

LA YOGA

AYURVEDA AND HEALTH

JULY/AUGUST 2010
VOLUME 9 / NO. 6

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S
FREE YOGA MAGAZINE

LAYOGAMAGAZINE.COM

can yoga make you a superhero?

yes! says
kids and students
NBA players
musicians
and lady yoga

yoga for kids and
youth in LA

bhakti fest and
wanderlust
moments

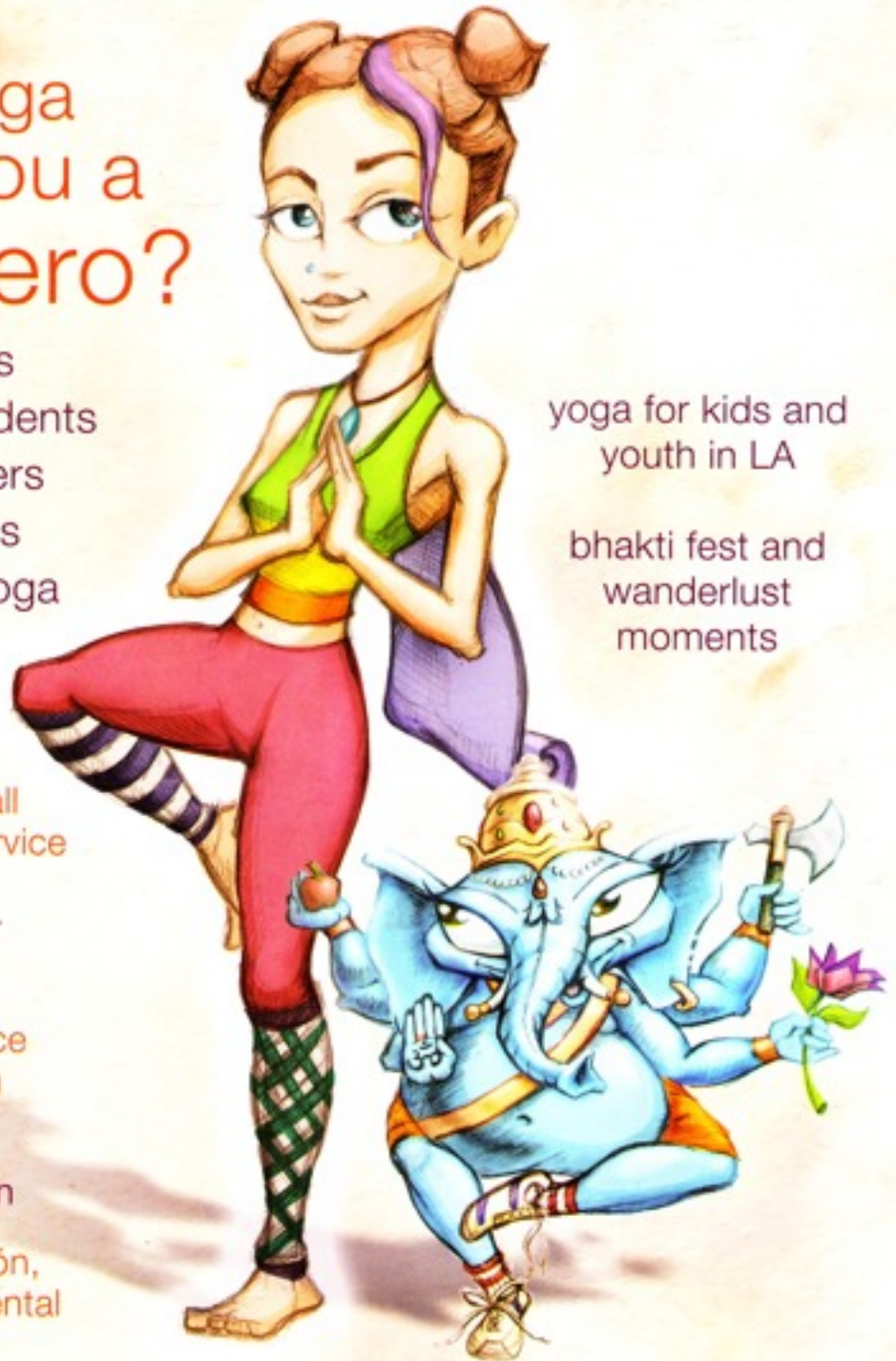
musician trevor hall
talks yoga, god & service

bare your feet for
better health

create sacred space
for optimal health

10 suggestions
for better digestion

cambia tu respiración,
cambia tu estado mental



YOGA Warriors

Think you're too tough for yoga?

