



**HOLD THE GRANOLA:** The Bengals have added a weekly yoga class to their off-season regimen but, wait a minute, it's not what you think.

"I was afraid they might think it was going to be like our parents' yoga," said Jen Damaska, the non-hippie instructor. "The granola, flower child stuff. That's not what we do here. There's no meditation or chanting."

And there hasn't been much eye-rolling, which slightly surprised Damaska

"I've been pleasantly surprised at their willingness to try something new," said Damaska of her first class with a sports team. "These gentlemen are so strong that the flexibility doesn't come up to match the strength in yoga terms. Generally in yoga you build strength and flexibility at the same time. But the approach has to be changed just because they're so strong and can do a lot of things, but need the flexibility."

Strength and conditioning coach Chip Morton has set aside three 45-minute sessions on Wednesdays for the classes and was never concerned that players would blow it off as not very serious.

"This is a straight-ahead, athletic version of yoga without all the other stuff. A lot of guys have already been exposed to it, and some other teams already use it," Morton said. "It augments work on the abdominal and low back areas. Core strength and a lot of it has to do with flexibility in the hips and thigh area. It's very important and good for the hips."

Damaska says there is some introspection involved, but it is an agenda with an athletic emphasis. Safety Marquand Manuel admits that five years ago he wouldn't have been caught dead in a yoga class because, "it seemed a little feminine," but once his body started talking to him, he understood. He took some classes of his own in a gym back home in Florida just after the season.

"It's an opportunity to work muscles you don't normally work on," Manuel said. "It lets you work on muscles you need to relax. Back. Quads. Hamstrings. Anything that's different is good. We work so hard, it's good to work flexibility. Anything I can do to better my body I see as a positive."

Bengals linebacker Brian Simmons also sees the benefits rather than the old-school way of thinking.

"It's mostly for me about stretching and flexibility," Simmons said. "You do those things and it helps you stay away from injuries."