



A FREE GUIDE

# HOW TO TEACH YOGA TO SOCCER PLAYERS

10 Insights From 30 Years of Working With Athletes

Distilled for yoga teachers who want players to say yes to yoga.



HAYLEY WINTER

THE INSTITUTE OF YOGA SPORTS SCIENCE®

## A NOTE FROM HAYLEY

I didn't start out planning to work with soccer players. I was thrown in at the deep end and had to figure it out along the way.

Thirty years ago, yoga in sport was taught under the radar. Nobody wanted to own up to introducing it to their players. There was no guidebook, no mentor, no training course. Just me, a lot of questions, and a changing room full of footballers who weren't entirely sure why I was there.

Over the years I've worked with athletes at every level, and I've made most of the mistakes you can make. I've over-complicated sessions. I've assumed too much. I've walked onto a football ground on a wet Tuesday morning with no props and had to think fast.

What works in a general yoga class doesn't always translate well.

This guide is what I wish someone had handed me at the start. Not a textbook. Just the real things learned from lived experience. These are the insights that changed how I teach, and that I've been passing on to yoga teachers for decades.

The FIFA World Cup arrives this summer and runs for five and a half weeks. Soccer players, coaches, and their communities are paying attention.

This is a genuine window for yoga teachers who want to do this work well.

Read this. Try one insight. That's the best way to learn.

And when you do, get in touch. I'd genuinely love to hear how you get on.

I hope it opens doors for you.

*Hayley*

Hayley Winter

Founder, The Institute of Yoga Sports Science®

Co-Founder, The School of Yoga Sequencing

Connect: [@hayleywinter.yoga](https://www.instagram.com/hayleywinter.yoga)



# 01 ATHLETES DON'T BUY YOGA. THEY BUY RESULTS

One of the biggest mistakes I made when working with athletes was assuming that athletes care about yoga. Most don't.

Athletes are results-driven. They want to move better, recover faster, stay injury-free, and perform when it counts.

For more than 30 years, I've explored how yoga can support the demands of sport. And in my experience, one of the biggest challenges yoga teachers face is translating the benefits of yoga into language that athletes actually connect with.



This is often where the buy-in breaks down. When a player hears Sanskrit, or words like mindfulness they may struggle to see how yoga relates to their goals.

But when they hear:

- Improve recovery between matches
- Increase mobility
- Reduce muscle soreness
- Improve focus under pressure
- Minimize the risk of injury

They're more likely to lean in. When working with athletes, don't start by 'selling' yoga. Start by understanding what matters to them and show how yoga can help them get there. I hope these insights help. They're the same principles that helped me earn the trust of athletes, coaches, and organizations such as The Football Association in the UK.

# 02 START WITH THEIR SPORT, NOT YOUR YOGA

The moment you make it about the athlete is the best buy-in of all.

The manager of a premier first team I worked with took me aside before I walked into the strength and conditioning room. He said: "Leave the sanskrit at the door. Otherwise you'll lose the lads." It was the best advice I ever received.

Athlete-centred delivery means making them the focus of every decision. What position do they play? Where are they in the training cycle? What does their body need today? Start by asking what they need. Listen carefully. Then build the session around that one thing.



Some athletes will be cautious about sharing injuries. Ask anyway, and ask gently. That information shapes everything. And whatever they tell you, approach the session with a beginner's mind. What feels easy in your body may be genuinely challenging in theirs.

## 03 SPEAK FROM THE ATHLETE'S PAGE

You don't need to deliver a biomechanics lecture, or need to know every muscle or master the language of sports science. What's needed is plain language connected to outcomes athletes care about.

Always communicate and use the language that you know, with your authentic voice. Talk about how it will make them feel. Talk about what it will do for their game.

Speak from their page, not yours. When your words connect to their world, they're more likely to listen.



## 04 ASK A QUESTION THEY CAN'T SAY NO TO

Time, budget, and relevance are decisions that coaches, managers, and teams have to make every single day. Yoga is rarely at the top of that list. You may find yourself in a room where the question isn't "how do we do this?" but "why should we even consider it?"

That's the moment that counts.

Don't try to win skeptical athletes or coaches over with enthusiasm. You can't out-energy a skeptic, and trying to will lose you the room. Earn their trust with relevance, and do it one small step at a time.

Start with a question they can't say no to. Something like these:

*Would it be helpful to recover faster after intense training? Would moving with greater fluidity and control be of interest to you? What would it mean to you to minimize the risk of injury?*

I've used these questions and they work because they speak directly to what the athlete already wants.

The key is to deliver on it. Keep the session simple and accessible. Delivering one tangible benefit, is worth more than ten promises made at the door.



## 05 GET THEM INTO THEIR BODY QUICKLY

The most powerful thing you can do in a first session is create an experience an athlete wasn't expecting.

E.g, place a football between the ankles and ask them to balance barefoot on their toes without letting it fall. In seconds, they're exploring balance, stability, focus, body awareness, breath and you've sparked their curiosity.

A slow, controlled bite-size sequence can make athletes aware of muscles they didn't know they had.

The expression I use, and one that surprises athletes every time, is this: "the slower you move, the stronger you get".

Slow movement removes momentum from the equation. Every stabilising muscle has to do the actual work.

And the compensations and weaknesses that get hidden inside fast training become visible the moment you slow things down. It supports an injury prevention strategy.



