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When people think of sailing, they probably picture guys flipping burgers in the back of the boat, drinking beer and cruising the harbor – but real sailors know the athletic side of the sport.

I spent my college years racing Flying Juniors on the Charles River in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. At 5'11, and 110 pounds, I made a perfect size crew for light wind days, but during puffs – I'd hike out as far as I could until my abs burned and my fingers were raw from trimming the jib. At the time, I didn't know that yoga is excellent cross training for sailing, but I do now, and fortunately, my husband, Rob, reaps the benefits.

Rob is an All-American college sailor, but like many collegiate athletes after graduation, he landed an office job and spent most of his time sitting behind a desk, and less time driving a boat. His strength and flexibility deteriorated. He was devastated, assuming his sailing career was over because of chronic back pain.

Yoga became a part of his life after we were married, and today, he is a jib trimmer for the United States Team for the British American Cup and races his J22 throughout the Northeastern United States – pain-free.

Whether you're racing a Laser or setting a spinnaker on a 40-footer - sailing requires strength, balance, flexibility and endurance. Sailors can achieve all these things for optimum performance on and off the water by practicing yoga a couple of times a week.

Whether you're tired from being hunched deep down in the cockpit, losing circulation in your legs, hiking until your back breaks, or grinding winches until your shoulders are on fire - use power yoga to prepare, get race-ready, and push your boat to the limit, not your body.

Try this power yoga routine designed to strengthen muscles specifically used by sailors, as well as increase flexibility, and improve balance and endurance.



Plank (whole body): Plank is one of my favorite poses because it strengthens the entire body, from head to toe and everything in between. Start on all fours, with your hands under your shoulders. Lift your knees off the floor until you are in one long line from your heels to your head. Engage your core and quadriceps. Don't let your hips sag or lift. Hold 30-60 seconds.

Downward facing dog (stretches hamstrings, strengthens shoulder girdle): From plank, raise your hips in the air to form an inverted V shape. Pull your core in toward your spine and reach your heels to the floor until you feel the stretch up the backs of your legs. Flow from plank to downward facing dog 5-10 times.

Tadasana (mountain pose): Stand tall with your feet together. Spread your toes out wide and engage your core. Arms can be down by your sides or reaching up into the air. Maintain shoulder girdle connection and feel your weight in your feet.

Chair Pose (Quadriceps/core/ankles): Stand in mountain pose with your feet together and reach your arms toward the sky, palms together. Squat down as if you were going to sit down in an imaginary chair, get your quadriceps parallel to the floor and keep your chest lifted. Hold for 5-10 breaths.

Warrior III (Halyard guys, this is for you! Balance): Stand in mountain pose with your arms by your side. Exhale and lean your torso forward, while raising your left leg back until it's parallel to the floor. Keep your hips square to the floor. (Arms can stay at your side, or reach forward to increase intensity.) Hold for 5-10 breaths.

Flat-bottomed Boat Pose (abdominals-beginner): Sit with legs extended out to 45 degrees from the floor and round your back until your weight rests on the sacrum (the flat bottom of the boat). Hands can reach toward toes or be behind the head. Hold 10-30 breaths.

Boat pose with a keel (abdominals-intermediate): Start sitting and extend legs to 45 degrees from the floor. Lean back (flat back) until your weight rests just back of your sitting bones creating a V shape with your body. Collarbone wide. Hold 10-30 breaths.

Locust (back): Lying prone, facedown, arms to your side, legs together. Start by squeezing your shoulder blades in toward the spine and down your back to open the collarbone and lift your head and chest off the floor. Contract the buttocks and lift the feet. Hold 5-10 breaths and release. Repeat 3-4 times.

Hand massage: Using lotion, gently press your thumb into the joints of the opposite hand and wrist to release tension and soften cracks in the skin. Shake out hands frequently to avoid cramping and carpal tunnel-like symptoms.