



Yoga for Athletes

The Ultimate Guide

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Introduction

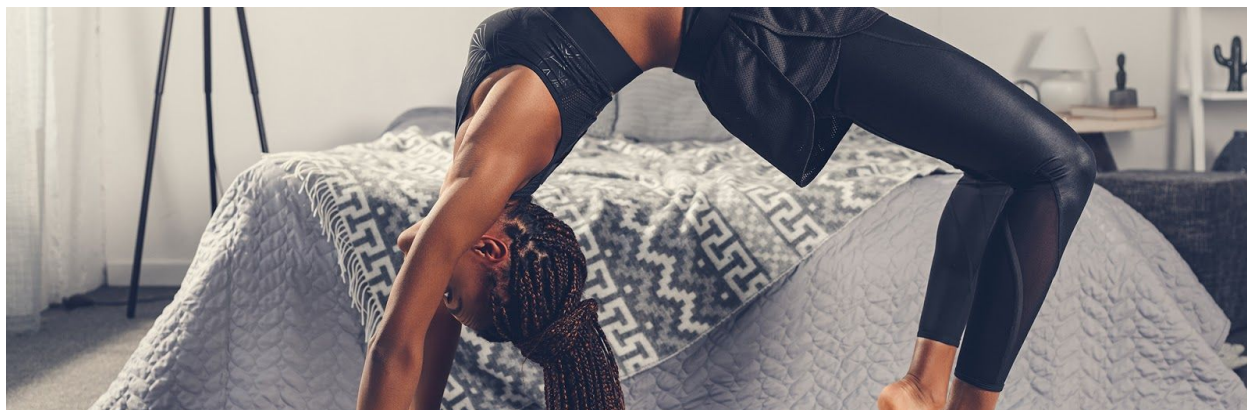
Yoga has been around for thousands of years and has taken on all kinds of meanings and purposes over time. Throughout its history, yoga has been used as a tool to achieve a specific goal, whether for the pursuit of enlightenment or simply trying to improve flexibility.

For athletes, yoga is a tool to improve and, ultimately, revolutionize athletic performance.

Plain and simple, this is how I define “yoga for athletes” and what I use to guide everything we do at Icewater Yoga. As athletes ourselves, we have first-hand experience with how yoga revolutionizes athletic performance and you can have these same experiences yourself, with a little guidance.

With all kinds of yoga “stuff” floating around out there (ranging from practical to very strange), I couldn’t find a single comprehensive guide that explains yoga to athletes and gives them practical advice on how to incorporate yoga into their training. So...I created this guide!

We believe yoga gives athletes superpowers. When others break down physically and mentally, the yoga-doing athlete is going strong. In situations that would break most, the yoga-doing accepts the challenge with a smile. The yoga-doing athlete deeply understands themselves as an equally physical and mental being and, therefore, can evolve with wisdom.





Benefits of Yoga for Athletes

So, we've made some big claims about yoga's potential for athletes. You might have even scoffed when I said "revolutionize athleticism."

We get it, the word "yoga" comes with connotations that don't help its credibility with athletes, so I want to start with yoga's undeniable benefits for athletes to start building our case.

There are three categories of benefits (and one bonus benefit) for athletes who do yoga:

1. Physical
2. Mental / Psychological
3. Psychophysical
4. Bonus (to be explained later)

1) Physical Benefits of Yoga for Athletes

The physical benefits of yoga may be obvious to some, but there's some detail that needs to be clarified for a full understanding.

Flexibility

The #1 excuse I hear athletes make about not doing yoga is "I'm not flexible enough." Let me clarify this excuse for you — it's not the muscles that are inflexible, it's the mind.

Now, with flexible minds, let's proceed...

Many athletes come to yoga to improve flexibility, and this is usually the first benefit athletes notice after doing yoga for a while.

But, I'd argue that athletes don't *actually* come to yoga for flexibility, they come for *enough* flexibility to reduce the risk of injury in training and competition, and to feel supple and in control of their bodies.

Range of Motion

Now that I'm on the subject, "flexibility" probably isn't the best word to describe what athletes need from yoga. The word "flexibility" conjures images of circus-like contortion and hypermobility (which have their own route to injury).

I prefer to use "range of motion," as it gives a sense of control over a functional amount of flexibility.

Good yoga builds range of motion or "useful flexibility." Not as good yoga will emphasize flexibility for flexibility's sake.

Strength

Yoga strength tends to span the whole body, from head to toe, reaching microfibers in addition to major muscle groups.

With an emphasis on isometric contractions ([2-minute YouTube video explaining isometric contraction](#)), yoga develops strength in the form of endurance as opposed to explosiveness. This is why athletes should incorporate yoga into a well-rounded strength training plan rather than training exclusively with yoga.

Through dynamic and unfamiliar movement, athletes doing yoga build strength in the form of control over the whole body.

Endurance

You've probably seen yoga portrayed as a bunch of people smiling in a pristine studio, wearing bright colors, doing light stretching. Thankfully, most yoga being done in the U.S. doesn't look like this.

