

# Detroit Lions' Calvin Johnson a devout practitioner of yoga during pregame routine

Kyle Meinke - MLive

Nov 07, 2013

ALLEN PARK -- There was a time when NFL players wouldn't partake in yoga because it was a "woman thing." And those who did it, wouldn't cop to it.

Now even Transformers practice yoga.

Detroit Lions receiver Calvin Johnson revealed Thursday that he's an active practitioner of the ancient Indian discipline, and it's a staple in his pregame routine -- including before last week's game against the Dallas Cowboys, where he proceeded to post a record 329 yards receiving in regulation.

"I do whatever I have to do, treatment-wise, to get my body, whatever aches are going on, to feel better before we leave the hotel," Johnson said. "I try to get a sweat. Take a shower. Then, we're off."



Yoga is an ancient spiritual and ascetic discipline that promotes deep breathing, meditation and stretching. It is practiced for health and relaxation, and has taken off in the U.S. in the past 15 years.

It was slower to take root in the NFL, where players stereotyped yoga as a "woman thing," according to defensive back Rashean Mathis and other players. But it broke through into the mainstream about five years ago.

"It wasn't seen as a feminine things anymore, but a healthy thing," said Mathis, who has practiced yoga for years in the offseason.

Johnson said he got into it three or four years ago through former Detroit quarterback Drew Stanton and his wife, who was a yoga instructor. The Stantons even had a studio in their house, and would bring in a heater for Bikram (hot) yoga.

That is where Johnson discovered many of the advantages of the craft, including flexibility and injury prevention, and it quickly became part of his regular game-day routine.

Nowadays, with Stanton long gone from Detroit, Johnson practices yoga in his home -- or in his hotel room on the road -- before departing for the stadium.

"I've done it for years," Johnson said. "I've seen, definitely, a positive impact from just being loose in my hips and hamstrings. I know it's something that works for me and I've been doing it ever since."

Receiver Nate Burleson said he doesn't partake in the yoga, but picked up Pilates two years ago at a joint in Birmingham, a Detroit suburb. An instructor had given him a card, which he originally considered discarding -- remember the stereotypes -- but later hit her up.

"She strapped me down on that table, and was yanking and pulling everywhere, and I was tapping out," Burleson said. "She's like, 'you have terrible flexibility.' But by the time I got up and walked away, I felt a tremendous difference in how I felt."

Burleson said he prefers Pilates over yoga because he can do one-on-one sessions with instructors. The yoga,

# Detroit Lions' Calvin Johnson a devout practitioner of yoga during pregame routine Cont...

Kyle Meinke - MLive

Nov 07, 2013

which typically occurs in class settings, didn't go so well.

"With yoga, for me, if I'm in there with some 60-year-old dude and he's doing better than me, I can't do that to my ego," Burleson said, laughing. "I did hot yoga one time, and there were some old ladies in there and they were looking at me like, 'You call yourself an athlete?' Oh my gosh. True story.

"I was like, 'I need to get up and walk out of here.' But my pride wouldn't let me walk out, so I just sat in the back and acted like I was pulling the moves off."

Rookie cornerback Darius Slay said he was resistant to yoga when first exposed to it during his combine training earlier this year at Performance Compound in Tampa. But after two weeks, he was hooked.

Slay said he not only became more flexible, the yoga also lengthened his stride as his muscles loosened.

"I thought it was little girl stuff," he said. "But then I got into it, not realizing the (benefits). Make your stride a lot better. Protects your body, and your body makes you money.

"I had a short little stride when I was coming out. It made my stride longer, so that's why I ran pretty fast at the combine."