

# Cowboys fans will flip over Felix Jones' latest discovery

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With a new workout plan (and a new beard), Felix Jones is poised to take over the starting running back job for the Cowboys. (Andy King)



**IRVING, Texas** -- For everyone wondering why Dallas Cowboys running back Felix Jones has been the team's preseason MVP, we may have stumbled across the answer. The painfully shy player told FOXSportsSouthwest.com on Tuesday that a Brazilian gymnastics instructor may hold the key to a potential breakthrough season in 2011.

What, you didn't see that one coming? There had to be some explanation for how explosive the fourth-year back has looked in three preseason games. Acting on the advice of his close friend Marion Barber, Jones met with Igor Carvalho, the owner of United Elite Gymnastics and Cheer in Rockwall, Texas, this past March. Carvalho already had 600 kids in his program, but he welcomed the opportunity to work with some NFL players.

Carvalho had watched Barber last season on TV and commented to his wife how he wasn't lifting his knees high enough while looking for yardage. He'd already been designing a program for football players in his mind, but he had no idea that Barber would walk into his gym this past March.

Barber and some of his teammates had been working with a speed coach at the R.I.S.E. complex in Rockwall named Russell Flannigan, who thought the players might benefit from Carvalho. The 44-year-old gymnastics instructor, now in his 30th year as a coach, put Barber through a stretching routine that included Pilates, Yoga and massage therapy. Barber convinced Jones to give it a try, and soon, they were joined by Cowboys running back Tashard Choice and wide receiver Jesse Holley.

Jones saw immediate results from the workouts and he started going to Carvalho on a daily basis. On days that he worked his upper body, Jones would work on the high bar and the rings. Carvalho also had the players learn to balance their feet on inflatable balls while catching footballs.

"I tried to give them more mobility," said Carvalho. "You can't totally prevent injuries, but we can try to put them in positions that simulate being at the bottom of a pile of tacklers. If those tendons can be a little more flexible, they can have a better chance of withstanding some of the punishment."

Jones didn't consider taking gymnastics classes while growing up in Tulsa, but he now drives over an hour from his home in Flower Mound to Rockwall just to go through stretching exercises in the days leading up to games. Carvalho borrows from several sports, including MMA, in working with his football players. Maybe that explains why Jones has spent the past five months growing a beard that now rivals one of MMA's most recognizable stars, Kimbo Slice. Cowboys coach Jason Garrett said Tuesday that Jones is an extremely confident player right now, but declined comment on his facial hair.

"It's not my position to evaluate a beard," Garrett deadpanned.

With the release of Barber, the Cowboys made it clear that Jones will be the feature back for the foreseeable future. Much has been made about how he's been more of a complementary back dating back to his time at Arkansas, where Darren McFadden was the headliner. Now, backs such as rookie DeMarco Murray and Tashard Choice will complement Jones. Running backs coach Skip Peete says the normally reserved Jones has been more vocal since the start of training camp. After one practice in San Antonio, Jones asked Peete if he could speak to the running backs alone. The next day, the group had its best session of training camp.

"I asked what got into them," said Peete. "And they all said Felix told them they weren't finishing plays and they needed to pick up their intensity."

By watching film of former NFL running backs such as Charlie Garner, Terry Kirby and Lamont Jordan, Jones has become a more complete running back. He wiped out Chargers first-round defensive tackle Corey Liuget as he tried to rush quarterback Tony Romo in the second preseason game.

More importantly, Jones is once again making players miss when he has the ball in his hands. And he's racking up yards after contact. Perhaps all those hours spent jumping on a trampoline and balancing on an inflatable ball has given him an edge.

A running back named Herschel Walker once turned to ballet in the offseason. Jones may be starting his own trend.

Now, let's see if he can stick the landing.