

This came from Emily Kulakowski who is a professional Yoga trainer for athletes
This was what she had written on her website.

I think it came from TED talk or questions asked to Olympic track participant. unknown
But I like what they have to say.

"The Olympic Games is an amazing display of athleticism, dedication, training, and each athlete's investment in their time and body. YSS™ took this as an opportunity to host a series of webinars discussing how yoga benefits athletes and how to integrate it in training. The YSS™ Olympic Series turned out great, with many coaches collaborating to share their wealth of knowledge in their respective specialties. I was humbled (and really nervous) to be asked to participate in the track and field discussion. THIS IS THE RECORDING OF SAID WEBINAR.
So let's get to it, *what are we looking for when training a track and field athlete?*

It's a pretty loaded question ...

There are more than 20 T&F events in the Olympics. Each with a unique demand and skill set. Without being painfully obvious, your first step would be to identify the events in which your athlete competes. And for potentially the most important detail: *identify the energy demands*. Whenever working with athletes, this is a crucial understanding. When you can identify the energy demands of the sport you will better understand how to prepare your athlete at a metabolic and cellular level. As a Yoga Sport™ Coach, this may not directly be your role, but understanding the sport helps you identify risks of injuries (as fatigue increases, so does the risk of injury) and the stresses they are putting on their body.

Now, what are some common injuries? This will take some research and maybe a conversation with their coach. **In T&F we see a lot of overuse injuries.** Within one event, there is not much variety of movement. The athlete is tasked to do one thing faster, longer, or higher than the athlete before and after. So they repeat that movement thousands of times leading up to competition. Imagine they are a 5,000m runner, taking millions of steps a week in training. Even throwers- their movements may be on varying planes with the component of complexity, but it is the same movement every time. Inevitably athletes will create imbalances and compensations. It is your job to identify those imbalances and work on balancing them out. Something as simple as a balanced kinetic chain can lower the risk of injury and reduce time spent away from training. Example: raise arms over head, do they reach the same range of motion? Do the shoulders move up towards the ear or is there a healthy scapular retraction? Maybe one lat is tighter holding more tension than the other ...

We see a lot of hamstring injuries in the sport. You will hear a lot of athletes, especially runners, complain of super tight hamstrings. But stop stretching them. Why are they tight? Figure *that* out and address the problem. A common issue is a lack of postural efficiency, that 'runner's' posture: shoulder rolled inward, pelvis tilted forward. That pelvic tilt is elongating the hammies and causing a mess in the deeper hip flexors. Work on that pelvic stability and opening the ribs (that slouched shoulder posture really crams up the rib cage). In the webinar we go over some of the very simple techniques I like to use to address these issues. And work on training the hamstring eccentrically. Doing Nordic hamstring lowers or slowing down the decent on a bridge can help strengthen the hamstrings in an eccentric state and prevent injury.

Pay attention to the groin, specifically the adductors. When our adductors are tight, it can actually rotate the femur (Hayley pulls up an awesome diagram in the webinar to display this) causing hypertonic hamstrings and making it difficult to tap into those hip flexors. Many times this may also lead to dreaded shin splints, when the femur rotates it forces the anterior tibial muscles to take a lot of stress. **I like the warrior poses for these**, you could even make them kneeling warrior poses. Not only does the warrior series create openness, but also brings awareness to recruiting muscles for stability and balance to support the pose. In other words, I need to pull this hip forward by squeezing my butt and tucking my belly button in, while my hip opens and adductors elongate.

Think about this: *Every T&F athlete spends a significant amount of time on one foot.* The mechanism of their time on one foot may vary: it may be an explosive jump or rotation, a sprint or long distance run. Let's be reminded, because you can do something fast doesn't mean you can do it slowly. Can you stand on one foot, hinge on one foot? These questions are important to expose any harmful imbalances. It means you as their coach need to pay attention to quite a few things to assure they are prepared to be on one foot:

- Can they comfortably stand on one leg, are both legs evenly strong? If not, we need to think about the glute med.
- Pay attention to the rigidity in their feet. We should be able to 'strum' our toes, or lift the big toe by itself. Try some simple ankle raises and foot rolls, [check out that blog I wrote about going barefoot.](#)
- Can they control the pelvis during movements (i.e. can they keep a neutral spine and pelvis in a lunge, or is there an anterior tilt? Trunk flexion?) There are a few implications to an anterior tilt:
- Stride length will suffer.
- A wobbly pelvic and core structure may indicate a weakness in the psoas. The psoas plays a very important role in hip flexion and maintaining posture.
- Hamstrings become hyperactive and overstretched. We talked about this already.

Work on their breathing. Many of these athletes don't want to work on something like breathing, it doesn't feel like we're doing much. This is a good teaching moment, explain why efficient breathing can be the marginal difference in their event. Also work in the mental advantages of taking controlling of your breath and thoughts. The world is a suddenly lonely place at the starting line, I had a team mate that threw up before every race. Think about the physical and mental energy wasted there. What if we practiced diaphragmatic breathing everyday, and when her nerves kicked in and heart rate elevated, she focused instead on her breathing and positive imagery? Not to mention the physiological benefits of accessing that dead space in your lungs (taking in more oxygen while using less energy and controlling your pace). [YSS™ has a great series for this here.](#)

T&F is one of the purest form of sport. It isn't subjective or biased. You're faster or your not; you jumped further, higher or you didn't. In that simplicity come a very small margin of error. Many races are won with tenths of a second. Yoga, and strength training for that matter, do not make you an olympian. But it can be the marginal difference to make you a healthier, more focused athlete. "