

How does a professional football team prepare for the Super Bowl? Aside from typical running, throwing and strength training drills, the championship-bound New York Giants also reap the athletic benefits of season-long [yoga sessions](#).

Gwen Lawrence, celebrity yoga coach and spokesperson for Gaiam TV, has been teaching yoga for 22 years and working with the New York Giants for 11 years.

“The Giants were my first professional team,” Lawrence said, who specializes in different forms of yoga, including Iyengar, Hatha, and Ashtanga Vinyasa, to engage the entire body and mind.

Lawrence, who also works with the [New York Knicks](#), Rangers and members of the [Yankees](#), said she works with the Giants twice a week during pre-season to get the players in shape and prepare their bodies for the upcoming year.

“These are pretty active, high intensity classes,” Lawrence said. “We do a lot of long, deep holds, some vinyasa.”

Vinyasa yoga, or “power yoga,” focuses on the alignment of movement and breath. Each of the [yoga poses](#) are connected in flowing movements from one to the next.

During the season, however, Lawrence said, her approach with the team changes.

“In-season, I come in on Mondays and do post-game restorative work with the players,” she said. “I can’t just go in there and kick their butts and expect full-body participation.”

The routine can change week-to-week, according to Lawrence, depending on how the players are feeling and which areas – such as their legs or their backs – are giving them problems.

“You also have to take into account the different positions,” Lawrence said. “An offensive lineman is obviously different than a receiver – the demands on their bodies are different – but there are basic moves that benefit any position.”

Among these moves, Lawrence’s post-game favorites include pigeon poses, frog poses and hero poses.

The pigeon pose is a hip stretch that is done by bringing one knee forward and bending the leg in front of the body on the floor, while stretching the other leg out behind you. Your arms can be placed on the ground beside your or held above your head.

“It’s a really deep hip opener that keeps your hips open and flexible,” Lawrence said. “It also reduces strain and stress on vulnerable knees.

The frog pose, meanwhile, is done by lying face down, spreading your knees out on both sides and balancing on your heels, like a frog. Extend your arms, one at a time, out on the floor in front of you. The position opens the groin area and provides a slight back bend.

Finally, the hero pose is done by kneeling on the floor, with your thighs touching, perpendicular to the floor. Set your feet apart slightly wider than your hips, with the tops of the feet flat on the floor and your big toes angled slightly inward.

“It’s kneeling, keeping the quads open, and the ankles flexible and strong,” Lawrence said.

All three of the moves, she said, are meant to improve flexibility, strength and prevent injuries. “My philosophy is, strength plus flexibility equals power on the field. Doing these moves not only keeps players less injury prone – because a tight, rigid body is more likely to crack and break – but they also translate into power.

“Think of it this way,” Lawrence explained. “You have a bow and arrow, and the bow string is strong and unbreakable, but if it’s too tight, you can only pull it back an inch and the arrow flops down on the ground. But when the string is flexible, you can pull it far back, and the arrow has more power.”

“When joints are open, strong and flexible like this, they can create more power with less effort on the field. That way, they can stay on the field longer and win the game in the end.”

But physical toughness isn’t the only important benefit the players derive from yoga training, according to Lawrence.

“We’re working on mental toughness, too,” she said. “Sometimes you have players with pre-game anxiety, and the breathing techniques they learn in yoga can help them cope.”

Lawrence described how she helped a former Super Bowl champ deal with a medical condition while playing the game.

“One of the players I worked with – Amani Toomer [who played for the New York Giants the last time they won the Super Bowl in 2008] – he had asthma, and I taught him specific breathing techniques to help with that.”

The best aspect of practicing yoga with the players, Lawrence said, is that the moves aren’t solely meant for Super Bowl contenders.

“I work with regular people and hear their problems; and I’ve worked with athletes for so long, I understand theirs as well – and honestly, it’s very similar,” Lawrence said. “I have my athletes, but I also have my soccer moms and other people, and they love it. It works well into their lives – and this goes across the board. It’s not just an athlete thing.”

Read more: <http://www.foxnews.com/health/2012/02/03/yoga-how-new-york-giants-prepare-for-super-bowl/#ixzz1lkpkVkAE>