Yoga is more than stretching and smiling about it. It can be an intense, physical challenge, depending on the style. Like any exercise that raises the heart rate, yoga can absolutely improve cardiovascular performance.

With this understanding, the key for athletes is to choose when using yoga for cardio is appropriate.

Understanding Physical Limitations

Athletes are often asked to push beyond their limits which, though motivating, generally isn't a sustainable long-term strategy.

Yoga is unrushed and self-monitored, allowing athletes to explore and understand physical limitations and watch them shift over time.

This perspective helps athletes understand that their bodies can only do so much in their current state and their true options are to 1) perform within their current potential and 2) improve it over time.

Instead of encouraging pushing through limits, yoga lets athletes understand and respect their limits and gives them tools to safely change them over time.

Balance 1.0

To balance in poses without the support of a wall (or whoever happens to be on the next mat over), athletes need all of what I talked about above — supple and strong muscles for stability, and endurance for sustaining a position for an extended amount of time.

Yoga constantly tests athletes' body control and awareness, bringing balance into muscle memory which is critical in every sport.

Balance 2.0

Arguably yoga's greatest physical benefit for athletes is balance in a different form: the balancing of opposite forces, like strength and flexibility.

Athletes that do yoga have dynamic musculature that is both flexible and strong. A powerful combination for performance and longevity.

Bows that are too rigid or pliant shoot weak arrows. In yoga, athletes find the middle ground, like crafting a bow that's equally strong and supple for shooting with force.

2) Mental Benefits of Yoga for Athletes

Most forms of physical training focus primarily on external results that are easy-to-measure ("how much you bench, bro?"). Yoga gives athletes an opportunity to explore and improve

their physical capabilities while also moving internal to develop calmness and self-understanding.

With pressures to constantly measure ourselves against ourselves and others (in a word, competition), developing perspective via yoga is invaluable for athletes.

Relaxation

When's the last time you truly relaxed?

Seriously. When's the last time you let every muscle in your body go limp and let every thought or worry fade away (without falling asleep)?

Relaxation [has amazing effects](#) for recovery and well-being, but we rarely give ourselves the time and space for it.

Most yoga classes end with at least five minutes in complete relaxation. This is unheard of in almost all other fitness modalities, but yoga gives athletes this space to let go of the wheel and let the body and mind take over for a few minutes.

Yoga improves athletes' ability to relax, if they're up to the challenge of letting go.

Stress Management

Yoga emphasizes quality of breath over quantity of physical effort. This approach smooths frenetic and uncontrolled energy, shifting the activity in the nervous system.

Putting breath first helps athletes learn to operate in the "parasympathetic" nervous system, the body's "rest and digest" or regenerative state.

Compare this to its counterpart, the "sympathetic" nervous system, which is characterized by "fight or flight," high stress levels, and basically physical and mental destruction.

The lives of a competitive athletes are stressful enough. Yoga serves as the perfect counterpart, letting stress and anxiety become more optional over time.

Calmness

A consistent and varied yoga practice also produces a state of calm, regardless of the situation.

In yoga, you'll find yourself upside down, sideways, on one leg, twisting, and basically in a constant state of change. Yoga asks you to breathe when all you want to do is collapse.

Staying poised and in control within challenge is a major psychological need for athletes. Poise under pressure is what I call "clutch."

Yoga develops the ability to be clutch and at our best when adversity comes our way.

Focus

In a culture filled with devices that often distract us from our goals, yoga reminds athletes how to focus.

In the moments keeping yourself from falling out of certain yoga poses, there's nowhere for your mind to go other than into your body and the pose.

Intense, sustained focus has obvious benefits for athletes, but it only comes with practice. Learning to maintain attention and effort through a full yoga class will translate to the next run, lift, or practice, and remove the obstacle of distraction.



3) Psychophysical Benefits of Yoga for Athletes

Some of yoga's benefits develop in the body and mind at the same time. Let me explain...

Proprioception

Imagine you're in one of the most common yoga poses: downward facing dog — hands and feet on the mat, butt in the air, legs and torso roughly forming a 90-degree angle.

Now, imagine lifting your right leg in the air behind you without anything else changing.

How high is your leg? How close is it to the wall behind you? If you bent your lifted right knee and twisted your body open to the right, where is your foot now?

These questions all explore the idea of proprioception: the sense of the relative position of body parts regardless of position or movement.

Proprioception is sometimes considered a “sixth sense” and, clearly, imperative for sport. Athletes need to know where their body parts are in space relative to each other and, oftentimes, others as well.

In yoga, athletes improve proprioception in a safe and controlled environment in preparation for environments that aren't as predictable.

Awareness

Let's take it a step further — what if I combined the ideas of focus and proprioception?

We've already talked about focus and understanding how our body's positioned in space, but what about the ability to focus on multiple sensations arising in the body at once?

