Do real men do yoga?

Paul Clements discovers why it’s no longer solely the preserve of the fairer sex

Are you one of the tens of thousands in the UK who have discovered the wonders of yoga? No, me neither. I don’t know my asana from my elbow – but lately it seems as though everybody else does. Even footballers: Ryan Giggs was so pleased that downward dogging helped him become one of the oldest players in the Premiership, he released a “yoga for men” DVD. Leading sportsmen, from Andy Murray and Evander Holyfield to the entire New Zealand All Blacks, rave about how yoga tones muscle, improves flexibility and increases endurance.

According to the current issue of Men’s Health, one pose in particular – kapotasana – is gaining popularity. My colleague Matt Julian, the general manager of the Third Space fitness club in central London for a taster session. Matt Julian, the general manager and his yoga instructor, agrees that yoga is no longer the preserve of the fairer sex – if it ever was: “Originally, women weren’t allowed to do yoga,” says Matt. “When yoga began in India, women were not allowed to practise as they were considered obstacles to enlightenment.”

For blokes, it’s more a case of asking yourself: am I man enough? There are plenty of moves that men are better at than women – such as this.” He drops to the floor, into a squat, and performs a mini handstand – the Crow. Can yoga get much more manly than that?

Matt, who did his first sun salutation four years ago – “when I could barely touch my toes” – now has the zeal to make up a routine. Given there are dozens, if not hundreds, of variants, he recommends a beginner like myself might benefit from vinyasa flow, a dynamic power yoga based on a series of key poses that you combine into circuits.

How hard can it be to join generation flex? It’s tougher on the ego than the muscles, says Matt. “Guys don’t like feeling the worst in the class. It’s not conventionally competitive, but you are competing with yourself to maintain your breathing and pose.”

Matt shows me a few key moves – the sun salutation, downward dog and warrior – all of which have Sanskrit names which I promptly forget, and require both strength and that you breathe in and out through the nose “like Darth Vader.” I can do that.

To my surprise, I can also do some of the stretches and hold some of the trickier poses (ta-dah, bending-over backwards bridge!). I can almost keep up with Matt’s flow of contortions, too. It’s aerobics meets Twister. “Can you feel the heat building up and a sweat coming on?” he asks. We’re only a minute in, and I am already dripping wet.

For such a deceptively simple circuit workout, I feel a furnace-like glow at the end. I can also see myself of a few poses – and the breathing – I can see myself through the nose “like Darth Vader.”

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The world would be a better place if more men did yoga.”

If I could just get the hang of a few poses – and the breathing – I can see myself doing a 10-minute session on the yoga mat every so often, before work or after a gym workout. I feel myself going native. “Good,” says Matt. “The world would be a better place if more men did yoga.”

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