

Athlete embraces yoga to heal and improve training

Ed Harrold has been athletic since he was young. He played sports in school, and as an adult he competed in lifeguard races, triathlons, swimming, running and biking events, and even the 22 1/2 mile Atlantic City Around-the-Island Marathon swim in 1994.

It was that event that caused his athletic path to take a completely new turn.

GET FIT

JENNIFER VAN ALLEN

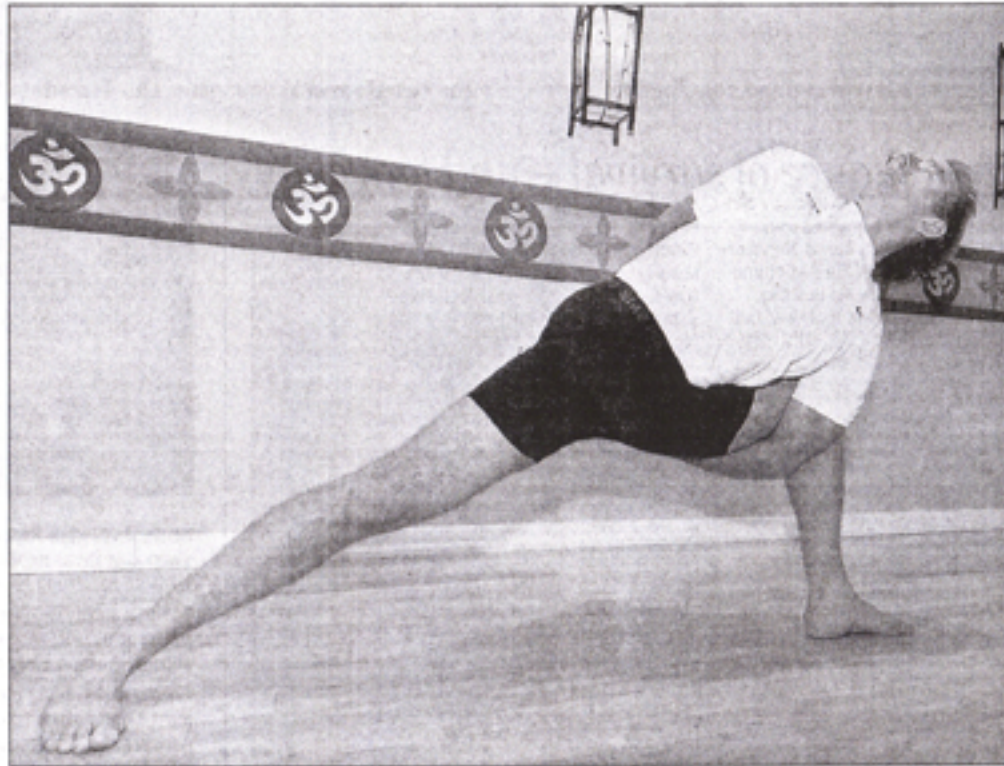
"It was so violent and hard on my body, and I knew that I had to start being more gentle"

Harrold said. "And there was a part of me that still wasn't complete."

So Harrold started practicing yoga. At first, he couldn't even bend at the waist to touch his knees. But he kept at it.

The clarity and healing he discovered in yoga improved his training so much that he learned to teach it, quit his job in the insurance industry and opened a studio of his own in 1998 in New Jersey. A year ago, he and his wife Wendy moved themselves — and the studio — to Lewes.

Their approach is based in the Kripalu style of yoga but integrates aspects of other styles, too. Harrold runs yoga workshops tailored for certain sports, such as rowing and cy-



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After Ed Harrold discovered yoga, he eventually quit his day job to open a studio to teach the benefits of the practice.

cling, at his Comfort Zone Yoga studio as well as other sites, such as the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health in Lenox, Mass. These programs focus on using yogic breathing techniques

and postures to optimize not only performance, but also the mental, emotional and physical benefits people reap from sports. Harrold also works with school rowing teams and

writes for the magazine Rowing News.

"The great thing about yoga is that you're never bored," said Harrold, 47.

"Every posture leads to something else."

What's your regular fitness routine?

I usually start the day with 10 to 15 minutes of seated meditation and my breathing exercises. I then row on a rowing machine for 15 to 20 minutes. In the afternoon, I run for 20 to 30 minutes. I do that routine about four days a week. With the inspiratory muscles, the muscles that you use to breathe in, you make the core of your body work harder. So I don't have to train as long to get the desired results.

What kinds of changes did you notice in your training and performance once you started employing yogic breathing techniques?

I was able to drop into a flow state or a zone every time I worked out, and not just have peaks and valleys. I had fewer injuries, fewer errors in training and racing, and less distraction from my ego. My times improved, and recovery was a matter of hours instead of days.

What kind of changes did you notice in your emotional state and frame of mind?

Through yoga you can untangle the knots that the mind has created in your body and break through mental and emotional blockages. I was able to use the left and right sides of my brain for optimal performance and get more joy and creativity in my life outside of

the athletic arena.

How does the way you breathe affect your endurance and athletic performance?

Endurance athletes need to take in more energy than they expel. But the diaphragm muscle, which can fan and cool the blood and spread oxygen throughout the body, is not properly strengthened in athletic training. By creating a thicker and stronger diaphragm muscle, the body needs to use less energy to get the desired athletic result. Your heart rate can remain more stable, and your mind undisturbed, so that you're meditating while you work out. Your mind becomes sensitive to where the energy is strongest into your body, and taps into that area. For speed athletes, it builds a strong energetic container and lets it explode for shorter speed pieces, like those that are three miles or less.

What advice would you give to someone who is thinking about trying yoga?

Whatever your goal is, whatever you're trying to become good at, yoga will help you do it. There's something for everyone here, and a way to make the experience work for you.

Do you have an exercise story you'd like to share or know someone who does? Contact Jennifer Van Allen at jvanallen@news.com.