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Importance of Yoga in Sports

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Abstract: *Yoga is one of the precious treasures inherited from ancient India. It has a wealth of benefits. Yoga has been considered a way of life; one can not only achieve the targets of staying healthy and fit through practicing yoga but also it can totally change the behavior and psychological outlook of a person. Although yoga itself is a sport yet its different kind of Asans especially help players in improving motion, mobility, coordination, strength, flexibility, balance etc. which can further boost the performance and prevent injury. Yoga presently has become inseparable part of training for sports players. This paper is a modest attempt to examine the benefits of yoga for sports players.*

Yoga was a physical, mental and spiritual discipline in ancient India. It is said that the word yoga was found to be mentioned first in Rig-Veda and later on many Upnishads referred this word. The Katha Upnishad used the word yoga in the same context as in the modern times. In Philosophical context it refers to the union of the individual's soul with the universal. The word yoga is associated with meditative practices in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. So yoga is an Indian philosophy. But presently it is popular worldwide. The philosophy of yoga happened to be popular as one of the six orthodox philosophical schools of Hinduism in the second half of first millennium. The term yoga in popular context and especially in western word means a kind of techniques based on various kinds of Asans. It is different from traditional yoga which mainly focused on meditation and release from worldly attachments. Yoga in this sense is based on the yoga sutras of Patanjali and also known as Raj Yoga. It is the ability to focus the mind on single point without distraction. It uses the body and breathing to develop self awareness and mental clarity. In nutshell we can say that the Science of Yoga works on Physical mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects of a person.

In the modern mechanized world where environment is very much polluted very few of us enjoy good health with all the deadlines and targets; we have become the slaves of our hectic schedule. Stress and anxiety has become an essential accessory of our everyday life and it is the root cause of various diseases, when imbalance is experienced at any level, the organs, muscles, nerves no longer function in harmony, rather they act in opposition to each other. Therefore Yoga aims to bring the different bodily function into perfect coordination so that they work for the good of the whole body. Yoga has been used to bring flexibility in different body muscles, to keep the muscles pliable and youthful. Yoga exercises improve the circulation of blood thus providing more oxygen to the body. Along with this yoga asans help in strengthening the concentration power, mind body connection, self discipline, reduce anxiety and enhance energy level of the

person. So yoga is a way of life, one can not only achieve the targets of staying healthy and fit through practicing yoga but also it can totally change the behavior and psychological outlook of a person.

Although Yoga and sports are two different disciplines (Sports make an individual extrovert, self-confident and aggressive whereas yoga makes the man humble, docile and balance) yet yoga techniques and asanas help players in improving their performance and strength, reducing injuries and take their minds off from troubles and workout. It is a good complimentary exercise for athletes. Moreover whatever is the game, players need focus concentration, self confidence, self discipline and better energy levels. All these can be achieved through various yoga techniques. In other words yoga techniques can be used for enhancement of sports performance. All though yoga is beneficial for physical fitness but every sport involves vigorous movement where as yoga techniques involve smooth and safe movement of muscles. In sports muscles are commonly injured by pulls and strains but asanas help in avoiding various kinds of injuries. So, Yoga as a therapy helps healing of Physical as well as mental suffering. Importance of yoga in sports can never be ignored. But as every game is played in different mode and through different means it is necessary to understand what kind of yoga asanas are needed for the better performance. Every game needs specialized skills as per its requirements. But whatever is the form of skills, players need to train the body in such a way that skills are refined and polished to perform in better way. It takes time, energy and commitment to master the skills. Along with this it is very important that a player remains focused, concentrated and confident despite various kinds of distractions liking cheering or chanting slogans. Sporting skills require the attainment of deep focus, living in every moment and the toughest part of any achievement is the handling of distractions and adverse conditions. If one is not able to score the goal or serve the ball at the critical match point or deal with crowds who are cheering or booing, victory will be far away. (Bam, 2008) So yoga not only helps in relieving stress and mental sufferings but also contributes in physical fitness. The importance of yoga can be described through the following aspects:

Breathing & Yoga:- Breathing is directly related to the performance. A player can reduce the anxiety and improve concentration through deep breathing. Meditation trains the mind to block out all worries of game and helps to focus on the present situation. One of the greatest living batsmen in the world in cricket vivo Richard of West Indies had to bat low down in the test because of headache due to sinus. Yoga regards sinus as a minor problem as it can be cured through breathing techniques. Many players experience stress and anxiety especially at the time of competition. Breathing techniques can contribute in lessening anxiety and pressure of those moments.