By Heidi Creed

Yoga. The word alone evokes thoughts of tranquility and mindfulness, and stereotypes of flexible women in tight-fitting outfits contorting their bodies in many seemingly unnatural ways.

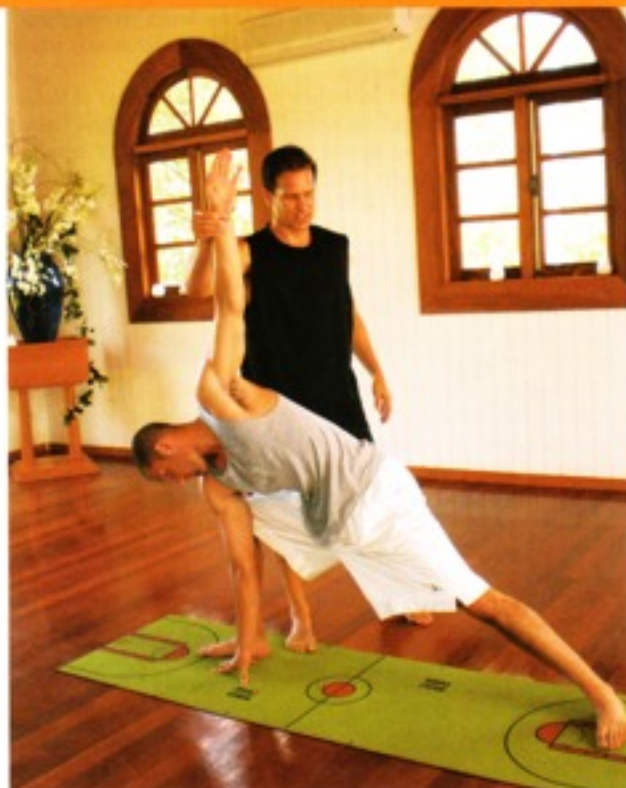
But a yoga class with 7-foot tall, exceedingly athletic men with limited flexibility? This is not a natural image to conjure.

"Yoga is so many things," says Kent Katich, owner of Yoga Court in Westwood. "It can be meditative, it can be a workout, it can be a school or even a service. ... It is not just about chanting and speaking the Sanskrit language. There is just a time and a place for all of it, and my job is to make sure these guys benefit from it."

Katich, 46, is not your "typical" yoga instructor. While physically he appears to be the pillar of fitness, and laid-back and friendly, he has this unexpected touch of feistiness about him where your mind thinks "coach" well before "yoga instructor." You have to when it's your job to work with people who make a living in the fast lane.

As the only on-staff yoga coach in professional sports, Katich is known as the NBA Yoga Guru. He primarily works for and travels with the Los Angeles Clippers, and has for the last seven years, but trains clients in every city they play, ultimately making up 25-30 percent of the NBA players. Plus he works out several professional baseball players too.

Clippers' all-star center Chris Kaman explains how Kent has made him a believer, "It's a lot more challenging than I thought. I'd mostly seen women practicing yoga and thought there would be chanting or something, so I wasn't sure how it could help a 7-



foot basketball player. I kind of figured it could improve my flexibility but didn't realize how much strength was involved."

Yoga Arena

Katich's studio reflects his clientele: tall and narrow. "Most traditional studios just don't work for my clients," Katich gestures upward toward the 20-something-foot high ceiling. "When a 7-foot-3 person reaches up, they're at 10 feet right there. The average ceiling is under 10 feet tall, so they'd start having problems before they even start."

