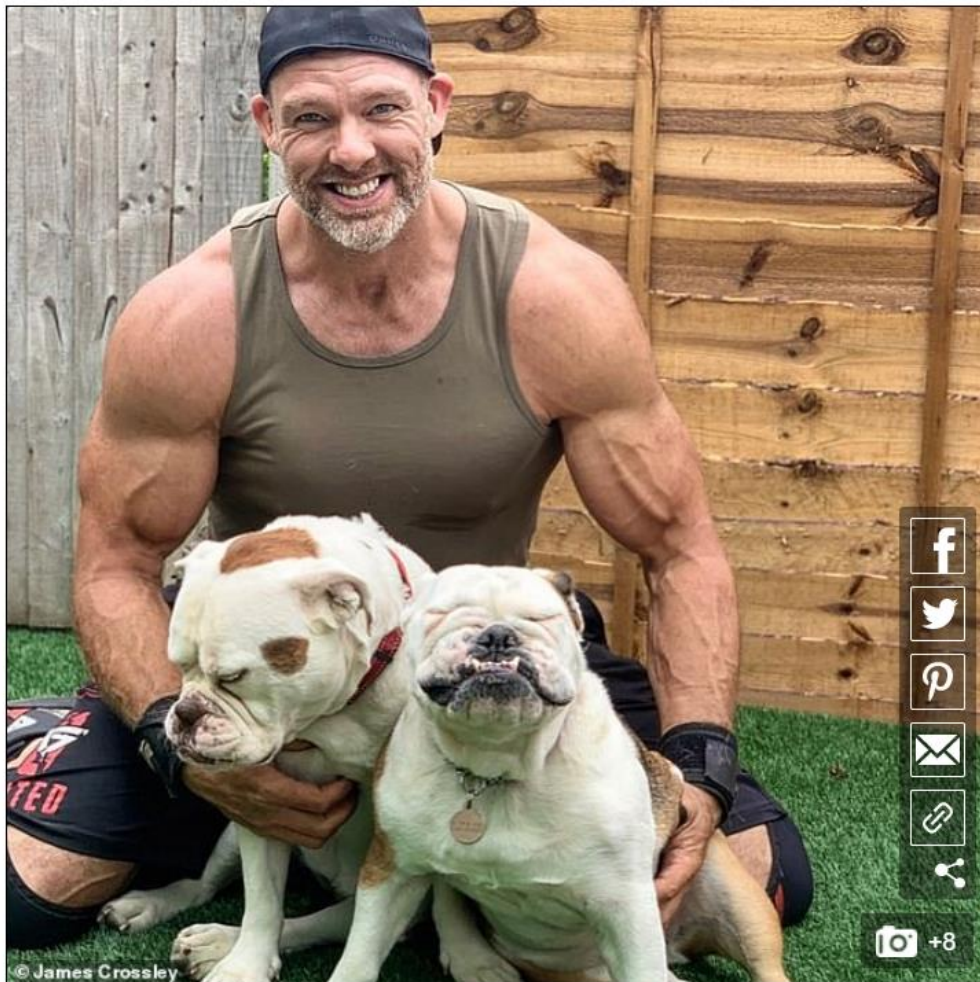


EXCLUSIVE: 'The competitiveness was hard for me to let go of': Gladiators' James Crossley, 47, credits yoga and gong baths for helping him 'move forward' with life and age 'pain free'

He soared to fame in the 90s on the hugely popular Saturday night show Gladiators.

And after years of gruelling sports, competitions and competitive lifting, James Crossley, 47, has turned his skills to yoga in a bid to age 'pain free'.

The sports star, best known to fans as musclebound Hunter, has credited the practice - as well as gong baths, the didgeridoo, crystal harp and the handpan drum - for giving him 'daily purpose' in his life.



