As often as he can, he’s doing Pilates with Luann Brusa at TruCore Pilates in suburban Chicago. When Bennett was signed by the Bears earlier this year, he decided to check out the studio, but his curiosity got the best of him and he tried it right then that it was something that catered to that. Cindy’s Pilates—next door to a boxing gym in Irving, TX, where I worked out with some other teammates.”

“First I tried yoga,” Bennett recalls. “I noticed a Pilates studio—Cindy’s Pilates teaching there. I was going there for two hours, we’re not going to kill their legs,” notes Rogers, who completed comprehensive training courses with Erica Essner and Kore Pilates. “We’re going to try to lengthen them to aid in their recovery.”

When Bennett was signed by the Bears earlier this year, he found another Pilates teacher, Luann Brusa, owner of two studios—Cindy’s Pilates teaching there. “I signed up for a lesson that day!” From the start, he could tell that Pilates was exactly what his body needed. “From the first time that I did it, it just made sense to me,” he says. He also liked that the routines varied every session, depending on what he needed to work on at that moment—and what hurt. “At the time, my knee was bothering me, so Cindy gave me routines that catered to that. My hamstring also had a ‘glitch,’ so she helped me work that out. I really liked having a new routine each time that could be adjusted to my body’s needs, and Pilates became a regular part of my workout.”

When pro athletes, including Darren Sproles of the New Orleans Saints and Gerald McCoy of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, want to train and improve their game for the next season, they head to Todd Durkin’s Fitness Quest 10 in San Diego, CA. In addition to football-specific strength and cardio work, they also take advantage of Fitness Quest 10’s Pilates program, which is taught by Melanie Rogers, Stephanie Scarbrough and Jessica Wagner.

“We’re not here to duplicate the training these players do elsewhere,” says Rogers. “But they can benefit from the overall flexibility, articulation of the spine and core strength Pilates can give them. When football players’ muscles are flexible, they can react quickly to changes in direction and sudden blows, which decreases the likelihood of them being injured.”

“All these guys were amazing athletes before they ever did Pilates,” says Scarbrough, who completed her comprehensive training through The Sheppard Method. “But I’ve found that most athletes get a new respect for Pilates once they try it, because it’s a different way of working for them—and it’s not easy! They also have to learn to breathe properly, which is very hard to master for anyone.”

The players come in one to three days a week during the off-season, and the routines are adjusted to their needs that day. “If they were just doing heavy lifting for two hours, we’re not going to kill their legs,” notes Rogers, who completed comprehensive training courses with Erica Essner and Kore Pilates. “We’re going to try to lengthen them to aid in their recovery.”

“In their other training, there’s a lot of emphasis on strengthening their big, dynamic muscles,” Scarbrough says. “In Pilates, we’re helping strengthen the smaller stabilizing muscles that support the skeletal structure. When the stabilizing muscles do their job correctly, the larger, more dynamic muscles can perform to the best of their ability.”

Rogers and Scarbrough discuss their work with Sproles and McCoy on the following pages.

SPIRIT PILATES
Takes the Field

NFL player Martellus Bennett keeps himself game-ready with Pilates.

by Beth Johnson

Unlike most of his teammates, Chicago Bears tight end Martellus Bennett, 26, isn’t carbo loading, lifting weights or going for a jog before home games. As often as he can, he’s doing Pilates with Luann Brusa at TruCore Pilates in suburban Chicago. At 6’7” and 265 pounds, Bennett isn’t what immediately comes to mind when you think “Pilates student.” And he admits, “flexibility isn’t naturally easy for me.” Though football traditionally places more emphasis on strength than “stretch,” Bennett also knows this is a liability because a collision sport like football takes a toll on the body—even when you’re as big as he is. “I’m a tight end, which is a position on the offensive line that requires both blocking and running. I’m always getting hit, or hitting someone, in every single play,” he explains. The usual football training regimen—running, weights and more weights—isn’t always enough to prepare you for 300-plus pounds of linebacker coming at you full speed. “So between getting slammed on the field by huge players and the brutal pounding his body took every week, both on the field and in the training room. “About five years ago, when I was playing for the Cowboys, I really wanted to find a new way to better my body, and to become more flexible. “First I tried yoga, but I have ADD, so holding positions for a long time—and all that chanting—just wasn’t for me,” he recalls. “One day, I noticed a Pilates studio—Cindy’s Pilates—next door to a boxing gym in Irving, TX, where I worked out with some other teammates.”

One day after a workout, his hamstring also had a ‘glitch,’ so she helped me work that out. I really liked having a new routine each time that could be adjusted to my body’s needs, and Pilates became a regular part of my workout.”

When Bennett was signed by the Bears earlier this year, he found another Pilates teacher, Luann Brusa, owner of two studios—Cindy’s Pilates teaching there. “I signed up for a lesson that day!” From the start, he could tell that Pilates was exactly what his body needed. “From the first time that I did it, it just made sense to me,” he says. He also liked that the routines varied every session, depending on what he needed to work on at that moment—and what hurt. “At the time, my knee was bothering me, so Cindy gave me routines that catered to that. My hamstring also had a ‘glitch,’ so she helped me work that out. I really liked having a new routine each time that could be adjusted to my body’s needs, and Pilates became a regular part of my workout.”
As on the Box is great for my spine and posture. I’ll admit stretching and work on my spine. Of course, everything to be worked on during a session, plus we always make says. “Partly it depends on what part of my body needs props like balls and the Magic Circle. “Luann is good at including the Cadillac, Reformer and Chair, as well as the muscles around the joints, which in turn, gives the you fall, or someone falls on you, that’s when you end up muscles—balance is so important for athletes.”