A good yoga teacher will cue adjustments in yoga pose alignments based on the most to least important and, as students, it's our job to modify our pose accordingly. Let's take warrior two pose as an example, where a teacher may cue the following:

- Front knee and front toes pointed straight ahead
- Keep front knee over front ankle
- Find a manageable but challenging distance between feet
- Press down into the outside edge of back foot
- Externally rotates both thighs
- Flatten low back by engaging core
- Lengthen spine
- Reach strongly through both arms and all fingers
- ...we can keep going, but I think you get the picture...

Now imagine attempting to do all of these things while your front thigh is burning and you're starting to lose control of your breath.

What I'm getting at here is multi-pointed awareness, an ability to notice and control multiple physical and psychological factors at once, all while staying calm.

As you can imagine, pretty handy when it comes time to compete.

Mind-Body connection

Let's do a little experiment:

...take a slow and deep inhale...

...now a slow and complete exhale...

These deep breaths are carried out by signals sent from the brain to the breathing organs with sustained focus. That little bit of relief you feel is your body signaling good vibes back to your brain.

So, with a simple inhale and exhale, you just experienced the mind-body connection.

The breath keeps the mind and the body united throughout a yoga practice, allowing athletes to notice how their mind effects their body, and vice versa.

You'll know you're improving at yoga when your mental state has no effect on your yoga practice or your athletic performance.

By breathing, we pay attention.

By paying attention, we notice.

By noticing, we adjust.

By adjusting, we improve.

4) Bonus

Okay, time for the bonus round.

I don't just want to give it away, so I'll give you some hints to consider...it can be considered both mental and physical, depending on how you look at it...it's a body part...it's complex...most training methods seem to ignore it...it's relatively long...it's where our brain sends messages and commands to reach the rest of the body...give up?

It's the spine!

Why does the spine deserve its own category?

I'll explain:

The spine and its components are perhaps the most important physical attributes we have outside of the brain. Because all movement stems from signals sent from the brain through the spinal column, every body part connects to the spine in some way.

While most training methods spend very little (if any) time focusing on the spine, yoga flips this on its head — the spine comes before all other body parts.

In yoga, athletes learn how to use the spine properly and understand how different areas of the spine function. Understanding how to use and protect the spine can be an athlete's secret weapon as they unlock and maintain healthy movement patterns, while others are stuck complaining about their "bad back."



Types of Yoga for Athletes

I'm going to be completely honest about this one — I don't really care what style of yoga you're doing, as long as it helps you achieve your athletic and personal goals.

That said, I want to make sure you have a good grasp of the major styles of yoga out there, and an understanding of why you would choose a particular style over another.

It's easy to get lost in all the types of yoga out there, all stemming from different traditions, lineages, and focal points. Here's how I categorize yoga styles for athletes:

1. Vinyasa Flow and Power
2. Restorative and Yin
3. Everything else

Ahhhhhh, so simple.

Let's break it down a little bit more so you have a good sense of what to look for and why:

1) Vinyasa Flow and Power

Vinyasa and Power yoga are a sweaty good time.

Both tend to challenge the body in terms of strength, endurance, balance, and precision, but they're unique from one another.

Vinyasa or Flow

The term "vinyasa" is often considered to be synonymous with "flow," but that's actually not the case. "Vinyasa" is better translated as "to place in a special way."

So, sure, “flow” is absolutely an aspect of a vinyasa yoga class, but the true goal is to place everything (the breath, focus, focal point, body parts, etc.) with special consideration and attention.

Most Vinyasa classes emphasize fluid transitions between poses. You'll often hear “one breath, one movement” to describe the nature of a vinyasa class — on the inhale you're doing one pose, on the exhale you're transitioning into another pose, and so on.

All in all, Vinyasa is one of the best styles for developing body awareness and control.

Power Yoga

Put simply, Power Yoga is strengthening yoga.

Focusing on simple and strong poses, there's generally less emphasis on “flowing” movement (as in Vinyasa classes), and much more emphasis on longer holds.

This methodical approach brings all of the benefits of yoga without the risks that comes with momentum.

A little disclaimer: this type of yoga tends to expose physical and mental weaknesses pretty quickly. Stick with it (in the off-season) and you'll learn a lot about yourself.

2) Restorative and Yin

There's no denying that Power and Vinyasa classes are challenging — pools of sweat, heavy breathing, every muscle fatigued. This is the challenge we're used to.

