



## Flow states

### Questions for Ed Harrold

*Ed Harrold is Director for Sports Training and Yoga at Kripalu's Institute for Extraordinary Living and originator of the Flexibility for Athletes® program. A Kripalu Yoga teacher and certified athletic trainer, Ed, with his wife, Wendy, owns and directs Comfort Zone, a Kripalu Affiliate Studio in Lewes, Delaware. Yoga Bulletin editor Tresca Weinstein recently spoke with Ed about his pioneering fusion of yoga and sports.*

#### How has yoga changed your approach to competitive sports?

I've always been a competitive person—and athletically I was always very, very hard on myself. I was never really satisfied with my performance, even when I won. Then I discovered an inner world that was far more dynamic than the appearances of the outer world. I studied with Yoganand [Michael Carroll], Stephen [Cope], and Sudhir [Jonathan Foust], and became a Kripalu Yoga teacher. The study of yoga allowed my mind to become sensitive to the way energy moves in each moment. I began to use energy wisely, which saved me from exposing myself to repetitive motion injuries and repetitive patterns in the mind that were holding my body back in performance. To be effective in sports you need to know how to enter and calm the mind. When I started to bring pranayama into my yoga practice and workouts, I was inviting both sides of the mind, the rational left side and the intuitive right side, to work together. Everything in yoga and in life is about balance—mental and physical—and the ancient model of pranayama, postures, and meditation is the perfect way to create balance in the bodymind container.

#### Tell us about the work you're doing with Stephen Cope at Kripalu's Institute of Extraordinary Living.

About two years ago, we started throwing around ideas related to bringing an athletic angle into the Institute. Now it's finally coming to fruition. We're looking at this huge untapped market, and with the help of Sat Bir Khalsa from Harvard Medical School, we're doing research that shows that yoga works quite well not only in the emotional world but also in athletic performance. All competition seems external, but really it's internal; it all takes place inside. We're using the basic yoga model as a way to enter the mind through the body, linking breath and movement, repatterning the breathing and the rotation of thoughts. Once we do that, we can tap into the athletes' special gifts and develop postures, pranayama, visualizations, and meditations that specifically

support any type of sport.

This fall the Institute is sponsoring a cycling and yoga program at Kripalu to help athletes get in touch with themselves and discover where they're really, really strong. The program will incorporate yoga, pranayama, inspiratory muscle training—which draws on the ancient techniques of pranayama—meditation, visualizations, and workouts on indoor spin bikes. [For more information on Cycling and Yoga: Optimal Performance in Sports, November 8–11 at Kripalu, visit [www.kripalu.org](http://www.kripalu.org).]

#### What are the elements of your trainings for athletes?

Athletes are using yoga more and more, as a form of physical therapy to help with injuries and create more flexibility—but our philosophy actually incorporates it into their training rather than as a complement. Our program is a combination of breath, angles, and balance—very different from traditional Western athletic training, which combines elements of frequency, intensity, and duration. We use a whole different set of language and skills to get the most out of each athlete. The breath is extraordinarily important—it affects the energy in the body and the thoughts in the mind. We blend advanced pranayama and inspiratory muscle training into cardio workouts to tap into deeper energy flows and emotions and create a sense of oneness. Once you penetrate the conscious mind, you get to this whole other level, a flow state in which you can do almost miraculous things.

We just finished a four-month study with a high school boys rowing team in New Jersey. The boys did yoga, pranayama, and meditation in conjunction with their traditional workouts on the rowing machine every day. The preliminary results show an average time drop for these athletes—per 2,000 meters on an indoor rowing machine, which is the benchmark for all rowing—of 22 seconds. But not only

did they improve athletically, their parents were completely overwhelmed at how the boys had changed energetically by the end of the four months. They were completely different, which is really what it's all about. What took place on that high school team is almost mind-boggling.

#### How do you reconcile yoga philosophy with the achievement-driven world of sports?

Most people we work with start out very ego-driven, but once they begin the process of self-discovery, they discover that nothing ego-driven is real. What we want

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to do is go the opposite route: guide them to tap into the parts of the body where there's no positive or negative, to realize these practices are just something you do to create balance. Everything we do integrates cues and visualizations and yogic techniques so you can figure out that you don't have to be anything other than what you are. We're teaching yama and niyama through movement. Everyone figures out eventually that there's no separation between the sports arena or corporate America or being at home raising children. It's all the same stuff, and it's about how to make your energy work more efficiently, and having the courage to let go of what doesn't work for you.

For more information about Ed and Wendy, Comfort Zone, and the Flexibility for Athletes programs and DVDs, visit [www.comfortzoneyogacenter.com](http://www.comfortzoneyogacenter.com) or [www.mindandbodyworkout.net](http://www.mindandbodyworkout.net).