Amazing: After years of gruelling sports, competitions and competitive lifting, James Crossley, 47, has turned his skills to yoga in a bid to age 'pain free' (pictured with Bulldogs - Smudge and Lyttle)

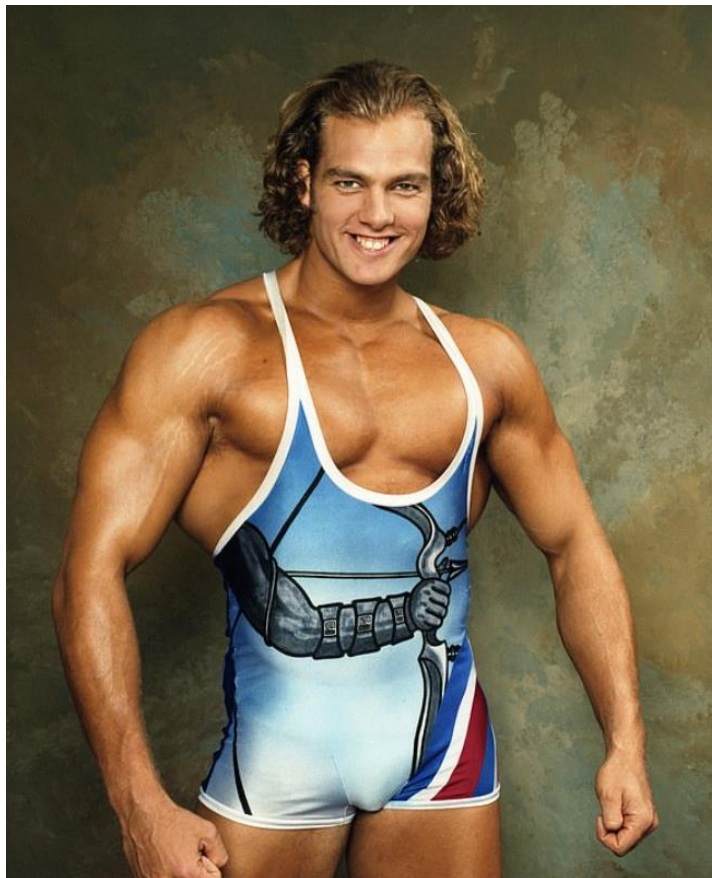
MailOnline

In a new exclusive interview with MailOnline, James, who impressively gained his yoga qualification and Level 4 Strength and Conditioning during lockdown, wants to help over 40s men as they 'need it the most' and tend to be 'put off' the practice.