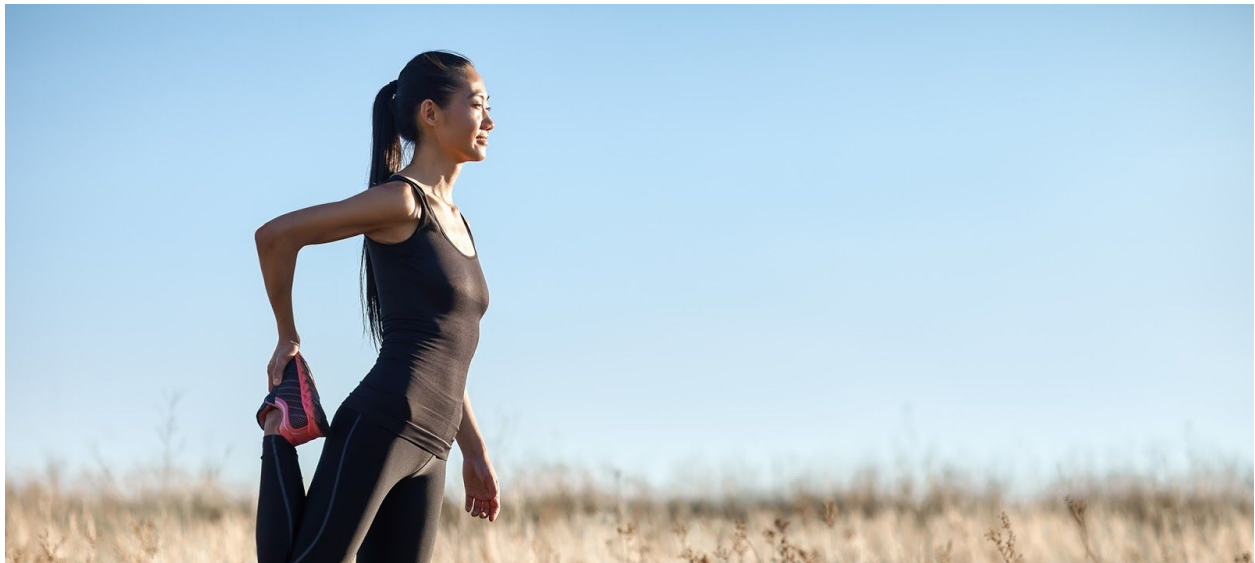
How about a different kind of challenge?

What if I asked you to hold a basic stretch at the point of minimal sensation for 5-10 minutes? Would that not be a challenge?

My guess is you'd have an easier time in a Power or Vinyasa class.

Restorative and Yin yoga classes ask us to take a back seat and put our bodies in a position to take care of themselves in their own time. With no rushing or pushing through, the tools we've been given to handle physical challenges are useless in these classes.

If Power and Vinyasa classes are the “yang” (fast, forceful), Restorative classes are the “yin” (slow, patient).



Yin

Any class specifically called “Yin” aims to release dense tissue, in particular the fascia of the body ([2-minute video explaining what fascia is](#)). In these poses, the goal is to find a mild degree of sensation and hold for no less than three minutes.

In yin classes, athletes in sports with abundant repetitive motion (you listening endurance athletes?) have an opportunity to counteract tightness that normal stretching just can't touch.

Yin addresses dense, plastic material in the body that only releases with time and mild tension.

Restorative

Somewhere between pure meditation and yin, restorative yoga uses props (such as bolsters and blankets) to create maximum comfort for prolonged relaxation and extremely mild physical sensation.

For athletes, taking a restorative class may be the most challenging (and beneficial) type of yoga. After so much working and training, taking time to experience the body on the opposite end of the spectrum can have profound benefits, especially in developing an appreciation for the physical gifts we've been given.

3) Everything else

Now that you have a sense of the main styles of yoga to be aware of as an athlete, here are some simple and painless descriptions of other styles of yoga you'll most likely come across:

Hatha

All physically-focused styles of yoga are, technically, "hatha" yoga. If you ever take a class described as hatha, expect something in between Power and Yin: Lots of pose holding, can get somewhat intense, very little "flow."

Recommended for athletes

Ashtanga

Extreme version of Power and Vinyasa flow. Consists of four scripted sequences known as "series" (i.e. primary series, secondary series, etc.) that start at an extremely advanced level and only get more complex. High risk of injury.

Not recommended for athletes

Iyengar

Similar to Hatha in terms of long holds, but more focused on alignment, precision, and breath. Accommodates different body types and limitations with props such as blocks and straps.

Recommended for athletes

Kundalini

Heavily-rooted in yoga philosophy and belief systems, Kundalini classes aim to address subtle energy in the body through specific breathing techniques and physical postures, often done at the same time. You'll want to take an open mind into these classes.

Not recommended for athletes

Hot and Bikram

Both done in heated rooms, "hot yoga" can refer to any yoga style while Bikram yoga is a set sequence of 26 poses and 2 breathing exercises. Heated rooms create a false sense of flexibility that allows for excessively deep stretching, often leading to injury.

Not recommended for athletes

Prenatal

Almost exclusively restorative in nature, these classes teach yoga in a way that considers the physiological changes that come with the varying stages of a pregnancy.

Recommended for pregnant athletes





Yoga Basics for Athletes

Time to get into the nitty gritty of yoga for athletes. First, let's clarify something — “yoga” is not “yoga poses.”

Confused? Probably...let me clarify a little more.

It's very common for athletes to ask questions like “what are good yoga poses for athletes?” and “what are the best yoga poses for my sport?” Answers to these questions can give a starting point, but would also be missing the point.