He finds his three to five Pilates sessions a week are the perfect complement to his football training. “To counteract the joint compression caused by weight lifting, I go straight from weights to Pilates as often as possible,” Bennett says. He’s also convinced Pilates has kept him surgery free. “The bottom line is that football is my job, and I want to do my job really well. Anything that can give me a competitive advantage on the field and help reduce injuries is a huge plus for me. It’s weird—I can lift 500 pounds, but in a Pilates session, there’s always some different type of motion that’s hard for me to do. That’s what is so great about it!”

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TruCore Pilates locations, one in Killdeer and the other in Barrington, IL. He recently drafted a new “player” to Pilates—his wife Siggi. “I was going to the studio with some other players who are into Pilates and I asked my wife if she wanted to join us. Even on the first try, it was really impressed how easily it came to her—probably because she grew up doing a lot of dance and ballet. The guys with me started joking that she couldn’t come again, because she made them look bad!” And therein lies the irony of Pilates. “I know players who lift hundreds of pounds, run fast and slam into other guys—but when they try Pilates the first time, they can’t believe how hard it is. That’s what is so interesting about it. You watch someone do it and it doesn’t necessarily seem like they’re doing as much work as they are.”

Now that he’s got his wife on board, he’s working to recruit other players. “I’ve got to get more football guys—but when they try Pilates the first time, they can’t believe how hard it is. That’s what is so interesting about it. You watch someone do it and it doesn’t necessarily seem like they’re doing as much work as they are.”

He’s also convinced Pilates has kept him surgery free. “I really want to keep myself as elongated as possible, because an elongated muscle is a strong muscle. When you fall, or someone falls on you, that’s when you end up breaking things. So by gaining flexibility through Pilates, I’m able to ‘go with it’ much more when I’m hit, and it helps minimize any injuries. I’m also able to strengthen the muscles around the joints, which in turn, gives the joints more support and stability. During a session, he uses various equipment, including the Cadillac, Reformer and Chair, as well as props like balls and the Magic Circle. “Luann is good at mixing it up for me, so that every session is fresh,” he says. “Partly it depends on what part of my body needs to be worked on during a session, plus we always make sure my hamstrings are good. We also do a lot of deep stretching and work on my spine. Of course, everything on the Box is great for my spine and posture.” I’ll admit common response has been, “Isn’t Pilates just for girls?” he says. “But I tell them you’re wrong, but if you think that, then why don’t you at least try it?”

“Luann helps me work on rebalancing and activating my muscles—balance is so important for athletes.”

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**PILATES HAS A WAY OF FINDING YOUR WEAKNESS AND SHOWING YOU WHAT YOU NEED TO BE WORKING ON.**

The bottom line is that football is my job, and I want to do my job really well. Anything that can give me a competitive advantage on the field and help reduce injuries is a huge plus for me. It’s weird—I can lift 500 pounds, but in a Pilates session, there’s always some different type of motion that’s hard for me to do. That’s what is so great about it!”

And it’s paid off. In his first game for his new team, Bennett caught a touchdown pass against the Cincinnati Bengals so amazing, it was accorded the ultimate honor: It became an Internet GIF.

“I CAN LIFT 500 POUNDS BUT IN A PILATES SESSION, THERE’S ALWAYS SOME DIFFERENT TYPE OF MOTION THAT’S HARD FOR ME TO DO.”

**WHAT BROUGHT HIM TO PILATES: “Gerald started doing Pilates to counterbalance all the heavy lifting and explosive work he does in the weight room,” Scarborough says. “As a 300-pound defensive lineman whose job is to move men as large as he is, he felt that Pilates could give him that extra edge in strength, flexibility and injury prevention.”**

**KEY MOVES: “Gerald is a lot of fun to work with and he can do things that you would never imagine someone his size would be able to do,” Scarborough says. “He can do a Rollover, which takes flexibility and a lot of strength; the first time he did it, I was so proud of him. He also does Side Plank work, which takes a lot of core stability. When he comes in, we try to do a lot of thoracic spine extension. The thoracic spine is the largest part of your back with the most vertebrae and it’s what helps you extend and rotate. When your thoracic spine gets locked up, you don’t usually have pain there, but your lower back and your neck start to overcompensate. So by doing rotational exercises with Gerald and other players, we do help them prevent many injuries. Just like with the other athletes, we do feet-in-straps Leg Circles to open up those hips, lots of flexibility work and shoulder-stabilizing exercises.”**

**Gerald McCoy**
Defensive Tackle
Tampa Bay Buccaneers

**Darren Sproles**
Running Back
New Orleans Saints

**What brought him to Pilates:** “Darren wanted to improve his speed,” says Rogers. “By emphasizing mobility and flexibility of the hip flexors and hip rotators, this translates to a faster and more agile runner back and kick-off return specialist. We also put an emphasis on ankle mobility and foot strength to help his overall speed and athleticism. Besides a basic core Pilates program, we added Calf Raises on the Chair, which strengthen the ankle, and various kneeling and standing lunge stretches to stretch the hip flexors.”

**Key Moves:** “Single-Leg Circles with the feet in the straps—which are key in anyone’s program—plus Roll-Ups, Thigh Stretch and Standing Splats on the Reformer,” Rogers notes. “Using the Arc Barrel is great because it allows them to do things like Spine Stretch and Saw in a way that doesn’t put too much pressure on the lower back and helps lengthen the hamstrings a bit more easily.”

**IN JUST THE FIRST TWO GAMES OF THE SEASON, BENNETT SCORED A TOTAL OF THREE TOUCHDOWNS.**

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