**THE ROLE OF YOGA IN SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY**

**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