

all-American wide receiver for the Chicago Bears and Los Angeles Raiders and an Olympic athlete in sprinting and bobsledding, also credits his success in sport to extensive training in ballet.

Today, there are plenty of athletes in various sports who have taken up ballet to improve core stability, dexterous leg and footwork, to correct hip alignment and pelvic instability, to prevent injuries, and for rehabilitation purposes. For example, Canadian hockey goaltender Ray Emery, currently with the Chicago Blackhawks, was told that his playing career was finished due to a bone condition known as avascular necrosis. His daily training routine after surgery included ballet, yoga, Pilates, and swimming to strengthen the core, hip, and thigh muscles, which helped him resume his playing career. It's not just football and hockey players who report benefitting from ballet. Recently, British world-class swimmers have taken up ballet as cross training and for warm-up purposes. Liam Tancock, who holds the world record in the 50m backstroke and competed in the 2008 Olympic Games, had this to say about ballet to swimnews.com: "[It's] very physical and you need a lot of strength and precision. They [dancers] make it look effortless but it requires a lot of concentration. You become more aware of your body and what your limbs are doing, how you're positioning your limbs, fingers and toes."

Elite swimmers such as Tancock recognize that dancers not only deserve great admiration for their daily rigorous workouts, work ethic, and dedication, but also for their concentration and focus on physical and mental components.

As a former elite swimmer myself, I know I benefitted a great deal from dance training. So it was a natural step for me as a coach to modify concepts from dance to create a Long-term Athlete Development model from a Calgary-based study of 24 young athletes and their progress over eight years. Ballet was incorporated into the program as one type of cross training. The athletes in this study tested well below Canadian national fitness norms for their respective age group at the start of the project but were off the charts by the end of the study, thus demonstrating the positive effects of ballet as a cross-training activity. Ballet helped to enhance their physical and athletic abilities to achieve an efficient and more effortless movement repertoire.

The artistic and aesthetic nature of ballet still creates lots of stereotypes, especially among males. But ballet offers much more than layers of tulle and satin ribbons. It develops strength, balance, and overall athleticism. Because of this, athletes and coaches should be encouraged to consider the potential benefits to be gained from ballet.

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