

The Los Angeles Kings

By LUCIA VITI



Does yoga fit within hockey's world? Is there space for tree, crow and eagle pose between checks and goals? If you ask Mike Kadar, the Strength and Conditioning Coach for the Los Angeles Kings, you may be surprised to learn that yoga is alive and well in Manhattan Beach.

"Ice-hockey, unlike yoga, can be brutal, but like yoga it's an unstable sport that challenges core stability, strength and flexibility," states the Canadian transplant.

Noting hip, hamstring and lower back flexibility as contingents for skating, Kadar detailed yoga's therapeutic benefits for hockey's overwhelming demands for speed, power, agility and flexibility. "Yoga lengthens over-used and over-developed hips, glutes, hamstrings and lower-back muscles. It's a 90-minute challenge that offers healthy and injured players career longevity by reconnecting what hockey contracts."

Although biking remains the traditional off-season, off-ice regimen, yoga is slowly emerging as a season alternative. "I ride the bike all summer, working like crazy preparing for the season," explains King's Right Wing Ian Laperriere. "Coach Kadar suggested I try yoga while recuperating from a

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concussion. I found a sweat like no other, bound to improve agility and flexibility. It's a smart workout that will pay dividends on the ice."

"Hockey players run amuck with injuries from speed-skating forwards, backwards, left and right in a 45-degree angle and shooting from one side," adds Rob Armstrong, yogi, non-professional hockey player, and Strength and Conditioning Coach for the Junior Kings, Southern California's award winning youth-hockey organization. "Shoulder, groin, hip, hamstrings, lower back and knee injuries are as well documented as yoga's ability to lengthen shortened muscles, increase strength and flexibility, correct imbalances and minimize injury."

Armstrong described hockey as "[part] gladiator [part] grace," noting that "Professional hockey is first-class competition. Games are larger than life. Tenacity, discipline, commitment, creativity and camaraderie sometimes get lost or misunderstood during a grueling season of controlled chaos."

Armstrong also discussed the importance of yogic breath for the game's interval bursts of speed. "Yogic breath serves as an asset to players gliding and resting between 180 and 90 beats per minute. Both command breathing as a discipline, which transfers to real life."

"Yoga brought me to a place no other workout ever has," continues Laperriere. "And not just because of its challenge. It helped me deal with the stress of recuperating from my concussion. I've learned how to listen to my body."

Hockey's origins remain a mystery. Great Britain and France record the sport as the winter version of summer field hockey. England earmarks 1820, noting the marshland Bury Fen and "Bandy", a rugged version of Kolven, Holland's popular ice game. Using sticks made from willow trees, players swat a wooden or cork ball known as a kit or cat on frozen meadows. British soldiers stationed in Halifax, Nova Scotia played "hoquet" while McGill University students faced off in a downtown ice rink circa 1870. Kingston, Ontario launched the first amateur hockey league in 1885. In 1892 Lord Stanley of Preston, the English Governor General of Canada, decreed a silver bowl as trophy to the league's best team, known as the Stanley Cup. The first professional league, established in Michigan, lasted three years. The National Hockey Association emerged three years later, until World War I. 1917 touted the inception of The National Hockey League, today's NHL.

"I hope to substitute yoga as an odd, off-ice workout for every player," concludes Kadar. "It's a slow sell, but as players understand and appreciate yoga's benefits, it can only help the enormous demands placed on them both on and off the ice."



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