

Yoga and Sports: Tennis

Tennis requires cat-like reflexes with short bursts of strength. These short movements do not allow the muscles to extend their full length. When muscles are strenuously worked they become tight and can lose their elasticity unless properly stretched. Yoga exercises can increase the body's range of motion. The lack of movement because of inflexibility binds the joints. Without the elasticity of the muscles, I think an athlete can be a prisoner within his own body.

Using yoga techniques makes it possible to retrain the muscles. Most tennis athletes play in a constant state of muscle tension. Yoga trains the body to relax muscle tension. Learning to begin your game in a relaxed state could mean gaining an extra step on the ball.

When in a ready position muscles are contracted and ready for action. To move, muscles must be relaxed and then contracted again to spring in any direction. By retraining the muscles you begin from a relaxed position, giving a quickened reaction time.

Yoga breathing exercises can help improve endurance and stamina. When exerting in sports or exercise we often hold the breath as a way to create strength. Yoga trains the body to create strength through breathing control. Holding the breath at points of exertion takes a great deal of energy that could be used during long sets or matches.

Learning the correct way while doing a yoga pose is simple. Exhale during the execution of a pose until you feel the muscles' full length of stretch (maximum resistance). Never hold your breath. Breathe normally and listen to the body. Hold for 30 seconds, then release the pose slowly. By constant practice of yoga poses you'll soon apply breathing techniques in everyday routines.

A simple spine twist is excellent for rotational sports. It can help increase needed flexibility of the shoulders and back and hips. Remember to apply the breathing technique to this pose.

Begin the spine twist by sitting on the floor with both legs straight out in front of you. Keeping the spine straight, bend the left leg placing the left foot on the outside of the right knee. Now, place the left hand on the floor behind you with your arm straight and the right elbow bent. Positioned on the outside of the left thigh place the right hand on the left hip.

Slowly exhale while turning the head and upper body to the left, looking over

the left shoulder. Pressure from the right arm should keep the left leg stationary while pressure from the left arm and torso gives you the twist. Stronger use of both arms increases the twist. Hold this pose for 30 seconds and repeat twist on the opposite side.

A total body conditioning and flexibility routine is essential for the avid tennis player. Yoga techniques could be the edge you need in developing your game.