

Doping in Yogasana Sports Competitions

Dr. Vikram Singh,

Sports Office,
JNU, New Delhi

Abstract: All types of sports whether competitive or non-competitive have few things in common.

First is that some form of physical training is incorporated for example aiming to improve strength, flexibility, endurance etc., secondly the participants are encouraged to push themselves physically and mentally for successful performance in a sport, mainly seeking to gain a top position or a medal. Yogasana sports meet all of those requirements. Unlike in football, judo, basketball, baseball, soccer, etc. where there is comparatively higher likelihood of getting injured, yoga is largely a non-contact sport and has very gentle or minimal human touch or contact while performing the postures without any prejudice or malice towards others in a holistic environment.

Yoga wasn't designed to be competitive in the beginning rather it evolved as a potent method to improve sports performance of other sportspersons. Yoga is not as rough as most of the sports like wrestling, rugby, martial arts etc. Contact sports are quite literally designed to put athletes in close proximity to each other, using their physical strength to best their opponents. And many individual sports — like gymnastics and ice skating — are so physically intense that they can set athletes up for serious injury even if they're not pushing each other around. The ethos of yogasana sports have originated from the vision and mission of modern day yoga gurus to popularise yoga asana for wider outreach and to cater to the basic instinct of proving one selves to be superior without letting down the other person. Yogasana sports has its own challenges that are similar to gymnastics, yet different and unique, especially when it comes to para yogasana sports and veteran yogasana sports. The objective of writing this article is to spread awareness about the illegal methods of drugs and doping and their side effects to keep yogasana sport taint-free.

Keywords: yogasana sport, holistic, doping

In November 2016, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports refused to recognise yoga as a sport. This refusal came after consultation between officials from the Ministry of AYUSH (Department of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) and the department of personnel and training. The reasons given for the refusal were put down to yoga's limbs being too varied for it to become part of a competitive sport and the fact there was no national federation specifically for yoga (<https://thewire.in/culture/the-story-of-yogas-sporting-journey>). National Yoga Sports Federation (NYSF) was established in August 2020, which the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports recognised in November 2020. The prime intention of NYSF is to promote and develop yogasana as a competitive sport for better community outreach and promote healthy competition in yogic postures without diluting the psychological and physiological benefits besides philosophical aspects of various asana's as mentioned in the yogic and other related scriptures. Thanks to the seeking spirit and hard work of NYSF and its state and district units, at present, there are several yogasana sports competitions that are being held in many places all over India and with great enthusiasm, realizing the outcomes of yogasana sports competition and cooperation, developing leadership qualities and yoga event management skills amongst the youth. Like any other sport, yoga asana sport also has its basic principles as derived from sports training and competition related fitness. Flexibility, neuromuscular coordination, balance, strength are some of the important aspects that play important role in winning a medal in this non-olympic sport. School level health and physical textbooks developed by NCERT, CBSE etc. have highlighted the importance of yoga asana not only for the general population but also for the children with special needs. Though there is very less likelihood of the yogasana sports players adopting unwanted/illegal measures of performance enhancement but it cannot be altogether ruled out because of the amount of name, fame and money involved now in yogasana sports as well. There is prestige, awards and rewards that can make or break a players' motivation in yogasana sports just like it happens in other similar sports disciplines like gymnastics, synchronized swimming. NYSF is compliant to the National Sports Code-2011 and also to the WADA code. It is therefore pertinent to mention some of the doping related points as relevant to yogasana sports.

WADA code book – 2021 clearly describes the importance and relevance of doping related issues in all sports as below.

“PURPOSE, SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE WORLD ANTI-DOPING PROGRAM AND THE CODE:

The purposes of the World Anti-Doping Code and the World Anti-Doping Program which supports it are:

- *To protect the Athletes' fundamental right to participate in doping-free sport and thus promote health, fairness and equality for Athletes worldwide, and*
- *To ensure harmonized, coordinated and effective anti-doping programs at the international and national level with regard to the prevention of doping, including:*

Education — *to raise awareness, inform, communicate, to instill values, develop life skills and decision-making capability to prevent intentional and unintentional anti-doping rule violations.*

Deterrence — *to divert potential dopers, through ensuring that robust rules and sanctions are in place and salient for all stakeholders.*

Detection — an effective Testing and investigations system not only enhances a deterrent effect, but also is effective in protecting clean Athletes and the spirit of sport by catching those committing anti-doping rule violations, while also helping to disrupt anyone engaged in doping behaviour.

Enforcement — to adjudicate and sanction those found to have committed an anti-doping rule violation.

