

# TennisLife

MAGAZINE



**Wimbledon 2009**

**French Open 2009**

**US Open 2008**

**US Open 2007**

**Wimbledon 2007**

**Australian Open 2007**

**US Open 2006**

**Wimbledon 2006**

**Australian Open 2006**

**US Open 2005**

**Wimbledon 2005**

**US Open 2004**

**Wimbledon 2004**

**Australian Open 2004**

**Wimbledon 2003**

**US OPEN  
PREVIEW!**

SEPTEMBER 2009

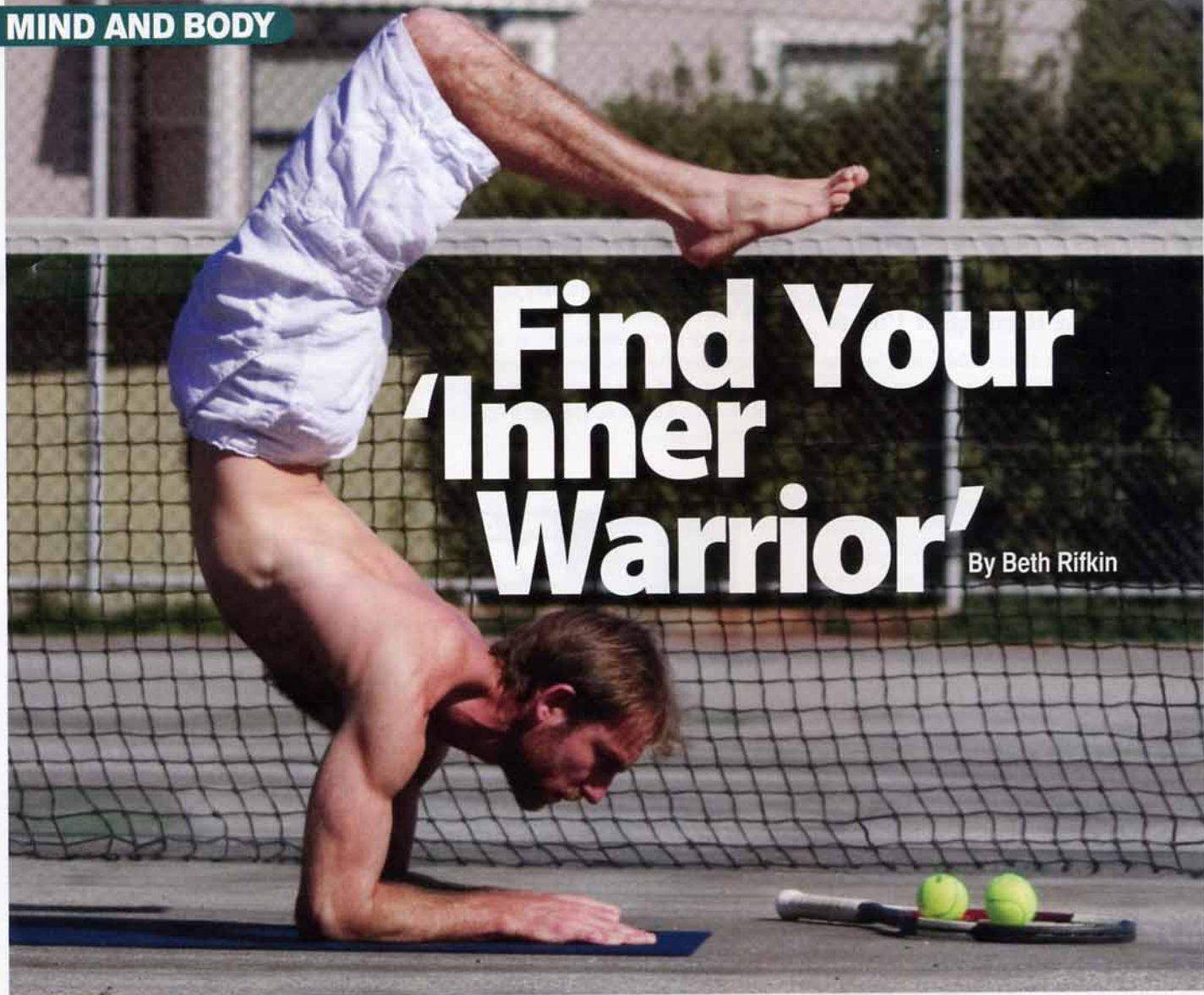
\$4.99



tennislife.com

NON-PROFIT  
PRESRT STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
THE GOLDMAN  
GROUP

PO BOX 270, LUTZ, FL 33559



# Find Your 'Inner Warrior'

By Beth Rifkin

**Yoga can help you control focus and concentration, so on court you'll "respond," not "react."**

**O**n a warm March evening during the round of 16 at Indian Wells, Calif., world No. 1 Rafael Nadal is confronted by match point, for the fourth time, from his friend and opponent, Argentine David Nalbandian. Amid the pressure from the crowd, the fans, his team, and his competitor, Nadal, who had recently won his sixth Grand Slam, is an image of calm, taking his time, never wavering or breaking his concentration; he turns his focus inside and reaches for success.

