

>> th: Is building core strength one of the reasons you do it, as well as stretching?

KC: I work with my osteopath who is also my fitness coach, so I also do a lot of other work besides that and more specific work. Obviously for tennis you need speed and endurance. Yoga does not address that part of a fitness schedule. Especially after the pregnancy I have had to work a lot on my core and build the stomach muscles and pelvic muscles – they were definitely a lot looser and a lot more stretched than they were before. It took me a long time to control them and again. I remember on court, just going for wide shots it didn't feel the same and afterwards it was harder to recover. With the breathing, just breathing through the stomach and using the muscles, I kind of had to retrain my body to deal with that.

When I was younger my fitness coach on the tour used to say the core was so important but to me the fitness exercises felt so boring. But I love that with yoga – you're not just lying there and trying to tighten a muscle, you challenge and you really push yourself. It really helped me after the pregnancy and when my father got really sick. It just gave me so much more energy to keep going and to fight for him and to be there for Jada and for my husband.

th: Do you think it has made you more aware of your body?

KC: For sure – even in the past nerves have made me tight and I was unaware of what they did to my body, even to my mental state of mind. Before a game I used to be really nervous, it was just in my nature. Bikram gives you that little bit of self confidence. I feel like when I come out of the room, I'm okay – they can curse me and I'm just fine. You just feel so much more balanced.

You get to know your body so well – you are doing a pose and you think this muscle feels a little tight today and by breathing you can actually loosen the muscle up, just making your mind think let the air go there and like relax it. I think it's amazing, since I've gotten older I really love doing yoga. ■



If you want to take up yoga, find a qualified teacher with a style to suit you. Check out www.yogaalliance.org or www.bwy.org.uk to find out more



POWER YOGA JASON POOLEY

Jason Pooley is a tennis player, coach, qualified yoga teacher and founder of the House of Yoga. He is a part-time tennis coach at David Lloyd Leisure, Riverside, and runs a regular yoga class there as well as other venues across London.

He can be contacted through his website, www.thehouseofyoga.co.uk

>> IF YOU ARE looking for an energetic workout to help your tennis then power yoga could be for you. Already popular in the US and Australia, Jason Pooley, founder of the Wimbledon-based House of Yoga is convinced of the benefits it brings to athletes and is committed to raising its profile in the UK. "Power yoga is a vigorous, dynamic and challenging form of yoga", he explains. "It works into the body in a more unique way. It builds a lot of flexible strength, and creates a lot of agility and mobility." Pooley says as a tennis player, power yoga appealed to him "It has everything you would do in the gym – you are strength building, working on your cardio because it is free flowing (although you can rest if you want to!) and it is a full body workout. If you want to sweat and stretch that's power yoga, and that's why I came into it from an athletic background."

Eighty five per cent of people who practice yoga are women, but Pooley has seen lots of men become hooked on this form of yoga. "More guys are getting involved. They have a perception of yoga being slow, no sweat, no heat and guys get put off because they have the strength but they don't have the flexibility." Yoga creates flexible strength so you have the balance between strength and flexibility. Baron Baptiste is credited with inventing power yoga twenty years ago in the United States and famously worked with the Philadelphia Eagles NFL team, changing the perception of who might benefit from yoga in the process.

A typical power yoga session lasts between 60 and 90 minutes. A session starts with 'finding the breath' and 'dropping the day', followed by a five to ten minute warm up. Next come sun salutations, lots of movement and standing postures, hip and shoulder openers and core work. Pooley also advocates having a bit of fun with balancing postures, such as the crow. There is also twisting and more passive deeper stretches on the mat to close a session.

"In most postures you are concentrating on the core, working from the core," explains Pooley, who believes power yoga is a perfect compliment to a demanding sport like tennis. "The pros have to travel extensively, which puts demands on the body. Yoga creates symmetry and balance in the body. In tennis, one side of the body gets over-developed and yoga helps create general balance in the body."

The mental benefits are also invaluable. The heart of yoga is about being in the present moment, dropping everything out and breathing.

"For tennis players who require focus for long periods of time, one set, two sets, not to mention five hours, yoga gives you that focus and brings you into the current moment, or in tennis speak it brings you into the zone. World class players are more in control of their emotions, but for club players this mental focus can be invaluable." ■

"FOR TENNIS PLAYERS WHO REQUIRE FOCUS FOR LONG PERIODS OF TIME, YOGA GIVES YOU THAT FOCUS" JASON POOLEY

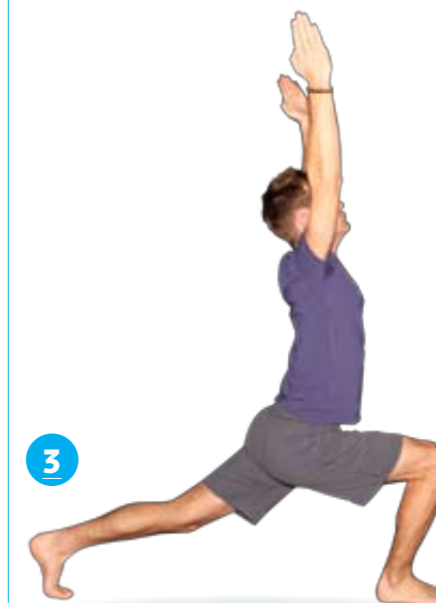
Jason Pooley demonstrates six yoga postures, which offer great benefits for tennis players



1 TWISTED SIDE ANGLE



2 EAGLE POSTURE



3 FORWARD LUNGE



4 CHAIR POSE



5 WARRIOR 2



6 DOWNWARD DOG



1 TWISTED SIDE ANGLE – The twisting in this pose creates an opening of the chest and stretches out the pectoral muscles. Internal organs are massaged as the lower back gets a nice wringing out effect.

2 EAGLE POSTURE – This fantastic balancing pose is great for tennis players. Opens the hips and shoulders and stretches the upper back whilst strengthening and toning the standing leg. Improves balance, concentration and brings you into the present moment.

3 FORWARD LUNGE – Creates flexible strength, tones the lower body and is a great posture to open the groin and stretch the quads. This is also a balancing posture which will help to improve focus and stability.

4 CHAIR POSE – This intense and dynamic posture is very therapeutic for the spine, upper and lower body. It raises the heart rate, strengthens leg ankle and back muscles and removes stiffness in the shoulders.

5 WARRIOR 2 – This pose is a great hip opener and brings elasticity to the leg and back muscles. Sculpts the buttocks and thigh muscles. With a strong and focused gaze it improves overall concentration.

6 DOWNWARD DOG – This pose will help you become longer and stronger and leaves you feeling stretched throughout your entire body. Longer stays in downward dog help to remove fatigue and bring back lost energy. Loosens shoulder joints and calms the nervous system.