

MOVE YOUR MIND.
BEND YOUR BODY.
LOTS OF IDEAS FOR
BOTH IN THIS ISSUE.

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Football & Yoga?

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PHOTOS: ANTHONY TUCCITTO,
SPIRIT LOFT, AND JOGA

WHEN WE HEARD THAT AN EX-CFL FOOTBALL PLAYER HAD OPENED A YOGA STUDIO IN LESLIEVILLE AND A LOCAL WOMAN WAS TRAINING THE TORONTO ARGONAUTS WITH HER FORM OF YOGA, WE DECIDED TO LOOK DEEPER INTO THIS CORRELATION BETWEEN YOGA AND FOOTBALL.





Like most active people, I do my best to lead a fit and balanced lifestyle. My recent motto is - stretch more and stress less! I have always had the best of intentions to build stretching, through yoga, into my athletic regime. I even have the cool yoga wear and colourful yoga mats to prove it! It's attending yoga classes regularly that I'm not so good at, as I've always assumed a traditional gym workout or a quick run is a better investment of my time.

New yoga practices, geared specifically to athletes, have encouraged me to revisit my interest in the practice of yoga, given the energizing and beneficial offerings at some contemporary yoga and fitness studios in Leslieville and Riverside. There, a few savvy entrepreneurs and dedicated "yogis" (people who are certified in the practice of yoga) are leading the way in attracting athletes to the practice of yoga and meditation, with unique programs that challenge muscles and channel the mind.

Jana Webb, creator of JOGA Athletic Body, Athletic Mind, takes locals through her Joga classes in the Energy Xchange studio on Queen just west of Broadview. Andre Talbot is an ex-CFL football player and with his life partner, Catalina Morgana, they own Spirit Loft on Carlaw, just north of Queen. All three practice yoga with a focus on sports training, targeted to athletic-minded individuals. The name JOGA actually comes from the idea of "Yoga for Jocks" although JOGA can benefit anyone with an athletic spirit and focus.

Andre and Jana were both drawn to the healing benefits of yoga after sustaining injuries that didn't



respond to traditional rehab methods. For Andre, it was a severe ankle injury from a football game, and for Jana, a painful shoulder injury. Both turned to yoga for relief and strengthening – and a new calling and life passion emerged for each of them. Spirit Loft was inspired by the Latin word spiritus with "Loft" representing the concept of "rising up" as well as the open-concept loft that houses the studio.

"Playing professional football for eleven years was really taking a toll on my body, and I was looking for ways

to enhance my training and assist with recovery," says Andre who played for the Toronto Argonauts and Edmonton Eskimos over his 11-year career.

Matt Nichol, an athletic trainer who has worked with the Toronto Maple

Leafs and the Toronto Argonauts, encouraged Andre to incorporate yoga into his training. A true mentor, Matt was one of the first people Andre told when he decided to retire from his successful football career in 2011 and pursue his passion for yoga on a full-time basis.

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Andre and Catalina completed their yoga certification at the Yandara Yoga Institute in Mexico and became the zen dynamic duo behind Spirit Loft on Carlaw. They offer yoga and meditation and kettle-bell and personal training out of their live/work studio, a light-filled space that exudes a calming feel.

Jana found that while injured, yoga was one of the few things that made her feel better. However, she found that some of the poses were awkward for her body type. Tight and athletic as opposed to lithe and flexible, she felt there must be a better way. While she hadn't intended to become a yoga teacher, Jana ended up in Japan and did Ishta Yoga training there. Ishta means "individual" and the practice looks at individual anatomy and structure and bases specific postures and breath patterns are created based on the needs of that individual. Jana is one of very few Ishta-trained yogis in North America. When she came back



and started to put Ishta in practice, Jana found she had an innate understanding of how people move. She started to create a series of sequences based on the cadence of sport training where the movement of sport was emulated. Her work attracted an athletic clientele including the NHL's Calgary Flames and several varsity sport teams in Calgary where she was living. While working with all these athletes, Jana was able to refine and design the postures and the system that is now Joga. "We started to get all these fantastic results" she says.

For some of the athletes the initial reaction is "Yoga? Ya right."

Jana's sequences are based on her observations that "a body that is athletic tends to be tighter, with certain tension points from repetitive use and strain." Jana started working these asymmetries in the body. Joga targets these key areas to strengthen them and help prevent injury. Knees, ankles, and backs all benefit. Through the practice of Joga, athletes and every-day fit folks find symmetry and realign asymmetries, and are thus able to work their bodies better mechanically.

Jana mentions that most athletic movements work the same muscle groups. She currently trains the Toronto Argonauts during the regular season and the off-season. She has built benchmarks into her workouts that appeal to



SPIRIT LOFT



athletes' goal-setting tendencies. As her clients progress in Joga they become able to achieve benchmark postures that make them feel accomplished. Many of her clients become very loyal to the practice even though for some of the athletes the initial reaction is "Yoga? Ya right."

When it comes to coaching athletes through their yoga practice, both Talbot and Webb apply their personal sports experience and what they've gained from working with a line-up of professional athletes Andre's clients hail from the Canadian Football League, the National Hockey League and from the Canadian Olympic Team. Jana has worked with the Calgary Stampeders, and currently works with the Toronto Argonauts. She has trained players from the Edmonton Oilers, Calgary Flames, Phoenix Coyotes, Ottawa Senators, and the Team Canada Rugby and Volleyball teams. "Joga is designed to be built into any athlete's training program to give them more agility and higher performance," Jana says. "It is not meant to overstep any training they are doing already."

Andrew and Catalina approach yoga from an interesting personal perspective. They say, "the physical form will eventually deteriorate, and the practice of yoga not only strengthens the body, but it encourages a sense

of calm and perspective to be more honest, compassionate and to take intelligent actions."

They practice what they preach at Spirit Loft. Andre and Catalina are passionately involved with a community program called New Leaf Yoga Foundation, which brings yoga to at-risk youth. The couple regularly visits community groups in "at risk areas" of the city to teach youth about yoga and meditation. "It's pretty amazing to see the transformations that happen when you gather a group of rowdy kids into a meditation circle, and teach them to de-stress and calm themselves by placing their own hand to their chest and the other hand to the belly while taking slow, deep breaths. It's our hope that we may be teaching them coping skills that they may otherwise not have had exposure to, and which they may be able to draw on under other stressful circumstances," shares Catalina.

Whether it be athletes or at-risk youth, clearly Jana and Andre and Catalina are using Joga and yoga to bring out the best in their clients. And like me, with new approaches to traditional yoga practices, more and more people can benefit from their innovative and practical practices.



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