

Should Yoga Be an Olympic Sport?

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USA Yoga is seeking to become the national governing body of the sport, and has applied to the United States Olympic committee to be officially registered.



For the over-worked and anxiety-ridden, yoga can be a great way to relax. So just in case it becomes too relaxing, why not turn it into a competition we can stress about?

While we're at it, why not ramp up the pressure and turn it into an Olympic sport? USA Yoga, which is campaigning to get yoga asana, or posture yoga, recognized as just that, will be putting on the National Yoga Asana Championship on March 2-4 in New York.

During the competition, participants will assume yoga poses before a panel of judges. In three minutes, each competitor will perform five mandatory postures — standing head-to-knee pose, standing bow-pulling pose, bow pose, rabbit pose, and stretching pose. After that, they'll perform two poses of their choosing. The poses are meant to exemplify "how someone can have perfect strength, balance, flexibility in the body," Rajashree Choudhury, founder of USA Yoga, told the Associated Press. The competition focuses on the physical feats of yoga rather than the spiritual or meditative aspects.

Those who manage to combine their competitive edge with their inner peace and win this week's competition in New York will then head to Los Angeles in June for an international championship. According to Choudhury, yoga competitions are common in India, where the practice originated. She took part in them growing up, and so did her husband, Bikram, who founded the increasingly popular Bikram Yoga, which involves a series of 26 postures in a room heated to around 105 degrees Fahrenheit.

The competition should appeal to the more competitive athlete than the meditative type: Choudhury said the competitions emphasize the athletic side of yoga, aiming to pique the interest of athletes who might be put off by the spiritual aspects.

Some argue that turning yoga into a competition diminishes the values it ultimately aims to promote. Roseanne Harvey of Montreal, Canada, told the AP, "The roots of yoga are based in acceptance and non-violence and compassion toward self and others." She said in most classes, "what we're trying to do is encourage students not to compete."

USA Yoga is seeking to become the national governing body of yoga asana, and has applied to the United States Olympic committee to be officially registered. The organization hopes to form an international yoga federation and to qualify for the 2016 Olympic Games.

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