All of yoga's benefits come from doing yoga, not just doing poses.

This point is subtle, but very important.

Yoga is an all-encompassing practice that touches every part of the body and mind. Poses are a part of that, but you'll be disappointed if you expect a handful of “special” poses to magically cure all your ailments.

Just like any training method is a collection of different exercises, drills, and routines, yoga *uses* yoga poses as the building blocks for the overall experience.

Information about yoga poses for athletes, even from trusted sources, can be misleading and miss the bigger picture of how athletes should be thinking about yoga poses.

When I Googled “yoga poses for athletes,” this is the first pose that came up:



(From [this article](#) and [this page](#) by the Yoga Journal)

I don't know about you, but this doesn't look like a healthy pose for most athletes.

Perhaps, over time, with practice and preparation, this pose wouldn't blow out an athlete's knee. But the way it's presented, it seems like the recommendation is for an athlete to just do the pose and voilà!, they're a better athlete.

I won't go deeper into this, but I want you to know that there's good and bad information out there and it's on you to sift through the noise and keep yourself safe from injury.

As a general rule, focus less on yoga poses and more on simply doing yoga.

So, now that you understand how to think about yoga poses, I feel a lot better about explaining more about them...

1) Yoga Poses for Informed Athletes

Yoga poses (also known as "asanas," postures, positions, or even stretches) are the building blocks of the yoga practice.

As athletes, it's very tempting to approach poses like competitive challenges. The difficulty in "achieving" a yoga pose may feel worthy of a prize, but we promise you'll never get one.

If you're looking for a nagging long-term injury, by all means, treat poses like challenges. Otherwise, we recommend approaching them as small pieces of a greater whole.







Major Categories of Yoga Poses

Athletes need to understand the various types of yoga poses to use them effectively. Let's start by categorizing them:

Key categories of yoga poses (in order of importance for athletes):

1. **Backbends** "extend" the spine or, put another way, bend it backward
2. **Twists** rotate the spine in one direction
3. **Forward folds** bend the body forward at the hips
4. **Inversions** place the head above the heart
5. **Standing Balances** support body weight with one or two feet
6. **Lunges** place one foot/leg forward, the other back, often with the front knee bent
7. **Arm Balances** support body weight with the hands and arms

Keep in mind, two yoga poses in the same category might serve two completely different purposes. Take a look at the chart below to see how poses overlap by category and purpose:

		Pose					
							
		Down Dog	Cow	Standing Fold	Bow	Dancer	Tree
Category	Backbend		✓		✓	✓	
	Twist						
	Forward Fold	✓		✓			
	Inversion	✓					
	Standing Balance					✓	✓
	Lunge						
	Arm Balance	✓	✓				
Benefit	Range of Motion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Strength	✓			✓	✓	
	Balance					✓	✓

2) Yoga Sequencing for Athletes

Poses begin to take on meaning from their presence within a sequence. Quality yoga happens when poses are organized in a specific order and for a specific purpose.

Early poses prepare the body for what's to come, later poses build on the foundation set by earlier poses. This way, the body is prepared for movement and learning.

Timing, movement, breath, pose, focal point, etc. all make up the sequence and, ultimately, the type of yoga you're doing:

- Sequencing mild stretches and holding them for extended periods of time = yin yoga
- Sequencing fluid movements into and out of poses = vinyasa yoga

Sequencing brings logic and intelligence to a yoga practice. Sprinters don't just sprint. They warm up with sprint-like movements while building muscle memory. Similarly, quality yoga will simultaneously warm specific areas of the body while using simpler skills in building toward more refined skills.

With repetition and patience, athletes uncover new abilities and skills they never thought possible. But, it takes a skilled teacher and an athlete who's willing to listen both to the teacher and their body.

Approaching yoga as an athlete means incorporating your own decision-making into aspects of the sequence. Sequencing together smart choices that will benefit you as an individual athlete gives power to the concept of yoga for athletes, and it shouldn't be taken lightly.



Yoga Training for Athletes

At Icewater Yoga, we believe yoga should be a lifelong practice for all athletes. If you're not willing to consider this as an option, you'll most likely end up disappointed with your yoga experience.

Training cycles change. For years, you'll fluctuate between training and competition. Your training intensity will rise and fall. Frequency of competition will change.

Over the span of your athletic experience (as we see it, your life), you can mold and explore yoga in different capacities to complement the peaks and valleys of training and competition.