Yoga Court is nestled in a quiet, non-descript courtyard, in the heart of an otherwise bustling Westwood neighborhood. The entry way is not dramatic nor does a beautiful receptionist nursing a wheat grass shot greet you. It's just one spacious, coolly painted yellowish room with hickory floors and a lot of natural light. And the upbeat sounds of Bob Marley, John Mayer, or maybe even Nelly filling the air. Nelly? As in *Hot in Herre Nelly*? In a yoga studio?

"I like to play music that allows them to feel comfortable. I try to read their mood or let them choose what they want to listen to. ... Every once in a while I throw in the Tibetan monk chants when the mood is right," smiles Katich.

Early On

How does a born-and-raised boy from Iowa become a "yoga guru" with privileged access to elite athletes around the country? For starters, Katich was actually a standout basketball player himself. He spent a season in the mid-'80s playing professionally in Sweden.

"One of the guys I was playing with kept doing headstands and I had never seen anyone in better shape, so he got me curious. ... When I left Europe the seed had been planted but I didn't know what I was looking for, so I tried a few yoga classes. One was almost an aerobics class, and another we sat in lotus for an



hour. Finally I found a flow class where I could participate without having to invest in a process I didn't understand," Katich explains.

He took a six-month hiatus from basketball, but practiced a lot of yoga during that time. "When I went back to play, I had never played better. My reaction time was better. I just had this court/body awareness that I didn't have before. And that was when I realized how much yoga was about conditioning, not just a dot on your head and chants as it's stereotyped.

"So I thought if it could help me this much, it could help them too. Plus, yoga gives you a longevity that weights and running aren't going to do. Sports are so brunt-oriented - run more, lift more. But that's just not good for long term health."

Katich went on to accomplish thousands of participation hours and completed a formal study with YogaWorks founders Chuck Miller and Maty Ezraty.

Path to Success

Keeping elite level clients committed can't be learned in a classroom. Since he's carved out his niche, Katich has used his natural instincts and personal experience to hone his teaching skills according to this particular demographic.

"I have had to find ways to earn their trust because yoga can be humbling and challenging. I'm asking them to open up and create a sense of vulnerability - something these guys definitely aren't used to doing in their line of work," he explains.

This is not to say that non-professional athletes don't have vulnerabilities, but "these guys get paid to use their bodies and their profession is about a lot of ego, so you can't expect to keep their attention if you start out with calm breathing. I get them moving right away."

He also avoids using the jargon commonly associated with yoga. "How can I get them to trust me if I'm talking about things they don't understand? It just gives them fodder for later," adding, "you know, they say things like 'yeah, I wouldn't feel this way if you didn't make me get into that tortilla or whatever you call it earlier today.' They just don't need any extra opportunities

to joke. These guys do it non-stop, all day. It's like having a bunch of brothers and I have to detach to make sure I can keep them focused when they need to be."

Benefits for Basketball

Since basketball players tend to have ankle and hip issues, he focuses in particular on exercises to loosen up those joints. A few common ones include the dog series, warrior series, half-moon, hero and tree poses. His goal is to get his clients to a point where they can and will use these exercises on their own as tools to keep them feeling good.

Katich has seen this goal realized with many players, and Mike Dunleavy, Jr. of the Indiana Pacers is just one of them.

"I'm coming back from hip surgery so working with Kent has helped me get more range of motion in the hip and understand functional movement as it relates to basketball. The yoga also gives me peace of mind because I have a stretching and breathing system I can practice during the season even when we're on the road," Dunleavy says.

All-Access

You don't have to be a pro to get access to Kent's "playbook." He generally teaches three classes per week at his Yoga Court studio, and offers several private and semi-private sessions when he is not traveling with the team.

However, if the studio vibe isn't your thing and you prefer the comfort of your home, Katich has a series of DVDs that work you through the same movements as the "big boys."

"Yoga has been commercialized really in such a feminine way that a lot of men don't want to give it a chance," says Katich. That's why he created his Yogaletics line. "It's a very sports-oriented approach that showcases the athletic side of the discipline." His kits and videos are sold at Best Buy and Sports Chalet, as well as online. He also has a unique collection of sports-inspired yoga mats that come in football, soccer, baseball, and of course, basketball. <<

yogacourt.com

