

By Dave Loveton, SBCC Sports Information



Hartz and Ybarra get their kicks from yoga

Yoga has been practiced for thousands of years but it's a relative rookie in the world of sports.

In the 1950s, Selvarajan Yesudian wrote the book "Sport and Yoga," exposing the practice to athletes worldwide. The book has been translated into 14 languages and has sold more than half-a-million copies. Yoga -- a series of postures and breathing exercises practiced to achieve control of the body and mind -- has been incorporated by many college and pro teams to reduce injuries while improving strength and focus.

According to the web site, yoga-central.net, more than 30 million people practice yoga on a regular basis.

More than 40 Vaquero athletes have hopped on the yoga train in the last few years, including punter Anthony Hartz and place-kicker Jeremy Ybarra of the football team. The women's basketball team has been stretching, breathing, relaxing and visualizing for the last three years and Coach Sandrine Krul is convinced that it's helped raise their free-throw percentage. A couple of baseball players are involved in the ancient Hindu practice, along with members of the soccer team.

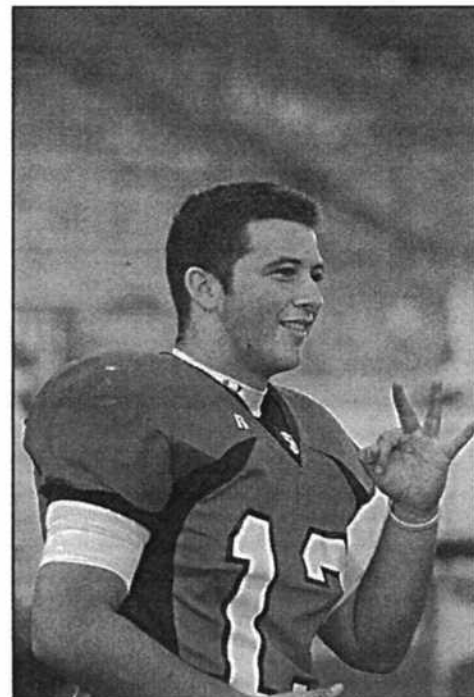
"It is important for athletes to be flexible in order to reduce their chances of injury," said Rosabeth Dorfhuber, who teaches yoga classes at SBCC. "Yoga is being used by pros in all sports now. There is value in including yoga and stretching in team conditioning programs."

Hartz, a sophomore from Oakland, set a school record with an 81-yard punt last year against Bakersfield.

"I got into yoga last year before the season since I was very unflexible and I heard yoga was a great way to get more flexible and also help prevent injury," noted Hartz. "Yoga helps loosen up my hips and makes my legs more flexible so I can get more reach. That produces more hang time and distance on the ball."



www.kjactionsports.com
Anthony Hartz



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Jeremy Ybarra

"After a few weeks of yoga classes, I started getting more hang time and more distance as well as being more consistent. I don't think I would have kicked that 81-yarder and had a 44-yard average in that game without taking yoga. I had a 77-yard punt in high school but it had a nice roll. The 81-yarder went far in the air and very high. I definitely thank yoga for helping with that one since you can see in the picture how high my leg got up, almost hitting me in the face."

Hartz, who boomed a 71-yarder last month against L.A. Southwest, is the No. 2 punter in the Western State Conference with a 38.8-yard average.

"I have yoga classes twice a week and Ms. Dorfhuber actually comes to (football) practice twice a week to work with the kickers," said Hartz. "This is a lot different from regular stretching. It also helps you with your focus and breathing. You actually try and breathe into the stretch so you can go farther and farther instead of going to a certain point, then switching the position."

Ybarra, a redshirt freshman from Santa Barbara High, got into yoga because of Hartz and his coaches. He's kicked seven field goals this year, highlighted by a pair from 41 and 40 yards in the season opener at Golden West.

Bobby Tanner, the Vaqueros' kicking coach, thinks yoga is a great tool.

"It really helps with flexibility and muscle strength," he said. "They have to do explosive training on their own. Hartz is a little tight and he needs a better follow-through -- that's how you get hang-time on the ball. Just watch him punt, from the start of the season till now. He's gotten his leg higher and it's much closer to his facemask."