



AYURVEDIC COACHING

THE SCIENCE OF LIFE

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During the winter when I was traveling through India, I kept coming across Ayurvedic signs. I even stumbled into a “World Ayurvedic Conference” with plenty of booths selling magic potions curing everything from arthritis to cancer. Despite all of the pamphlets and experts around me, I didn’t really understand what it all meant and why it was so prevalent in India, yet only remotely visible in my own Western community.

One of the intentions of my trip was to stay in ashrams to meditate, do yoga and to learn from the spiritual culture. I discovered that a number of the yogis actually had PhDs in yoga. I thought seven years of study to teach a downward dog was quite extreme, but it turns out these spiritual seekers were soaking in thousands of years of Vedic Knowledge in places like Benares, Hrishikesh and Varanasi. Their role in life is to keep learning and passing on the energy and teachings of the masters who preceded them.

After meandering through a few books, conversations, lotus postures and amazing Ayurvedic treatments that included massages, cleanses, steam baths and herbs, I felt I had enough information to access and realize how valuable this knowledge

would be to the soccer community. As coaches or teammates, we would all benefit enormously if we understood ourselves and others a bit better via our own true natures, the type of body we live in and the way our personalities are generated to align with our physical makeup. Instead of judging ourselves or others for our differences, our behaviours, our perceived limitations or talents, we would instead learn to see ourselves as a product of Nature and with the particular nature of the body we were given.

I went to see an Ayurvedic doctor in a town called Rishikesh at the foot of the Himalayas. After a friendly hour-long consultation including the measurement of my pulse and a look at my tongue, she described to me in full detail elements of my personality I had never quite thought about, past health conditions I had forgotten about, future health challenges I needed to consider and even my probable death until I cut her short, not wanting to know. Quite frankly, I was amazed and I asked her how she knew all of this information about me and she said “its science, we see it everyday.”

I did six days of treatment like a car going in for an incredible tune up and off I went with three months of herbal treatments and recommendations for my diet and lifestyle.

Talk about preventative medicine.

As coaches stepping into practice with multiple body types and characters, it’s easy for us to lump all players into a mass of similar expectations and challenges without taking note of each individual’s innate disposition. There will be the player who doesn’t like to run or the kid who brings you up to date on every statistic, the striker who cannot sit still or appears not to listen to a thing you said. There will be the player who everyone likes to be around, who organizes the food or team activities and the person who cannot stop screaming about the referee’s miscall. In the Ayurvedic community, they would explain these different scientifically, based on each individual’s body type.

Unfortunately, since soccer is often dominated by an old-school mostly male mentality, and because on a good day men are not oriented toward nurturing and preventive medicine, the connection into eastern philosophy remains obscure to most sports leaders. Similarly, the spiritual community often balks at the mention of sports, especially team activities or physical contact games like soccer, probably due to the conflicted and competitive nature of the activity. Ironically, to its players, soccer is probably one of the most spiritual activities on the planet: it improves fitness, allows us to overcome challenges, inspires sportsmanship, and contributes to social development. So naturally I began to think of a “best of both worlds” scenario where the greatness of Ayurvedic preventive medicine could be combined with the greatness of competitive soccer.

When I returned to Vancouver, I consulted Jeffrey Armstrong, a leading scholar of Yoga philosophy, meditation, Vedic Astrology and Ayurveda and the Director of VASA-The Vedic Academy of Sciences and Arts, to describe some of his findings.

He believes we would all benefit tremendously if we began learning this knowledge of our specific body type from the time we are in kindergarten.

He explained it like this:

Say you owned a Mercedes, took it in to a garage for some repair and maintenance, and said to the mechanic, “Do you repair Mercedes?” If the reply is, “No problem, a car is a car, they’re all the same. They all have engines, tires, wiring, brakes and exhaust,” would you be confident that your expensive car would be fixed properly? Just because cars run on the same principles, are they identical and therefore all repaired, tuned and operated in the same exact way? Or are there different types and models with precise specification, design and performance differences?