I have a simple formula for this:

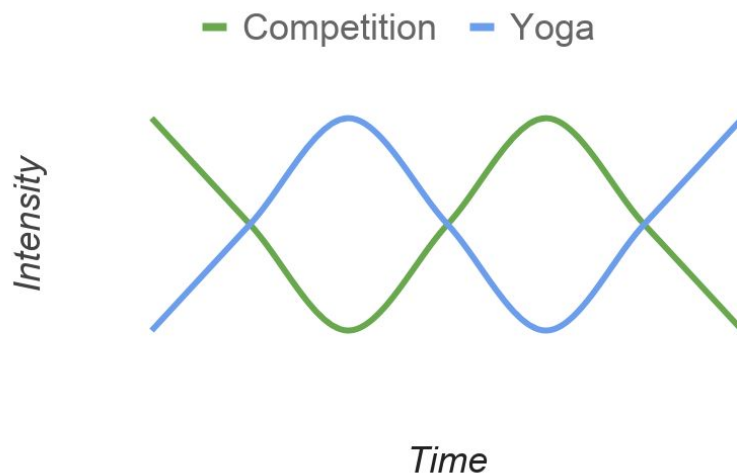
1) A General Yoga Training Plan for Athletes

Here goes, as simple as I can put it: intensity of competition and intensity of yoga move in opposite directions.

When competition is intense and frequent ("in-season"), yoga is light and less frequent.

When competition is light and less frequent ("off-season"), yoga is intense and frequent.

The simple line chart below explains this general training plan:



As time passes (moving left to right on the chart), intensity of competition rises and falls and the intensity of yoga does the opposite.

2) A Slightly More Specific Yoga Training Plan for Athletes

I want to keep this as simple as possible, but you'll need more detail to actually do something with this plan.

...so I'm upping it to three key points (and I promise to keep it simple!)

Athletes incorporating yoga into their training have three factors to consider:

1. **Time:** how long should I practice in each session and how often?
2. **Purpose:** what am I hoping to achieve by doing yoga?
3. **Tools:** what resources do I have to support my 1) Time and 2) Purpose?

Let's elaborate:

Time

Athletes spend a lot of time training and the last thing I want is to make yoga something you dread.

But, like anything, consistency in yoga is absolutely essential.

Infrequent yoga is irrelevant yoga.

The key is to find the perfect class duration and frequency to stay motivated, achieving your goals, and doing everything else you need to do.

Duration

So, how long should a yoga for athletes class be?

For most, an hour or more of yoga simply isn't feasible.

Few public yoga studios offer classes under an hour in duration. Add commuting there and back, arriving a little early, finding parking, chatting with people after class, and the whole experience can turn into a two-hour spectacle.

Let me be clear — you don't need a public yoga studio to do yoga.

Sure, it's a great option if you have the time and you can find a teacher who's worthy of your time and money. But you're better off finding a tool that allows you to practice for the length of time you can afford while giving you the yoga you need in the moment.

Put simply, athletes need yoga that's efficient.

I like 30 minutes because it's a realistic amount of time that any athlete should be able to commit to and, honestly, a half hour of purposeful yoga is plenty for most athletes.

Frequency

Ok, great. Now, how often?

Don't listen to that yoga-obsessed friend of yours. You don't need to do yoga every day.

Yoga is about balance and too much yoga will bring about its own type of imbalance in the body. But on the other hand...

Infrequent yoga is irrelevant yoga.

We want you to be the best you can possibly be in your sport. So spend most of your time practicing that! It's what you enjoy and, ultimately, it's where your time is going to be best spent.

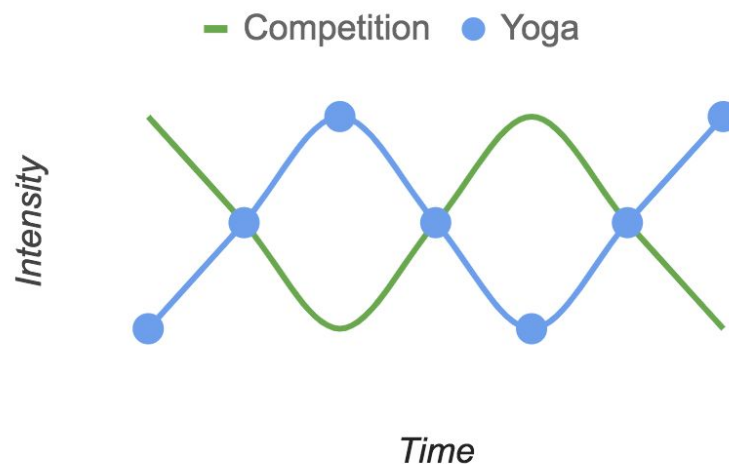
Doing yoga once to twice per week is the sweet spot for athletes. It brings the best of both worlds — loads of time to dedicate to your sport and enough time to get everything you need from yoga.

Recommendation: Athletes should practice yoga for about 30 minutes, 1-2 times per week, every week.

Purpose

An athlete's overall goal isn't to become a superstar at yoga, it's to be a better athlete.

Remember the little line chart from before? I'm going back to it, but with more detail this time:



Yes, that's right...I added dots. But not just any dots. These dots represent the three basic purposes in an athlete's training plan:

1. **Restore:** dots at the bottom of the chart. Competition is high, yin and restorative yoga keep the body supple and resilient.
2. **Active Restore:** dots in the middle of the chart. "Active restoration" eases out of restoration and into more intense yoga, or vice versa, giving the body a chance to adapt.
3. **Workout:** dots at the top of the chart. Fully into the offseason with physical capacity for building balanced strength and range of motion throughout the body.