Rule of law — to ensure that all relevant stakeholders have agreed to submit to the Code and the International Standards, and that all measures taken in application of their anti-doping programs respect the Code, the International Standards, and the principles of proportionality and human rights” (source- https://www.wada-ama.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/2021_wada_code.pdf)

Categories of illegal doping methods and substances that the yogasana sports players might use/be using:

1. Anabolic Steroids- also known as anabolic-androgenic steroids are used to increase muscle mass and strength especially in the artistic yoga events (group and pair events) like making pyramids that requires immense strength and muscular endurance especially to the one who is forming the base for the players towering over him/her. The main anabolic steroid hormone that body produces naturally is testosterone but its presence more than a certain limit is considered as illegal. Other common examples of anabolic steroids are stanozolol and nandrolone. Taking anabolic steroids at doses that are much higher than those prescribed for medical reasons can be very dangerous because of serious physical side effects like, prominent breasts, shrunken testicles, infertility, prostate gland enlargement in men and women may develop increased body hair, Baldness, which may be irreversible, infrequent or absent menstruation.
2. Cannabinoids like marijuana slows down the reaction time and expedites relaxation before the competition, who have trait or state anxiety related problems. The List of Prohibited Substances and Methods as published yearly by WADA has the name of Cannabis since 2004. Despite the lack of hard evidence on the ergogenic effect, it is recognized that there are some health risks associated with the use of cannabis like synthetic cannabinoid toxicity can cause acute psychosis, and agitation, as well as seizures and sedation and renal failure have occurred (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK482175/>).
3. Stimulants- Some athletes use stimulants to stimulate the central nervous system and increase heart rate and blood pressure. Stimulants can: Improve endurance, Reduce fatigue, Suppress appetite, Increase alertness and aggressiveness. Common stimulants include caffeine and amphetamines. Cold remedies often contain the stimulants ephedrine or pseudoephedrine hydrochloride. Energy drinks, which are popular among many athletes, often contain high doses of caffeine and other stimulants. The street drugs cocaine and methamphetamine also are stimulants. Although stimulants can boost physical performance in yogasana sports and promote aggressiveness while doing dynamic postures or pyramids, they have side effects like nervousness and irritability, which make it hard to concentrate on the event. It can enhance insomnia that prevents proper sleep and can add to the pre-existing problems just before the competition besides causing dehydration enabling yogasana player feel fatigued too soon and delaying the recovery.
4. Diuretics- Diuretics might be used to lose body weight/fat so as to compete in the preferred body weight category or to able to perform an asana in a better visible way. It is banned in all sports because they can cause uncontrolled rapid body weight loss and can also change the body's natural balance of fluids and salts (electrolytes), leading to dehydration. Diuretics can also act as masking agents to drain out the other ingested prohibited substances that might be present in the body.
5. Narcotics- Narcotics are used to suppress severe pain due to overtraining or due to muscle spasms, strains and sprains. Narcotics are among the oldest doping substances used in sport. Some examples are alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, heroin. Nausea, Dizziness, Addiction, low blood pressure, Drowsiness, Mood disturbances are some of the side effects of using narcotics.
6. Blood doping: It is the process of increasing the Red blood cells by blood transfusion. Increasing the availability of haemoglobin making larger amount of oxygen to develop energy, improving stamina and performance.
7. Gene doping: It is the use of genetic material in an artificial way to change the gene expression with the aim of improving sports performance.

The term ergogenic aids is often used with and without referring to illegal methods of sports performance enhancement. Ergogenic aids are any external means and methods to enhance performance in sports. These include:

- Mechanical Aids
- Pharmacological aids
- Physiological aids
- Nutritional aids
- Psychological aids

Conclusion:

Yoga is considered to be holistic and ethical practice as envisaged in yoga sutras and various other texts and have stood the test of time to be relevant even today. Given the fact that there are several advantages of doing yoga, that have been proven beyond doubt, but still, the challenges of yogasana as a sport will be seen in the times to come. It is important to educate and spread awareness about drugs and dopes amongst the yogasana sports persons and coaches for realizing the motto of WADA- “play true”. A scientific, systematic and pedagogical approach to teach diet and nutrition, sports nutrition, nutritional supplements, and then drugs and doping in sports will be the correct progressive approach to empower the budding yogasana sports players and coaches to keep the spirit of yogasana sports as purely ethical and holistic, unlike other tainted sports.

References:

1. <https://thewire.in/culture/the-story-of-yogas-sporting-journey>
2. https://www.wada-ama.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/2021_wada_code.pdf
3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK482175/>

