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The Benefits of Yoga for Enhancing Sports Performance

Date: October 3, 2016

Time: 1110 hrs – 1150 hrs

It is well known that performance in any sport is as much about mental fitness as it is about physical fitness. It literally calls for an interconnectedness between mind and body. Training to enhance performance has come a long way. Initially, training focussed totally on the physical aspects namely fitness, techniques, speed, strategies etc. This slowly gave way to realizing the importance of mental fitness and training in various psychological aspects that included techniques to manage anxiety, to building mental strength, positive affirmations, visualization etc. The ideal mental state that sports persons have to be in, is a paradox. On the one hand, they need to work hard to remain calm and relaxed, while going into high pressure environments where they have to be extremely alert, energetic, and aggressive and focused. There's an optimal level of arousal that elite sports persons have to learn to obtain and sustain. Besides, they would also have to contend with overuse syndrome due to performing repetitive movements that often end up with tight, overused muscles that become vulnerable to pulls and sprains, and underused muscles that progressively get weaker.

In the quest for finding new methods to address all these, the age old practice of Yoga has come to the focus and is gaining more and more popularity as it unfolds many layers of physical and personal benefits for the sports persons. Yoga works on the strength, flexibility, balance, agility, endurance, core, and overall strength, among other things for the practitioners, essentially the same components that is needed for performance. Hence more and more people are

discovering the myriad ways that Yoga can be used to improve performance—from increasing mental concentration and improving flexibility and balance to preventing common injuries and honing skills in a particular sport.

Besides, the popularly known aspects of Yoga namely *asana*, *pranayama* and *dhyana*, the other aspects of *Astanga Yoga* namely *yama*, *niyama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *samadhi* are also greatly beneficial to develop attitude, discipline, focus and concentration. Practicing *Astanga Yoga* also teaches the sports persons to respect their bodies and develop better body awareness wherein they learn to work both with their strengths and limitations.