The answer, of course, is that there are many kinds of vehicles, each of which must be maintained according to its manufacturing specification. This being so, when was the last time you went to a doctor and were told the exact body type and repair specifications of your unique body? The Western or Allopathic doctor will usually tell you the condition of your body or which part is stressed, diseased, or broken, but will never tell you what model of vehicle you are driving. Like an ignorant car mechanic who treats all cars the same, the modern allopathic doctor will confidently tell you your diagnosis and the recommended medicine to improve your condition, but there are two things they will never tell you: your specific body type and the lifestyle that will be correct for maintaining and improving the condition of your body. This is the reason why modern medicine is not preventive. They are body mechanics who in spite of their skills and considerable learning, do not know how to recognize the make and model of your vehicle.

Of all people, athletes should be the first to take note of this ignorance. Athletes are driving their vehicles the hardest, expecting very high standards of competitive performance and must constantly recuperate from injuries quickly and even small errors or gaps in performance can be the difference between winning and losing. That is why the ancient science of Yoga/Ayurvedic medicine is an absolute necessity for all athletes, because they can’t afford to be ignorant of their body type and the correct technology for fueling, repairing and maintaining their “Mercedes.”

The Sanskrit word “Ayus” means “the life force,” and “Veda” means “knowledge,” so Ayurvedic medicine is the science of cultivating the life force in all that we do. Ayurveda is based on a deceptively simple view of matter that sees five basic elements that are the building blocks of all material reality. These five elements are visible to our unaided senses and so do not require complicated equipment to recognize. The five elements are: Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Space. All organic bodies are made of these five in varying ratios. From those ratios, one can understand the design specifications of each body and how it will function, since each of the five elements functions differently.

Nature is very practical, so these five elements combine to make three basic building blocks for all bodies. Earth and Water combine to make the substance of any body. Fire and Water combine to create the engine of transformation. Space and Air work

together for movement and data transfer. These three are called respectively: Kapha (Earth and Water), Pitta (Fire and Water) and Vata (Air and Space). They are the three formative substances of all bodies, also known as Doshas.

Whichever one of these three Doshas is most abundant will define your primary body type. In modern terms, these create three body types: Endomorph (‘morph’ means body), which is the heavy, curvaceous body, smooth, slow moving, deep sleeper and able to skip breakfast. The second is the Mesomorph or medium build, muscular, hot, impatient, tolerates pain easily, intense, and must eat breakfast. This is the fire type dominated by force, heat and direct intensity. The third is called Ectomorph, which is slender, nervous, a light sleeper, fast in speech and action, high strung, cold in the extremities and irregular and inconstant in habits. The Endomorph is Kapha or Water and Earth. The Mesomorph is Pitta or Fire and Water. The Ectomorph is Vata or Space and Air.

By Nature’s arrangement, the three types expand by combination to ten basic body types, according to the dominant Dasha: Kapha, Pitta, Vata, Kapha/Pitta, Kapha/Vata, Pitta/Kapha, Pitta/Vata, Vata/Kapha and Vata/Pitta. Equal amounts of all three are called tridoshic or Kapha/Pitta/Vata. Once you understand your specific body type, how that body will perform in different climates and when fed various foods and herbs will become clear. This is because food and climate are also simply some combination of the five elements.

Thus, it is possible to tailor an exact regimen of living, eating and healing that matches the precise body type of every individual. This ancient secret is the missing paradigm that supports correct maintenance. Once we know the model of the car in some detail, then the most empowering fuels and ways of living become obvious. There are hundreds of Ayurvedic books in English now to study and understand your body type and dietary needs, as the science of Yoga/Ayurveda is currently being revived. The optimum situation is to have the best of both worlds—the emergency technologies of Allopathic medicine when needed, and the day-to-day wisdom of living properly in our unique vehicle, which is the gift of Ayurveda. In the future, all successful athletes will use both for their high performance needs.

Imagine if you were a high-level coach deciding where to place specific team members in certain situations based on an Ayurvedic model rather than guesses and biases. There are a number of personality observations we already incorporate to increase team performance: he’s fast but lazy; she’s short and feisty but doesn’t concentrate etc. The science of soccer investigates every technical, tactical, physical and psychological edge to gain optimal training and advantages over opponents. However, if we started to understand ourselves specifically through the lens of Vedic Science, our dietary needs would be better adjusted, our relationships with our colleagues would be more effective and our expectations with ourselves and others would be more in line with the exact kind of body in which we are living. This awareness could lead to greater explorations in human achievement, health, social cohesion, relationships and ultimately the enjoyment of the beautiful game we all love. Welcome to the new world of Ayurvedic Soccer.

For more information visit www.JeffreyArmstrong.com 