Just over 400 miles north in San Francisco, sweat is dripping off the students in Diego Del Sol's class at the Yoga Tree studios. Del Sol, a yoga instructor for over 12 years, has a distinctive way of raising body temperatures without the use of artificial heat. As he leads the class into the next of a long line of challenging yoga

poses, his ever-present calm voice directs the student's minds away from doubt and fear and onto their breathing, soothing anxieties and instilling confidence, until success is reached.

The commonalities between Nadal and Del Sol—courage, discipline, determination and strength—are the traits of a warrior.

## Mastering Your Focus

"Yoga is for enhancing a person on all levels," says Del Sol, who has been named best private yoga instructor by *San Francisco Magazine* and is a tennis and soccer player. "The yoga master has the heart, mind and body of a champion, so the tennis player is a yoga master. The professional tennis player is already using yogic principles to get to the top of their game."

Those principles are restraint, observance, strength, breathing, withdrawal of senses,

## The Power of Breathing

One of the basics of yoga, the breath, is also vital for the tennis player. In yoga it is said that as your breath is restricted, so is your life. "The breath is a direct link to vitality, energy and control," says Del Sol. "The breath can help you concentrate, hone the mind and make it so sharp that it's like a laser."

Focusing on the breath brings us completely into the present moment—we only have the breath of today, not of yesterday or tomorrow. Therefore, by putting our attention on the present, our concentration can deepen, and we're able to block out unnecessary distractions, like missed shots, the crowd or the chair.

Del Sol and Brewer advocate continuous long deep breaths, inhaled and slowly exhaled through the nose with the mouth shut. —B.R.

concentration, meditation and enlightenment—the eight limbs of yoga. All of them help a tennis player to master calm, focus and concentration—crucial for staying on top of the increasing intensity and power of today's game.

Documented in the journal *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* in 2007, yoga's combination of challenging poses with mindfulness changes the way the autonomic nervous system responds to stress and anxiety. By preventing or controlling the onset of the fight-or-flight response, your brain has the chance to stay present within the heat of the moment, think clearly and make the right decision.

Like Roger Federer, for example, as ATP world number 26 Dmitry Tursunov observes while discussing mental strength on the court: "Roger is human and he makes mistakes, but he deals with them much better than most. It's that little difference that makes a very big difference."

Tapping into your inner warrior on the yoga mat can change your perception on the court. Difficult situations become manageable, allowing you to compete with fluidity and confidence.

"Athletes perform best when they relax," says Tennis Channel's One Minute Clinics tennis fitness expert Adam Brewer, of TenXFitness, who regularly incorporates yoga into his clients' conditioning programs. "The goal on the court is to stay calm no matter how tense the situation."

Del Sol agrees, "If a player has uncontrollable fears or doubts, they will come out on the court while under pressure."

### Automating the Process

Pro players Andy Murray and Dinara Safina both are known for allowing their emotions to get the better of them during crucial moments in a match. But they've both been addressing this over the past year, with astounding results. Altering their mental reactions during competition has enabled each to push through service breaks, double faults and bad line calls and go on to confidently defeat their opponents.

"That instinctual move that you want to make usually isn't the best play; it's crucial to respond rather than react," says Brewer, who in the past has trained with Bjorn Borg. "A regular yoga practice automates that process, allowing the player to call on it faster and faster on the court."

"It's imperative for the player to stay flexible, open and responsive to what's happening—just respond to the tennis ball. That's the kind of self-discipline that naturally flows from a yoga practice. It's muscle memory, exactly the same as hitting a thousand forehands over and over."