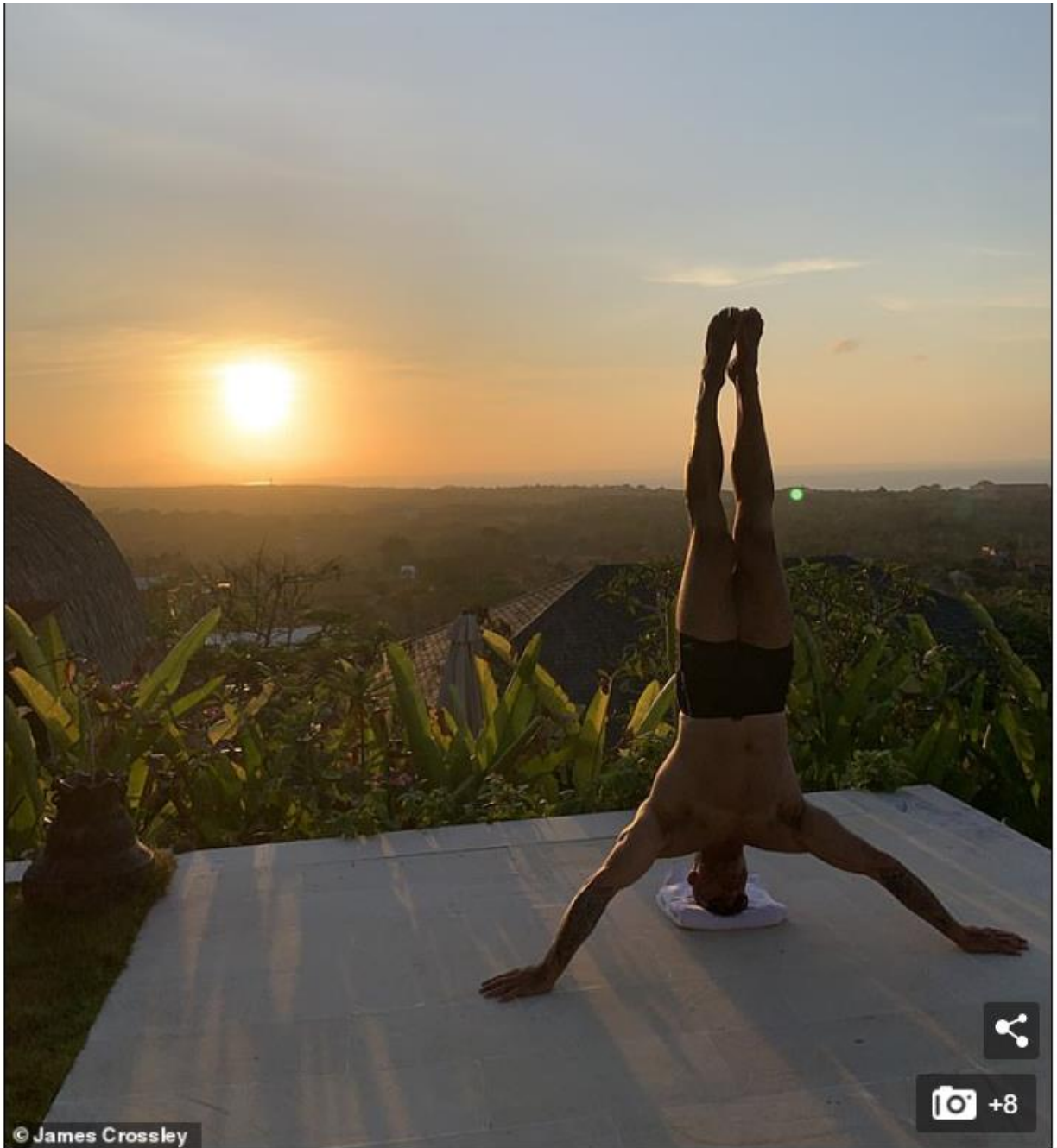
The Circle star said that his new focus is on nourishing and prolonging his health, as well as living pain free, after years of having a competitive mindset.

James also quipped that most people don't know what a gong bath is, joking: 'They think you've gone all spiritual and New Agey!'

The sport star told MailOnline: 'Basically, I competed in Strong Man for about eight years and when you compete in Strong Man, it's a very aggressive sport and hobby. So I got lots of tears - biceps, knees, all of this kind of thing.'



Way back when: The sports star, best known to fans as musclebound Hunter, has credited the practice - as well as gong baths, the didgeridoo, crystal harp and the handpan drum - for giving him 'daily purpose' in his life (pictured in 1995)



Impressive! In a new exclusive interview with MailOnline, James, who impressively gained his yoga qualification and Level 4 Strength and Conditioning during lockdown, wants to help over 40s men as they 'need it the most' and tend to be 'put off' the practice

MailOnline

'When lockdown one came into play, obviously I couldn't get hold of the same kind of weights I was lifting, and it was perfect timing for me to actually say: "Okay, I need to make a change here." So, I did my yoga my qualification.'

James revealed that he has been doing yoga for years and that his girlfriend is also a yoga teacher.

He continued: 'I've been doing yoga for years of different levels depending on what I was training for. I did my qualification literally in the first lockdown.'

'Because I've been doing body building since I was 12 and I'm a bit of a do-er and I'm not very good at sitting still.'