An athlete's purpose for yoga will constantly change, which is the best part. It brings new opportunities to reflect and notice the inevitable changes occurring in your body over time.

We took this into account when building Icewater Yoga. All of our classes are filterable by categories that are relevant to athletes. [Check it out for yourself](#), if you'd like.

Recommendation: Restore during times of high competition, shift gradually into and out of high competition with active recovery classes, and do yoga workouts in the off-season.

3) Yoga Tools for Athletes

Now that you know how much time to spend on yoga and what you'll be doing when you do yoga, how do you actually do it?

You need a tool. Something that doesn't require too much time, money, or energy, and also gives you the particular style of yoga you need in the moment.

Let's find that tool.

First step is finding a teacher that...

1. ...understands athletes (a.k.a. an athlete)
2. ...you trust (a.k.a. experienced)
3. ...motivates you (a.k.a. positive, but not annoying)

The problem is this teacher will be very hard to find. If you find someone that meets these criteria, they'll likely be expensive and you'll need to be on their schedule.

This will cost too much time (an hour or more of active yoga time) and money (roughly \$20 per class at most studios and at least \$100 per class for personal private sessions).

The tool that solves this problem for athletes is online yoga.

Having done extensive market research in this area, the majority of online yoga options simply aren't going to work for athletes.

Online yoga comes in two ways: 1) Free and 2) Not free.

Free Online Yoga

By "free," I basically mean YouTube. Icewater Yoga is obviously an online yoga business and you'd expect us to shun YouTube entirely. But, actually, I see it as the best first step into yoga for athletes because...it's free!

YouTube yoga's biggest drawback is teacher quality. Some teachers know what they're doing but, sadly, most don't.

In my experience, I've been more frustrated than satisfied with yoga on YouTube due to poor audio/video quality, spending too much time searching, and disappointment with misleading video titles and descriptions.

YouTube is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get.

That said, if your budget doesn't allow for a paid tool, start by trying five different teachers on YouTube that appear professional and trustworthy. Take a class with each, choose your favorites, and take every class they offer.

Here are some classes we like:

- [Power Yoga by Bryan Kest \(a classic\)](#)
- [Active Recovery Class by Yoga With Adriene](#)
- [Vinyasa Flow Class by Lululemon](#)
- [Yin Yoga by Travis Eliot](#)

(By the way, remember what I said about Ashtanga earlier? [This is the first class in the series](#). Skip through and see why this might not be the best idea for athletes.)

Not Free Online Yoga

By "not free" I basically mean every online yoga subscription service out there, and there are a lot.

Google "online yoga" and expect a showering of options. Some are exceptional, others are weird and/or unacceptable.

We built Icewater Yoga to be the best online yoga resource for athletes. That said, I understand if you're not feeling it. If you're considering another platform, take advantage of their free trial (most offer at least one week), and use this checklist to compare options:

1. **Honesty:** Does the service tell you exactly what you're getting beforehand? (Don't be fooled by platforms that don't clarify how many classes they offer or how you will be accessing them)
2. **Thoughtfulness:** Does the service offer videos of teachers guiding you through thoughtful sequences and offering options for modification? (Avoid platforms that mash together random clips of poses)
3. **Teaching Quality:** Do you trust and like the teachers? (Avoid platforms with teachers who lack experience or authenticity)

4. **Athletic Fit:** Does the platform have specific options for athletes or some way to select the right class for an athlete's needs? (Avoid platforms that are too narrow in class types)
5. **Price:** What is the maximum monthly price you're willing to pay for online yoga? (Avoid platforms that cost too much for your budget)

We could share more criteria, but these are our top five. Ultimately, online yoga is going to be your best option for the long-term, so choose wisely!

Recommendation: Start with a few local studio visits to learn the basics, ask the teacher(s) questions, trial a few online platforms, choose one, and stick with it.

4) Sport-Specific Training for Athletes

Ready to tie it all together? Let's do this!

When it comes to sport-specific yoga, most information out there looks something like this: "5 Best Yoga Poses for X sport!!!".

I'll be frank. This is clickbait and it should be ignored entirely. We've already talked about how yoga is far more than just poses, so you no longer have an excuse for reading anything with a title like that.

Now that I've been frank, I'll calm down a bit and actually explain how to think about crafting a yoga program or routine that matches your sport (without a random list of 5 poses).

