing with breathing. This is the conscious control of energy by practising controlled breathing techniques.

Pratyahara – dealing with the senses. This denotes the withdrawal of the senses. It teaches us to close the doors to the senses so that the mind can still be aware of external stimuli but no longer repsonds to them.

Dharana – concentration. This is the ability to focus our entire concentration on one object, one question, or one consideration and keep it there.

Dhyana – meditation. This is an interaction with the object of concentration whereby we become observers and view the object intuitively, free from subjective notions. It is an acceptance.

Samadhi – The absolute: the inner freedom. This is the complete feeling of being at one with the world, knowledge of the true self. Ultimate enlightenment and Inner Happiness.

Afflictions of the mind such as experiencing competitive anxiety, dealing and coping with stress, handling pressure and nerves, staying in the present, remaining focused, coping with negative thoughts, the inner critic, low confidence, self-esteem and belief systems are all common issues experienced by athletes regardless of the sporting discipline. Some psychological interventions recommended that are evidence-based to deal with some of these common issues are developing pre performance routines, introducing positive self-talk, the use of mental imagery, goal-setting, concentration skills and deep breathing and relaxation exercises. Athletes can learn and develop a lot of these psychological skills through the practice of yoga and it is always worth acknowledging the value it can add to any psychological intervention. There are many research studies that show that yoga has the potential to reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Previous studies carried out on the influence of yoga on anxiety suggest that yogic relaxation can counter balance sympathetic over-activity and increases in parasympathetic activity.

Yoga is distinctly different from other kinds of exercise as it generates motion without causing strain and imbalances in the body. Role of yoga in education from various angles, including the type of education that was being provided to children throughout the world as well as the different levels of stress that children face in the classroom environment. The use of yoga as a supplementary exercise routine can improve the performance of any sport. Yoga is the catalyst that gives a sports player or an athlete that extra edge against the competition. The benefits of yoga in sports have been documented and attested by successful athletes and sportsmen. In yoga, the different postures coordinate the breath with the movements and by holding the postures, the various muscles of the body are stretched and strengthened. These postures are an ideal complement to other forms of exercise, such as jogging, running, and cycling as they systematically work for all the major muscle groups at the neck, back, shoulders, hips, hands, feet and even ankles. Not only the physical characteristics but also the mental aspects of the individual will enhanced through the practice of yoga. Yoga is a great form of exercise and a mind-body practice that can have physical, mental and emotional or psychological benefits, even spiritual benefits. Yoga also is an effective way to develop greater self-awareness, acceptance, and the ability to be present in the moment.

PHYSIOLOGICAL and PHYSICAL BENEFITS

* Reduced sympathetic dominance/increased parasympathetic activation
* Reduced blood pressure
* Reduced resting heart rate
* Reduced cholesterol
* Reduced blood glucose levels
* Improved lipid profile
* Decrease in inflammatory markers
* Improved endothelial function
* Decreased body weight
* Reduced waist-hip ratio
* Increased strength
* Increased core stability
* Improved balance

COGNITIVE BENEFITS

* Improved concentration
* Sharper focus
* Increased mental clarity
* Increased ability to be present

PSYCHOLOGICAL (mental health, emotional) BENEFITS

* Reduced sleep and sleep disturbance
* Reduced anxiety and negative affect
* Reduced depression
* Increased feelings of well-being
* Positive shifts in locus of control
* Improved coping

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.

**CONCLUSION**

Yoga is one of the Indian philosophical systems that emphasize the importance of the work with the body to develop healthy behaviours and thoughts. Among all its techniques the physical postures, called asanas in Sanskrit, are the ones that got. It is necessary to remember that sports and gymnastics belong to the scope of Physical Education. Once there was a time when people said “it is not the winning itself but the competing nobly that really matters”, when the place where competitions took place was sacred and the respect between competitors was essential. Both Yoga and Physical Education in their origin use the body as a tool for developing attitudes and abilities that are important to achieve physical and mental health. Performance will improved 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 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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