

Yoga with Anne-Marie

THE SPIRIT OF SPORT / THE ENLIGHTENED ATHLETE

CRICKET WHITES AND YOGA

BY ANNE-MARIE NEWLAND

It must be almost a year now since we have had the pleasure of Mark's company in class. He is well over 6ft. tall, has the longest legs and a personality as large as his feet!

I know for a fact that it was very brave of Mark to enter the studio that first time because although we are breaking the taboos of yoga as soft, feminine and therefore not for THE REAL MAN, we still have a long way to go to convince most men to find out yoga is anything but soft.

A STRONG PERSON IS SOMEONE WHO IS LIKE A MELLOW AFTERNOON TO THE UNTRAINED EYE BUT HAS A CENTRE MADE OF HOT IRON.

Mark had some major issues:

He was training but not becoming flexible [as most training programmes bulk rather than lengthen].

How could he prevent an injury like the one he sustained last season?

Was that injury due to this inflexibility? Almost certainly...

Power yoga heats the core, so that even iron will bend.

It was clear to me that sportsmen and women were becoming more holistic about their approach to training and that they were beginning to challenge old ways.

Stretching was always just tacked on to the end of a session and was never really taken too seriously.

It's all because certain muscle groups are in demand for specific sports and the results were short term and never mind the consequences. Those idioms of course leave many with damage that is irreparable.

When Mark first came to class he found it devastating! He was so shocked to find the class such a difficult challenge. After all he was fit, wasn't he?

Like so many beginners he found it tough. Athletes especially, as they are 'fit' for their own sport and it's hard to stick at something that is so hard and sometimes really disheartening. I know that if they keep the class up and come back, that by week three they can 'feel' the progress even if they cannot yet 'see' the progress.

I get calls so often where the conversation begins with “how long will it take?” And I reply there are no short cuts; you will have to work hard in every class, forever!

So that can be scary.

Yoga, after all, is what we are talking about here - not a fitness regime alone.

No matter how astounding the physical results are, the mental ones are even more so. I teach my students:

- To empower themselves.
- To believe they can do anything once the mind commits.
- The mind is the architect the body the result.
- Focus on the place you want to be.
- Feel what you want and then you will respond.
- Start all of this with the breath.

BREATH LINKS THE OUTER WORLD WITH INNER WORLD AND THAT IS YOGA.

The trinity of breath, body and mind.

And the soul lives in all.

Well you may think that this would scare a cricketer and a fast bowler at that. But no, that's the beauty of working with these wonderful people, they have amazingly sharp minds, like lasers.

It is this very quality that helps them commit, and once they do, the results are so dramatic that its like watching a miracle happen in front of your eyes!

Mark's original injury had been in the back, on his bowling arm side, among the muscle groups including the obliques, the sheathes of muscles around the waist and the lattissimus dorsi.

This meant that he could, in no way, put any strain on the set of muscles that he needed to bowl.

It was with this set of muscles in mind that, once healed, work must begin on keeping Mark's whole body flexible, strong but not bulked.

Astanga yoga [power yoga] uses every muscle group, the whole body is supported and no 'weak links' are allowed to develop.

The thing is though, yoga is not a set of exercises, it's a life tool. I hear it all the time from people who were so surprised at how they enjoyed the class, because they had only come in for a laugh!

It doesn't surprise me in the least because yoga has such a subtle way of working and yet the results are so very profound, it really does change your life.

You can practice yoga anywhere, in any weather, without a teacher, equipment, or lots of money!

A year on and I can see the rewards of being a teacher, alignment, grace, flow, strength, and great fun!

Mark's own progress was very much like this. His body was so tight, but luckily his mind wasn't. He has an amazing ability to focus. A lot of that is due to his sport. Once an athlete is hooked and he sees the results there is no turning back.

For Mark's own needs the class stretched every muscle group and strengthened each group equally, giving him balance within his whole body structure.

We worked on the side stretches like:

- THE TRIANGLE, for length in the spine, power in the waist.
- TWISTING TRIANGLE, for the rotation of spine and lower back.
Both of these postures demand great concentration.
- THE PIGEON, for the quadriceps [the large muscle at the front of the thigh], and the soles [the muscle that helps lift the thigh].
- THE CRESCENT MOON, for all of the above, plus the front of the body and upper back.

BUT NO-MATTER HOW CONVINCING YOGA IS PHYSICALLY THE MENTAL BENEFITS REALLY ARE TRULY ASTOUNDING.

It is with this powerful yet soft quality that will support Mark through his next season, and we all wish him the best in yoga tradition.

BREATHE DEEP, TAKE THE CHALLENGE. CHANGE YOUR LIFE.

Next issue cycling - can you leave the race and come back stronger?

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