

Yoga with Anne-Marie

THE ENLIGHTENED ATHLETE.

FINDING FOCUS IN THE BOXING RING.

BY ANNE-MARIE NEWLAND

I think that, for most of us, boxing will always be synonymous with the great Mohamed Ali. As a child I knew him as Cassius Clay he then made his conversion to Islam and changed his name.

I don't like the sport of boxing these days, as the money and the hype seem to be the most important thing. I cannot bear the way the media and fans seem to like boxers who are aggressive and verbal.

As a child I remember learning about the art of boxing during history lessons as part of our work on The Victorians.

This sport was seen as the Sport of The Gentleman. The rules were very strict and the high moral code of conduct even stricter.

Interestingly enough I had a request a couple of months ago from a Yoga and Health reader for poses for the boxer. Umm, I wasn't sure there was any one in the class boxing; certainly no one had said anything.

Then about the same time I got a call from a man who said he wanted to join my classes and that he had read my articles in this magazine.

Patrick is now a regular part of our classes. He has made incredible progress and is a real yogi cum father, bricklayer and boxer!

I think what I love about the people I am meeting, is the vast dichotomy of lifestyles and personal work these students are involved in.

Patrick is a down to earth man involved very much in the grounding arts of everyday work and the uplifting heaven sent work of yoga.

If I look back at the first time Patrick came to class, it was his posture that was very memorable. Although I had no idea that he had been boxing for the last ten years, there certainly were some telling signs.

I was constantly telling him to stop pulling his chin in and of course that is his boxing training, hoping that he wouldn't get hit on it. The hand always in front of the face and the head pulled tightly back to protect it. I know for a fact that working on the cobra, or upward dog as the Americans call it, has really transformed Patrick's over all posture problems. Boxing shortens the muscles and can bulk them which is OK for boxing but not for long term health, we needed to help him lengthen and open.

THE COBRA:

Benefits are:

Opening of the shoulders, make sure that you are aware of the natural curve at the front of the shoulder where the collar bone and the deltoid meet.

The deltoid is the muscle at the front of the shoulder.

That natural curve can sometimes be made more prominent by the student rolling the shoulder in and then the shoulder also rises towards the ears.

Make sure the student presses down into the floor making the distance between the ear and shoulder longer.

Press the shoulder blades together. Most important is to make sure the buttocks are active and the tops of the legs pulled together to support the lower back.

The muscles involved in the support of the lower back are: the gluteus maximus (the bottom) the latissimus dorsi (the muscle running down from the shoulder blade to the lower back). There are others but these two are the most prominent.

Care must be taken when arching back in the cobra. Do not allow the neck muscles to collapse, keep them active. If you have a neck problem then keep the face to the front.

For more advanced practice press even deeper into the floor and lift the knees off the floor. It is even more crucial here that the muscles in the buttocks are working.

Obviously the chest is allowed to expand, the ribs open and oxygen is taken in more deeply.

It is also a wonderfully uplifting posture and feels like a joyful experience once mastered.

THE DOG POSE:

This is one of Patrick's favourites and for any yogi it is the most demanding and challenging; the benefits are numerous.

I use the dog pose at the beginning of my yoga practice and it can seem overwhelming to a new student; to someone who has a tight back, and back of legs like the hamstrings and the calf muscles.

But with constant commitment to work this posture can be the one that allows all else to follow on from.

Once in dog pose make sure you are always warmed up enough to spend at least five deep breaths in this posture. If you are a beginner then bend your knees until you are on the balls of your feet then pull the hips back to the back of the room and make sure you still pull the shoulder blades together to keep the chest open. Pull the inside of the arms up to the sky by rotating the deltoid at the front of the shoulder.

This is the biggest stretch for the whole shoulder system.

With either the variation or the full pose make sure you breath deeply keeping the mouth closed and use ujjayi breathing on the exhale. This technique insists you slightly close the throat / epiglottis / to make a sound as you breathe.

This stops the air leaving too quickly and allows the sound to help you focus on the breath.

Things to remember in the dog pose are:

Lift the sitting bones to the ceiling, tip the pubic bone down the floor. Think about the weight being pushed into your hips and the chest reaching for the feet.

Your feet need to be 6-8 inches apart, hands pressed into your mat, arms strong and straight and the heels reaching down to the floor.

The neck must be relaxed and the face soft.

If you practice salute to the sun try holding the dog for at least 5 breaths during your practice [maybe in the last two rounds] to help work deeper and to build physical and mental courage and endurance.

Patrick is a dedicated practitioner and knows that progress can only be achieved by constant practice.

I believe in moderation in all things. A typical Swami Sivananda phrase that means:

IT IS BETTER TO DO A LITTLE EVERY DAY THAN A HUGE AMOUNT NOW AND THEN.

Daily practice should never mean giving up your life; it is better if it becomes part of your life like work, children and friends.

Most of us have busy lives and Patrick is no exception, he often brings one of his daughters to a class rather miss one. Sometimes I also have to bring my youngest daughter to help me teach if I have childcare problems. As I often tell my students this is my life - all the bits and not just some bits make me who I am.

HAVE KIDS, WILL TEACH AND THEY COME TOO!!

Patrick's own story tells some of how he sees all this work helping him in all his practice, and how he has in my eyes brought back a little of the old fashioned values once associated with this art.

To me, Patrick has done much more, he has found a balance and focus that allows him to box and find his spiritual centre too, plus amazing grace in the ring.

PATRICK'S STORY.

Next issue racket sports and how yoga can help.