Core strength mechanism:- Yoga postures are all about building core strength. Core strength exercises strengthen the core muscles like abdominal muscles, back muscles, hip flexors, hip adductors, gluteal, diaphragm muscles etc. Strong core muscles make it easier to do varied kind of physical activities. Core exercises train the muscles in pelvis, lower back, hips and abdomen to work in harmony. This leads to better balance and stability, whether on the playing field or in daily activities. In fact, most sports and other physical activities depend on stable core muscles.

Yoga balance exercise & athlete:- Yoga improves balance which is very much needed in every game. By practicing balancing moves in yoga, player can learn where to find the centre of gravity or balance, and then movements can be adjusted according to the situations.

Concentration & Meditation:- It is generally observed that every person is unable to concentrate his/her mind on single object for long time. Due to lack of concentration, player can not focus on practice properly which leads to the bad performance, but concentration can be improved through yoga practice. Simply concentration is an act to achieve a focused mind; on the other hand meditation is an act to achieve an uncultured mind. Meditation is very good as it adds positive energy to all the cells of the body and removes

any kind of negative energy. Meditation helps to go deeper within oneself. For meditation and concentration, Padmasana or Siddhasana is prescribed. In fact Siddhasana is considered to be the most beneficial of all.

Strength & Yoga:- Yoga increases an athlete's strength. Strengthening in yoga requires entire body to be working as a unit so that the strengthening one muscle group is connected to that of another muscle group. Yoga works on muscles that support the spine and strengthening them, gives the body more flexibility. Yoga balances out posture, improving alignment when the body is out of alignment. Regular exercises make strong body to feel good.

Stress & Yoga:- During game there is need of stress to some extent but bad stress often effects badly to the performance. Due to stress player can get stomach pain and headaches. Yogic exercises reduce the stress and keeps body & mind fit.

Kinesthetic:- Yoga discover and explore Kinesthetic awareness. It has a wonderful effect on every team sport because it helps to be more aware of both the teammates and the opposition.

Agility & yoga: - Agility is an ability of individual to move body position easily and quickly according to the situation. Yoga helps in improving agility. The combination of total body strength, flexibility, posture and balance is aimed to improve body's ability to move freely, quickly and without pain.

Yoga and Nervous System:- The human body is a very efficient, self generating chemical factory as well as giant power station practically regulated by the nervous system, resulting in excessive release of chemical from the glands under great pressure. Yoga practices provide a large variety of nervous stimulation and increases efficiency of the nerves.

Yoga & endocrine glands: - Nature has blessed every human being with endocrine system. This system is a network of glands that produce the hormones which help cells to link with each other. They are responsible for every activity or function of every organ in the body. If the endocrine system develops problems, whole body will face different kind of issues. This endocrine system is a fantastic super chemical system of growth enhancing, performance enhancing. Thousands of years ago the yogic postures and other exercises had provided for the stimulation of all the endocrine glands.

Ideal diet - 'vegetarian and non vegetarian':- There are different schools of thought on using non vegetarian or vegetarian diet for the players. But yoga practioners prefer vegetarian diet which is ideal for man. They claim that the fastest animal, the deer is vegetarian the strongest animal elephant is a vegetarian animal that has both strength and speed, similarly horse is also vegetarian. Some of the world class athletes like Edmund Moses of USA, Paavo Nurmi of Finland and Murray Rose of New Zealand are all vegetarians. It is myth that non vegetarian diet is better than vegetarian. Even water is very important for efficient circulation of nutrients and absorption of foods.

Conclusion:- It has been concluded that yoga is an ancient Indian practice. The world has accepted the importance of yoga exercises. Yoga has proved to be very effective in much health related serious issues. Sports are no different. Players need more concentration and focus while performing. They go through lots of stress during competitions. It is yoga that helps players keeping them cool and calm in these kinds of situations. So although yoga itself is a sport yet it helps in improvement of players of other kind of games. It would be no exaggeration if yoga is called basic for all other games.

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