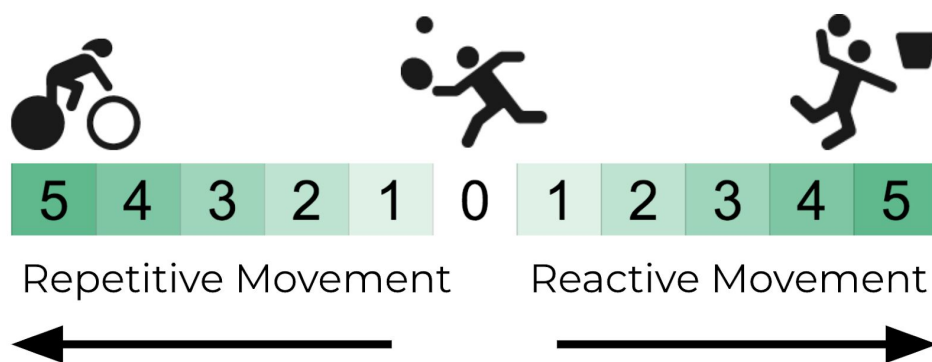
How to Make Yoga Fit Your Sport

Here's an obvious statement: sports are demanding on our bodies.

Here's a less obvious statement: sports are demanding on our bodies in different ways.

These "different ways" that sports make demands on our bodies create imbalances. As a yoga-doing athlete, it's critical that you understand how your sport's unique demands create imbalances in your body.

As you know by now, I like to keep things simple. So, I created a simple scale to break down how I think about sport-specific yoga:



This is extremely simplistic. Of course, cycling has reactive movements, and basketball has repetitive movements. I'll accept the scale's imperfection because it's the clearest way to align yoga with sports.

So, are you a repetitive or reactive movement athlete, or somewhere in between?

Endurance athletes (runners, cyclists, swimmers, triathletes, rowers, etc.) tend to fall more on the repetitive side and ball sports generally fall on the reactive side.

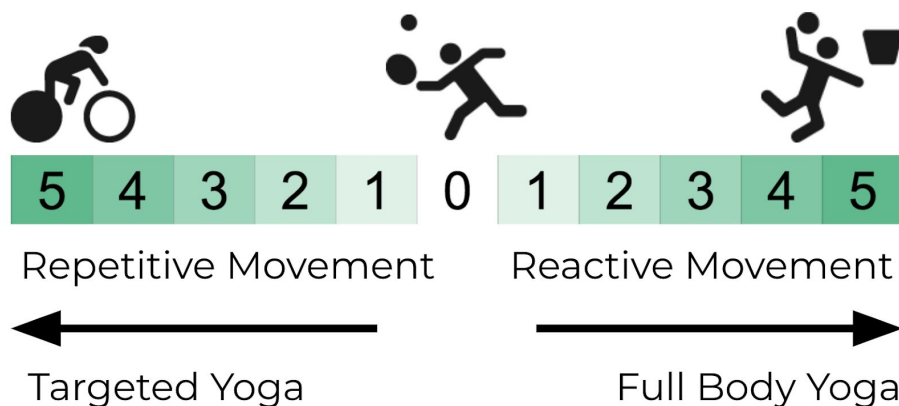
There are also tweeners — tennis is a great example. There's a lot of reaction in the sport and there's also a forceful repetitive motion: the serve.

All sports create imbalance. Repetitive sports bring imbalance to specific sites in the body, while reactive sports create imbalance more generally.

An athlete doing yoga should match their yoga with the imbalances their body creates.

Same chart as before, two new labels:

- **Targeted yoga:** focuses on specific body parts taken out of balance by sport
- **General yoga:** addresses the whole body equally to maintain balance in sport



Within a given sport, there are different positions with different body types and physical demands. The trick is to be honest with yourself and use yoga as a tool to understand where you have imbalances and follow high-quality yoga teaching to address these areas.

Quick tip: More often than not, the places where you "get stuck" in yoga are where you have imbalances. Use yoga to identify imbalances in your body.

Yoga for Sports Teams

...is very expensive and mostly ineffective.

We've said it before, *inconsistent yoga is irrelevant yoga*, and that's usually what sports team experience.

It's hard to find the right teacher, coordinate with the teacher and team, find a room that fits everyone, and do it regularly. On top of that, one session is usually pretty expensive.

So, what happens? At best, teams do yoga a few times per year or don't do it at all.

But what if teams approached yoga using all of our recommendations?

This is all that would need to happen:

- Every athlete has access to a trustworthy online yoga platform
- The platform offers yoga for recovery, active recovery, and a workout

In this scenario, every athlete can customize their own experience, taking the right classes throughout the competition cycle on their own time, targeting their own needs, with teachers who understand them.

It's affordable, consistent, custom, and fitting yoga for athletes and teams.

Icewater Yoga offers team packages that meet all of these criteria. Email us at info@icewateryoga.com to learn more.



Conclusion

So that's it, you're an expert on yoga for athletes!

Well...maybe not...but now you have a stronger grasp of the concept and, hopefully, ideas on how to start applying yoga into your athletic performance training.

If you take anything away from this guide, it's that the best yoga for athletes is simple and consistent. No crazy poses. No wasted time or money. Just simple yoga that molds to athletic needs.

Keep it simple and consistent and you'll start noticing differences and begin to understand what I mean by yoga's potential to revolutionize athletic performance.

Visit IcewaterYoga.com to practice with Joe and his team of teachers