'I wasn't working, so I needed something to fill my day and it just made sense that I was getting into the yoga – my girlfriend's a yoga teacher – and it just made absolute sense to do that.'



Didgeridoo skills: The Circle star said that his new focus is on nourishing and prolonging his health, as well as living pain free, after years of having a competitive mindset.

MailOnline

James said that due to coronavirus restrictions, he was able to do his training and classes online over a month where he submitted videos, he added: 'It was great because it gave me a real purpose!'

Yet the sports star admitted that he found it difficult to change his 'competitive' mindset and even when he started yoga, he would try to hold positions the longest.

He said: 'I've always been very competitive. This can be quite a negative thing as you get older. I was competitive as a body builder. I was competitive as a Gladiator and a Strong Man so it took me a while to get rid of that competition.

'Even when I started yoga I was seeing if I could hold a Pigeon [pose] for the longest. It was getting that ironed out of me.'

He added: 'I break my day into units of time, half an hour is a unit, and work hasn't been the same so I'll spend half an hour on the handpan, half an hour on the didgeridoo, half an hour doing yoga - so its given me daily purpose.'

MailOnline



Hilarious! James also quipped that most people don't know what a gong bath is, joking: 'They think you've gone all spiritual and New Agey!' (pictured in 2019)

MailOnline

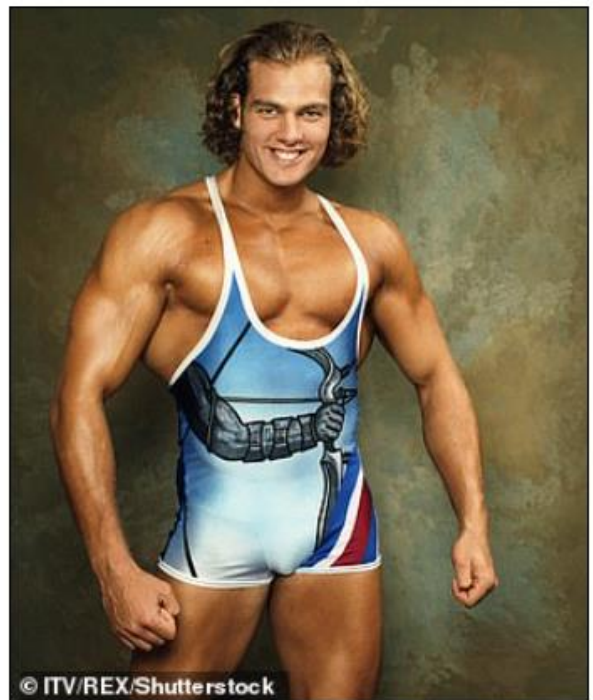
Reflecting on his life and career - which has included Gladiators and acting for the Royal Shakespeare Theatre - James said: 'I suppose if you reflect on stuff, if you look back, you think: "Oh wow, I have done a lot of things."'

James said that his life seems to go in blocks of seven years at a time and that people have to keep moving forward.

Talking about some of his past competitive sporting competitions, the TV star revealed that he used to bash his thumb with a hammer to numb the nerve endings for heavy lifting.

James admitted: "You start to think, I look back and think: "I've gone a bit far here!"

He added: 'You have got to keep moving forward, it is very easy to be a champion of one sport, living in that champion moment you had in your 20s.'



Competitiveness: The sports star admitted that he found it difficult to change his 'competitive' mindset and even when he started yoga, he would try to hold positions the longest (pictured recently, left, and on Gladiators, right, in 1995)

MailOnline

'I'm the kind of person who likes to be busy, likes to be challenged, but the challenge is how to change what your body and mind are capable of doing. You only get one life and you've got to try to make the most of it.

'I can accept now, and this was really hard for me to let go of, the competitiveness of Strong Man, the competitiveness of lifting, if I tried it now - too many injuries.

