

BIOENERGETIC EXERCISES AND OTHER PRACTICES OF BODY AWARENESS: THE EFFECT ON ENDURANCE-SPORT ATHLETES AFTER 8 WEEKS OF PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

Bioenergetics works may comprehend exercises, which help people come in contact with their chronic tensions and learn how to release them using the proper movements. People who practice these kind of exercises experienced some advantages in their amount of energy, in their mood, and in their performances (at their job or in other activities). These exercises also help improve posture, allow for deeper breathing, and increase self-esteem. However, empirical research on the impact of different types of bioenergetic exercises on adults in general, and especially on athletes, is still insufficient.

The study is a small step towards filling the gap. We analyzed the effect of the bioenergetics exercises and of some mindfulness and yoga techniques on the reduction of the physical and mental stress levels. This produced an improvement of athletic performances, of general health conditions, of mood and of some important parameters (Heart Rating, VO2 Maximum, aerobic strength) which are fundamental for the effort required to participate in endurance sports such as running, cycling, triathlon and which also caused a reduced risk of injury. In particular, this pilot study used a mixed method approach, combining a qualitative questionnaire with a pre-test and post-test experiment over two periods, with a control group, in order to understand how an eight week training period, including bioenergetic exercises, yoga, and mindfulness exercises can decrease stress levels, improve joint flexibility and influence health and wellness in a cross-section of professional and recreational athletes.

OBJECTIVES

The goals of the present pilot study were to explore the utility of a bioenergetic exercise training, combined with yoga and mindfulness practices, in order to allow a reduction of mental and physical stress levels and to reach an improvement of athletic performances and a reduced risk of injury; to improve general health conditions, mood and, finally, to create an improvement of some important effort parameters (Heart Rating, VO2 Maximum, aerobic strength) necessary for endurance sport activities such as running, cycling, and triathlon.

In particular, our basic questions as research hypothesis were the following:

1. Does measurable evidence exist which proves that bioenergetic exercises, together with yoga and mindfulness exercises, play an important role in the improvement of competitive performance?

2. Do bioenergetic exercises help athletes to reduce the physical and emotional stress in their competition?

Our research also had a social function, not quantifiable with numbers or data, which was to promote a healthy-sport culture, in which the greatest goal of the professional or recreational athletes is to maintain their psycho-physical health.

METHOD

The eight-week training was specifically created for this research study and incorporated several exercise techniques which included Bioenergetics, as well as some Yoga and Mindfulness practices.

The eight-week training took place with weekly group meetings (eight total meetings - 2 months) in which various types of bioenergetic exercises, along with yoga and mindfulness techniques, were taught and practiced. The participants were asked to repeat those same exercises everyday at home and during their sport training (before or after), filling in a diary of their training.

We worked on two different periods of time. In 2014 we conducted the first session of the study (eight weeks - February/April), with an experimental group and a control group. In 2015 we conducted the same study (eight weeks - February/April), but only on an experimental group, testing them before and after the training.

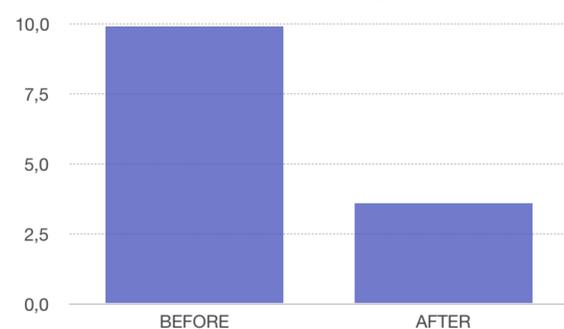
TEST

Since our aim was to study not only physical markers, but also physiological, hormonal, and psychological factors, we decided to use the following tests:

- POMS (Profile Of Mood States) – McNair et al. 1971
- PGWBI (Psychological General Well Being Index) – Chassany et al. 2004
- Spirometry test
- Heart rate monitoring under strain
- IRI Test (Immediate Recovery heart rate Index)
- Salivary cortisol test
- Joint mobility test
- Strength aerobic test – Cooper Test, 1968

RESULTS

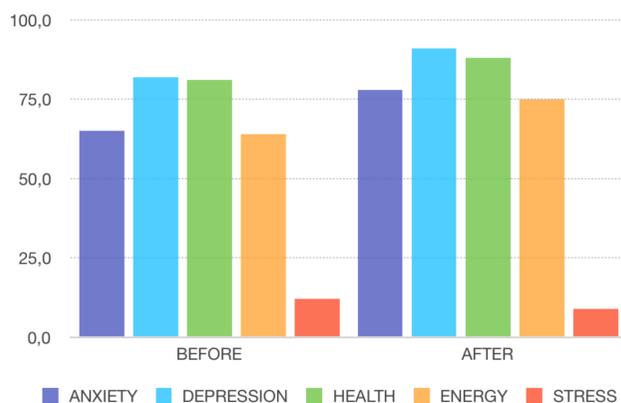
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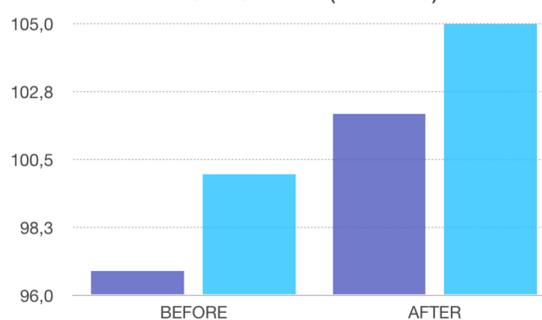
JOINT RIGIDITY



PSYCHOLOGICAL RELIEFS



SPIROMETRY (FEV - FVC)



- 75% of participants perceived changes in their approach to training and competition, in their level of individual well-being, in their mental ability to manage their emotions during competition.

- 62.5% registered an increased ability to better manage fatigue and practice workloads and an improvement in individual performances.

- No injuries were registered in the six months following the training.

- 100% of participants increased their own personal best time during their competitions

CONCLUSIONS

This study therefore highlights a positive correlation between the practice of bioenergetic exercises as well as other body awareness exercises (yoga and mindfulness) and the practice of endurance sports by professional and recreational athletes. The study shows in particular a reduction of stress during competition, a reduction of muscular tension, an improvement of overall health and psycho-physical well-being and a reduction of injuries. It should be noted that the study was a qualitative research and a pilot study which may represent a first step leading towards further studies that may confirm these findings.