

## THE BENEFITS OF YOGA FOR TENNIS PLAYERS

John played most of the tournaments this summer. He played well but is not playing to his full potential. His flexibility is poor which is hampering his movement and limiting his reach. He has picked up a few injuries that could be cured, but better still, avoided, if he had better flexibility and strength in certain areas. When he is up against a steady player he struggles for breath after long rallies. He gets easily distracted on court and when things aren't going his way he gets angry and frustrated. His breath becomes shallow and his thinking is unclear. Tension builds up in his body. This leads to a string of points being lost. Then the head drops and his confidence suffers.

John is technically very good and he loves to compete but the key areas that are letting him down are his physical strength, his flexibility and his mental game.

There are so many players similar to John; players who allow nerves to inhibit their play; players who lose matches but can't remember how it all went wrong because there was so much chatter going on in their head that their focus wasn't on the match; players who get injured frequently as a result of tight, imbalanced or weak muscles. So how can these players be helped so they can realize their full potential? YOGA could be the answer!

### WHAT IS YOGA?

Yoga is an ancient practice that helps create a sense of union in body, mind, and spirit. It brings us balance.

Reading the list of benefits below, it is no surprise that professional sports people including tennis players are turning to yoga.....

- **The physical benefits:**

Increased strength, stamina and flexibility,

Helps prevent injuries,

Improved balance,

Improved respiration, energy, and vitality.

Improved overall athletic performance.

- **The psychological benefits:**

Improved ability to relax in stressful situations.

Enhanced concentration.

Encourages positive thoughts which help boost confidence

### ***What happens in a typical yoga class?***

Yoga practices: Asana, Pranayama and Meditation

**ASANA** These are poses that are comfortably held. Each asana involves the contraction of certain muscle groups and the relaxation of their opposing muscles. These actions improve strength, stamina, flexibility and balance. Synchronized breathing is required to execute the asanas correctly which ensures good oxygen delivery to the working muscles.

Injuries are a common occurrence in sport and tennis is no exception. Poor flexibility is one of the major causes.

An example of some yoga asanas and how they can benefit tennis players

- **Tree pose** (vrksasana) to strengthen the legs, open the hips, and improve balance and



coordination.

- **Triangle pose** (trikonasana) strengthens and stretches the hamstrings, quads, hips, groin and ankles. Helps open the chest and promotes balance.



- **Warrior II pose** (virabhadrasana II) strengthens and stretches the legs and ankles, stretches the groin, chest and shoulders.



- **Chair pose** (utkatasana) creates space throughout the ankle and knee joint; lengthens the Achilles' tendons, calves, and spinal column; and firms the abdomen.



- **Boat Pose** (navasana) strengthens abdominals and hip flexors, promotes balance.



- **Upward facing dog** (urdhva mukha svanasana) strengthens back muscles, arms and wrists. Stretches chest and abdomen.



**PRANAYAMA**- This is the term given to exercises in voluntary breath control. These exercises train you to breathe efficiently with minimum effort for maximum oxygen intake.

Tennis players practicing breath awareness will be better able to recognize if their breathing is shallow as a result of a long taxing point, when nervous or when angry and frustrated at a situation on court. They learn to adjust it to a slower, deeper breath. Willfully slowing down breathing helps to bring about a state of calm.

## **MEDITATION**

Meditation is a natural tool for relaxing the mind but at the same time maintaining awareness. Practicing meditation can bring about mental clarity with a sense of peace and calm and can result in a relaxed body with increased energy.

For a tennis player this meditative state could be described as “playing in the zone”.

In conclusion, the word “Yoga” translates as Union, Yoke or Join together. This refers to the union of body, mind and spirit. Tennis players who practice yoga along with their on-court hitting can expect a stronger, more supple body with less injuries. They can also experience the ability to calm themselves in stressful situations on and off the court. This will result in less tense, happier tennis players who will no doubt start to play to the best of their ability more often!

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Yvonne is teaching yoga @ The Pavilion, Merrion Village, Dublin 4 Mondays 8.15pm-9.30pm, Tuesdays 9.30am-10.45am and Thursdays (Class for Men only) 8pm-9.15pm

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