

# CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

SQUATS, YOGA AND...MATH? RYAN O'REILLY'S ECLECTIC ROUTINE KEEPS HIM ON HIGH ALERT

BY RONNIE SHUKER



**S**O YOU'RE IN THE gym, doing a squat or a lunge, holding an awkward yoga pose or trying to stay upright on a balance beam. Suddenly, your dad throws up a flashcard with five colors on it and tells you to name the color in the middle. But you can't drop the weight or break the pose. Somehow, while your muscles begin to burn and your balance starts to tip, your mind has the focus to find the answer.

That's just one of the legion of training tricks Ryan O'Reilly gets thrown his way from his father, Brian, while working out during the off-season. The motivation behind them goes to the heart of Ryan's training philosophy: combine physical and mental training to imitate game situations so you can adapt to anything thrown your way on the ice.

With such an unorthodox trainer, Ryan has one of the most unusual off-season regimens in the NHL. Every summer, he trains at the family's home just north of London, Ont., under the watchful eye of his father, who's constantly challenging him with mind games while he works out his body. Another trick Brian tries is shouting random math questions. "I might throw out something like  $7 \times 6 / 2 + 3 \times 9$ ," Brian said. "So now he has to also think under pressure, be agile under pressure, be aware under pressure, respond to a stimulant and then give me the answer."

Ryan's training regimen is always evolving, food- and fitness-wise. In the kitchen, he experimented with vegetarianism last season, taking meat almost entirely out of his diet while loading up on veggies and fruit. (He'd even try to go vegan if it weren't for his love of ice cream.) At the gym, his father is continually mixing things up with new exercises or tweaking exist-

ing ones. For any given exercise, he might have Ryan change the weight, use a kettlebell instead of a barbell or dumbbell, or simply switch his grip. It's all meant to mimic the randomness of hockey and build mental toughness. "After every season, you want to find new ways to push yourself," Ryan said. "When you're playing hockey, every game, every situation is different. It's such an instinct game that if you challenge yourself to do more things and get out of your comfort zone, you're training mentally as well. My dad always is constantly doing new exercises and finding different ways to do them."

Ryan is used to all this, having basically been born in a gym. His father is a high-performance coach who has run a gym in various incarnations on the homestead in Varna, Ont., for the past 25 years. Ryan was raised with athletes all around him, coming and going through his dad's gym. He'd see athletes lifting weights, doing balance beam work and holding yoga poses, so he grew up thinking all of this was play.

When he was just four, Ryan was already doing a kids' form of yoga, learning how to breathe and stretch. Around 15 years old, he really became serious about it, and later became a bit of a yoga master to his ex-teammates in Colorado, many of whom he tried to convert. (It's even part of his personal life, as his girlfriend, Dayna Douros, is a yoga instructor in Denver.) Yoga is now an irreplaceable piece of his game-day preparation, and he even draws on it during games. "It taught me to always look inside yourself and find out the areas of tension, to put your mind in the right place and to be clear," Ryan said. "That's the zone you want to play hockey in. You want to have a clear mind. You want to be focused."

As a yogi and a Lady Byng Trophy winner, Ryan might evoke images of a Zen-like Buddha on the ice – he has a grand total of 64 career penalty minutes in more than 400 games – but beneath that peaceful veneer is a fiery competitor who still stewes after a loss. He's been that way since he was a kid. As a tyke, if he lost a game, he'd sit in the dressing room and wouldn't leave until his parents dragged him out. Heck, even a ball hockey game had dire consequences. "He hates to lose," said his older brother Cal, who's played 113 games in the NHL. "As a kid...he was younger than me and my friends, but he'd

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always play with us. Whenever he lost, he'd start throwing sticks at everybody, so we knew to start running as soon as the game was over, because he'd start freaking out."

Along with a horde of athletes around them, Ryan, Cal and their two sisters grew up with a rotating cast of foster brothers and sisters. That's how Ryan came by the nickname 'Snook' – an Irish term for a child with a ton of energy and a predilection for mischief. His grandmother gave it to him when he was a boy. At the time, the family had two other Ryans living with them, and he was a little bowling ball of energy who constantly got into trouble. The nickname stuck, and even now, at 24, Ryan still occasionally gets into trouble at the gym when he's under his father's tutelage. "Any given day, when he offers resistance," Brian said, "whatever he resists, I attack."

Ryan made headlines for the wrong reasons this summer when he was charged with impaired driving in July after his truck crashed into a Tim Hortons in Lucan, Ont. But, armed with a shiny new \$52.5-million contract, he is focused on getting a fresh start with the Buffalo Sabres after six seasons with the Colorado Avalanche. (Cal signed with the Sabres as well.) And he has his father to keep him grounded – at the gym, on the ice and in life – whenever he gets off track. "When I'm training with Snook, or he calls me after a game, all my questions are about self-evaluation, not evaluating other people," Brian said. "Unhappy people, unsuccessful people, evaluate other people. Happy people, successful people, self-evaluate. And when he's not happy, it's probably because he's evaluating someone else, and that's what I call him out on. That's my job as a coach, as a parent, as a person." |

### ▲ BODY & MIND

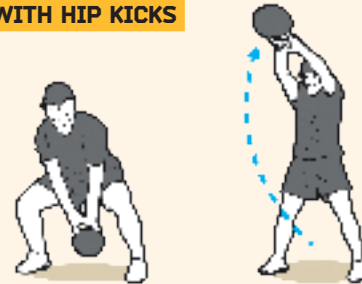
For O'Reilly, building the brain is as key as muscles.



## O'REILLY'S FAVES

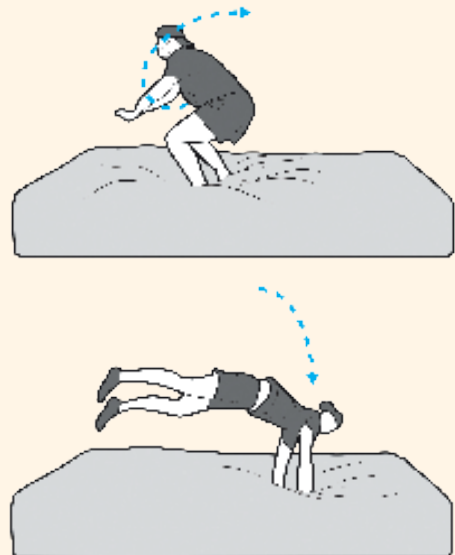
O'Reilly has teamed up with **Go Pro Workouts** to post his training regimen online. His program covers everything from strength, agility, core, balance and flexibility training. Check out a couple of his go-to exercises:

### KETTLE BELL SUMO SQUAT WITH HIP KICKS



Stand tall with your feet shoulder-width apart. Squat down, pick up the kettle bell and raise it to knee level, keeping your arms straight. Next, lower the kettle bell a bit, bending your knees and swing it in a forward and upward movement. Pause briefly at head level and lower to starting position. Repeat. Perform three sets of 10 lifts.

### SUPERMANS



Stand in the center of a mat. Jump in the air so your hips perform a 180-degree twist. You'll start facing the ceiling and land facing the mat, on your stomach. Repeat movement in the opposite direction. Perform 5-10 reps in 30 seconds.