'It's just letting that stuff go, changing the mindset, which can be the hardest thing. Moving forward with the mind, I've done that now, which took me a little while.'

He added: 'Sometimes we do everything possible to get these things but I think the point is, my mind isn't in that mindset now of: "What can I do to win", it's: "What can I do to nourish, what can I do to prolong health and be pain free.'"

James added that he has to use bricks and bands during yoga due to certain parts of his body being 'so injured' after years of gruelling training.



Moving forward: 'It's just letting that stuff go, changing the mindset, which can be the hardest thing. Moving forward with the mind, I've done that now, which took me a little while' (pictured left on ITV show Gladiators, which was presented by Ulrika - centre)

He said: 'When I do yoga, I use bricks and bands because there's certain parts of my body that are so injured. I've dislocated my shoulder six times. The thing about yoga is it's practise for your body, so it's not one size fits all.'

'So once you embrace that and realise: "I'm not trying to look like the girl who's a pretzel in the corner of the room, I'm trying to do my own thing" then you really start to benefit from it and the consistency of it.'

MailOnline

James credited the practice for helping him lengthen and loosen his muscles as well as gain for flexibility in his day-to-day life, such as looking after his two Bulldogs - Smudge and Lyttle - and even putting on socks.

As well as his yoga journey, the TV star has also been working on his gong bath qualifications.

The practice sees someone lie down and relax while a practitioner begins to play a large gong, starting gently and quietly, then building the sound into a droning meditative chime for up to an hour.

Hunter from Gladiators says he's going on The Circle as NHS nurse



Watch the full video

Gemma, a 31-year-old single nurse.

0:00 / 0:31

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MailOnline

It has been credited for helping chronic pain, anxiety, depression, insomnia and more.

James joked: 'Most people don't seem to know what a gong bath is and you say: "Do you want a gong bath?" and they're like: "What?" They think you've gone all spiritual and New Agey.

'But it's one of those things, my friends - actors, body builders - I've got them to a gong bath and they've become absolutely hooked to it.'

Talking about people's different reactions to the practice, James said: 'People will burst into tears, people will start laughing, people will cough, it's just amazing how the sounds and the vibrations effects people differently.

'But one thing that does seem to be a rule, which is amazing, is how well people sleep after a gong bath which is why I got into it.



Injuries: James added that he has to use bricks and bands during yoga due to certain parts of his body being 'so injured' after years of gruelling training

MailOnline

'My sleep hasn't always been great. Of course, streaming it online is never going to be as useful because you don't get the vibrations from the gong but the sounds do work. You can get something from it.'

He added: 'But the whole point of it is to put you in a very relaxed state. It's that rest and digest, so much time we're in our fight or flight nervous system where we're tense and breathing shallowly.'

'All the good healing stuff happens in the rest and digest so the gong makes that happen.'

Comparing his fitness now to when he starred on Gladiators in the 90s, James admitted that it is 'very different'.

He quipped: 'When I did Gladiators I was a machine. I was training twice a day, once with the weights, once with the events training, because the thing with Gladiators is all the events are very unique. My absolute fittest would have been in my late 20s.'

James' priorities have now shifted, he added: 'What I'm trying to do is grow old pain free, that would be the best way to describe it.'

'I'm doing the weights in line with the yoga but the weights I'm doing are very controlled, slower tempo, not as heavy, rather than trying to roll a car in a competition.'

'I'm mixing that with the yoga so there's no strong focus on being a champion or getting a record any more. And that's the thing about yoga, it's about nourishing the body rather than annihilating the body.'

MailOnline

James revealed that he is still in touch with his *Gladiators* co-stars as they will always have a 'bond' after appearing on such an 'amazing show', he sweetly added: 'We're always a phone call away.'

Talking about what's next, the TV star revealed that he has launched his own James Crossley coaching website to help people get fitter, as well as his yoga and gong bath practices.

For more information, visit: www.jamescrossleycoaching.com.

