



Trinity Yoga Centre | 6 – 3818 Gordon Drive, Kelowna BC V1Y 3G8 | 250.448.2512 | info@trinityyogacentre.com

Yoga for Athletes

The athletes approach to yoga may be a different one than the average yoga student. However, some similarity exists, and it is worth exploring. There are 5 key elements which are especially important to an athlete, and to the advancing yoga student as well. We will be looking at those 5 elements soon enough. For now let's recognize that there are a variety of yoga styles offered, from very 'out there' esoteric practices, to extremely physical practices that are simply an intense 'workout'. Neither of those is inherently bad, yet they may not be in alignment with the intention of your development as an athlete. I offer this information as a tool to develop clear intention around your developing yoga practice, as we want you to receive maximum benefits from your efforts and awareness. Once you have a clear intention, and your 'tools', you may explore a variety of styles of yoga, and maintain the integrity of your intention.

1. Tension versus Compression-

As noted by the teacher Paul Grilley, each of our joints has a unique structure, basically genetic in foundation. From that foundation, we want to look at our range of motion and stress on the structure of the body as different as those around us - even the yoga teacher. You basically want to feel the 'stretch' in the belly of the muscle (tension), NOT THE JOINT (compression). A bit of stimulation of the joint, naturally, is alright.

2. Endorphins versus Cortisol-

A common experience in yoga is to 'try as hard as you can', especially for athletes. Effort is not a bad thing, but if all you are doing is 'stretching as hard as you can', that is not yoga. You want to find a level of effort where you can breathe fully and deeply, sending a message to the brain that everything is alright. If you always push the body to the limit you may receive endorphins, but you may also be masking a release of cortisol, the stress hormone in the body. You want to find a level in your yoga practice where you are in a rest/relax posture, not a fight or flight.

3. Connection to Self- Why?

As many sports psychologists will attest to, your relationship with your mind is a key factor in your advancement to the higher level in sport. You eventually want to have a yoga practice which allows you to look at; *How am I with myself? Do I always compete with others? What is my limit of effort? How hard am I trying? Am I enjoying this!?* These questions and more can surface in a yoga practice, if you are not just on auto pilot. So, turn off the auto pilot and get the benefit of exploring your mind's tendencies.

4. Yin to begin- Yin is a Taoist word which means; lighter, less than, etc. In your yoga practice you want to enter each pose, even the whole practice itself a bit slower, a bit easier, a little less effort. Once you get going you may choose to add intensity, but only when you choose. This is especially true when working around an injury.

5. Core/Stability—Flexibility—Strength—Speed-

This is a model you may use to develop your yoga practice. I use this with all the athletes I work with. We start with foundation, relation to gravity, even the true core. Then we start to develop flexibility around that core, the hips/shoulders can then work efficiently. Then you are ready to develop strength from that platform. Finally, you may start to add speed to the movement. Like a golfer (Tiger?) hitting a ball out of the rough. As these pieces come together you begin to develop your practice and your core.

I hope this has been helpful. Feel free to contact me for more information, a private session, or perhaps visit our studios in Kelowna or Vernon. (Harshad) Jeff Thomlinson