## 06 MAKE IT RELEVANT TO THE GAME

As yoga teachers, we love our props. They support the practice and they change how a session feels. The same principle applies when you're working with athletes.

Bring the ball in.

For soccer players, the ball is the centre of everything. It's what they train for, think about, and connect with every single day. When you bring it into a session, something shifts. The session stops feeling like something added on and starts feeling like part of their world.

One of the most effective things I've done is ask players to place the ball under the armpit and breathe into it. The ribs expand against the ball. The breath integrates with the nervous system.

The athlete feels something immediate and real, and they connect it directly to their sport. And here's where it goes deeper. That same practice, breath connected to the ball, travels with them. Into the tunnel before a match. Into the moment before a penalty kick, when the noise of the crowd drops away and all that exists is the ball and the breath.

Yoga becomes a tool for performance under pressure, and it's built around something they already trust.

Bring the pitch into the room. The ball is your best prop, and it already belongs to them.

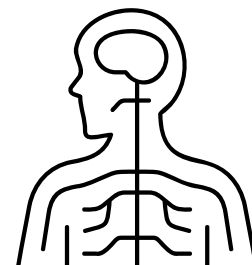


## 07 LESS STRAIN. MORE GAIN

Athletes are conditioned to do more. Their training culture is built around volume and intensity. You may feel the pull to match that energy. Don't.

Three movements with full recovery will do more than fifteen movements rushed through a session. The physiology needs time.

If you have fifteen minutes, deliver three movements. Allow time for the information to integrate into the nervous system. That's where the real adaptation happens, and it will serve both you and your athlete well.



This is a principle I learned working alongside elite performance coaches, including those whose work shaped the thinking behind books like "Atomic Habits". Marginal gains. Small shifts that accumulate.

A "less-is-more" approach through sports-specific yoga encourages players to shift from a push-the-limits mentality to a more integrated one.

That's the marginal gain advantage in practice. You can read more about this in my feature in the article on the [Olympic Channel](#).

## 08 BITE-SIZE SEQUENCING IS A STRATEGY, NOT A SHORTCUT

You rarely get a full hour with an athletic team. You often get fifteen to twenty minutes, a corner of the gym, and a coach watching the clock. If you think you need to deliver a full class you don't. Start thinking bite-size sequences.

A short, sports-specific sequence of three to five yoga techniques, repeated consistently, does more for an athlete than an occasional long session ever will.

It fits inside a strength and conditioning program without disruption. It's easy to schedule, easy to commit to, and because the barrier to entry is low, the frequency goes up.

In seven years of case-study research we conducted at the Institute of Yoga Sports Science® the evidence showed the effectiveness of bite-size sequencing in minimizing injury and improving athletic performance.



As yoga teachers, we often have a lot we want to share. Learning to say less and let the experience do more of the teaching is a skill.

## 09 RECOVERY IS OFTEN THE EASIEST DOOR IN

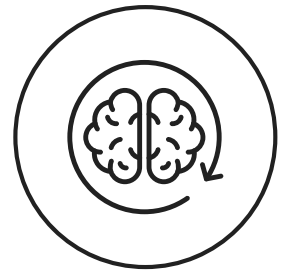
Recovery is not the soft option. It's where strength actually builds.

It's when the muscles repair, the nervous system resets, and the brain reorganises movement patterns. Just as interval training needs rest to produce adaptation, the body needs recovery to absorb the work it has done.

For skeptical athletes and coaches, recovery is often the easiest buy-in.

It's tangible, it's immediate, and it's directly connected to performance.

Start there and the door to everything else begins to open.



## 10 GIVE THEM SOMETHING USEFUL THEY DIDN'T EXPECT

One of the best things I ever did with players was show them how to strengthen their hamstrings while putting their jeans on in the morning. That's not a joke.

When you take mobility and breath work out of the yoga context and into everyday life, two things happen.

The athlete practices far more than they would in a class.

And they start to connecting that everything in life is a performance opportunity if they want to gain the advantage. It can start before getting out of bed.

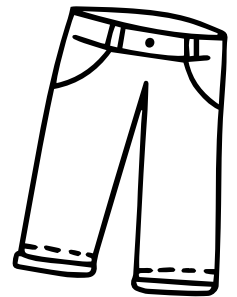
Consider that every session you teach has a takeaway.

One thing they can do at home, in the car, or before a match.

Make it simple.

Make it specific.

Make it theirs.



# READY TO TAKE THIS FURTHER?

---



The barrier to buy-in isn't yoga itself. It's how yoga is perceived in sport and how we communicate its value as teachers. These ten insights are a starting point for changing that.

The next step is having a complete, ready-to-teach yoga for soccer sequence in your hands. Built on the same movement science principles. Designed specifically for soccer players at any level. Trusted by elite players.

**Get the Yoga for Soccer Sequence** —→

**Instant Access World Cup Special: \$37 (~~\$97~~)**

Ready to go beyond the basics?

Our 40-Hour Yoga for Athletes Online Course gives you the science, teaching tools, and practical framework needed to confidently work with athletes.

**Explore our 40-Hour Online Course** —→

**Instant Access World Cup Special: \$497 (~~\$697~~)**

Includes the Yoga for Soccer Sequence, plus exclusive bonuses.

## Questions? Ideas? Curious About Working Together?

Whether you're new to yoga for athletes, ready to grow your current offering, or you're a coach or team exploring how yoga can support your players, I'd love to hear what you're working on.

Sometimes a short conversation is all it takes to find the next step.

**Get in touch.**