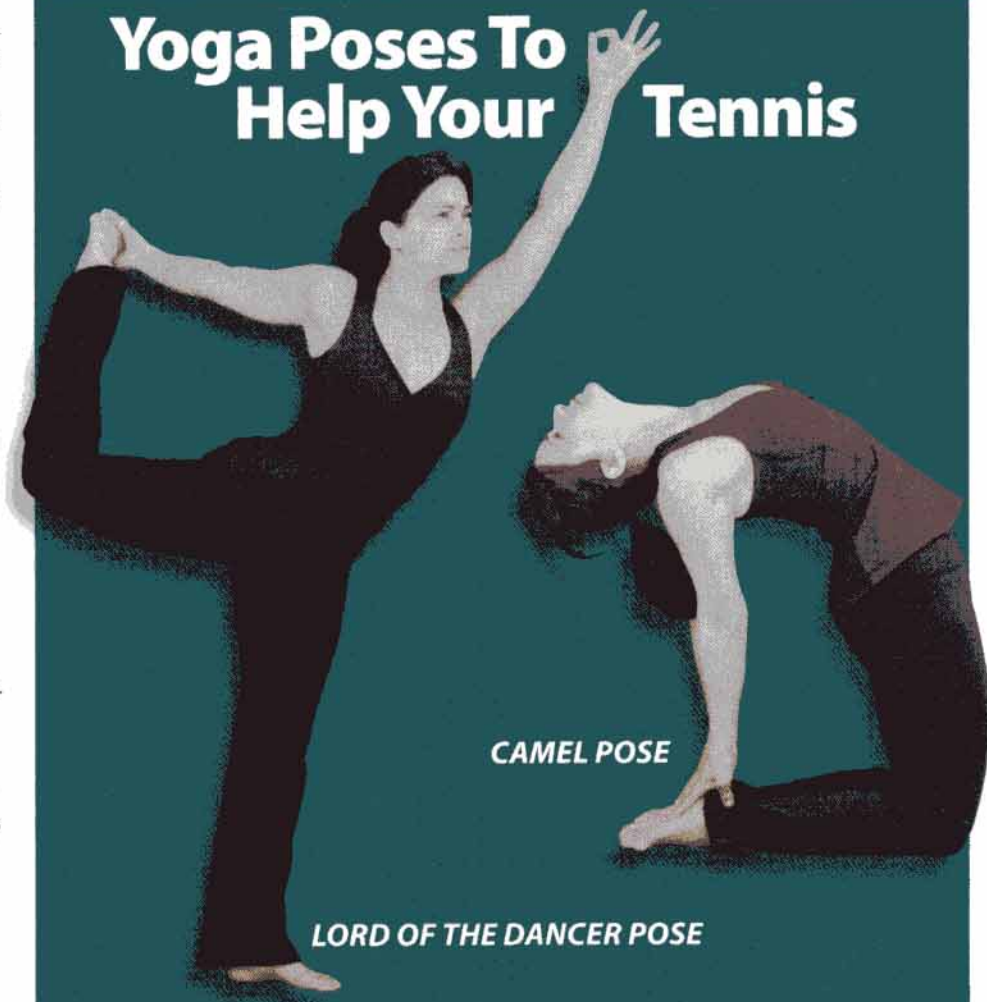
"Yoga is the art of knowing one's self by looking deeply within," says Del Sol. "It requires a steady dedication to practice. Put in the hours, always challenge yourself, never give up and the benefits will transfer into your game on the court." ☺

Photo left: Diego Del Sol, Yoga instructor, in Scorpion pose ("Vrischika-asana")

Photos right: Deanna Brolly, Yoga instructor and personal trainer

Photo Credit: Faerworks (faerworks.com), San Francisco

# Yoga Poses To Help Your Tennis



CAMEL POSE

LORD OF THE DANCER POSE

**While all yoga practices should be tailored to the individual, these five poses ("asanas"), recommended by Del Sol and Brewer, condition a tennis player's body to work in one synchronized movement while also improving strength, agility, endurance and flexibility.**

**Downward-Facing Dog ("Adho Mukha Svanasana"):** Both a strength building and resting pose that calms the brain and helps relieve stress while also energizing the body. Down-dog stretches the back, hamstrings and calves, and builds power in the shoulders and core.

**High Lunge with a Twist:** Much of your time on the court is spent balancing on one leg with a rotation. High lunge with a twist can help with efficiency and agility by improving balance, increasing strength of the lower body, opening up the hips, stretching the thigh, elongating the spine and opening the chest.

**Warrior II ("Virabhadrasana II"):** Warrior II is an empowering stance that allows one to see through illusions and act with courage and focus. The classic pose builds strength and stamina in the legs and ankles, works the shoulders and helps to relieve backaches.

**Camel ("Ustrasana"):** Camel pose is a member of the backbend family and helps to relieve fatigue and anxiety. It stretches the entire front of the body, ankles, thighs and groin. It also helps with spinal mobility while strengthening the back and giving the deep hip-flexors a nice stretch.

**Lord of the Dancer Pose ("Natarajasana"):** Tennis is like a dance—often done on one leg. This pose helps develop stability while building strength in the legs and ankles, and it stretches everything from the shoulders down to the thighs.