

Cowboys Vickers a vanishing breed

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IRVING, Texas

Lawrence Vickers knows he is a rare breed.



AMERICA'S GAME

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In prior decades, it would not be uncommon for an NFL team to carry two fullbacks. Now, some clubs such as the Detroit Lions don't have even one on their 53-man roster, as H-backs and sixth offensive linemen fill blocking roles.

Vickers, though, has that job with the Dallas Cowboys because the franchise is committed to the position — and, during a seven-year NFL career, he's proved one of the best who plays it.

As he prepared for the FOX America's Game of the Week against the visiting New York Giants (4:25 p.m. ET Sunday), Vickers spoke with FOXSports.com about the state of fullbacks in the league, the art of playing the position, joining the Cowboys in the offseason and dealing with anaphylaxis.

Yes, anaphylaxis. Vickers is allergic to ant bites.

Q: What does it feel like to be part of what has become an exclusive club of fullbacks who are left in the league?

Vickers: "I think it's a blessing. It's becoming an extinct position. It's one a lot of guys can't do. It's being a running back, a fullback, an o-lineman and a tight end all wrapped up in one. It's like you're doing four jobs at one time. You've got to make a collision and position yourself right at the same time to make a play work. Your success also comes within everyone else's success. It's a total team position."

Q: Because all those skills are required to play the position, could that be the reason the fullback position has become rarer?

Vickers: "It's one of those positions you can't coach to be great. You've got to be able to go above. Of course, I can tell you, 'OK, this is the guy you're supposed to block.' But the course you take getting to that guy, you've got to not only avoid getting in the way of the running back, but you're also the cleanup guy along the way (with other defenders). It's a hard position. A lot of guys can't do it. It takes a while getting adjusted to running into linebackers in the NFL. Teams also are doing a lot of passing. But if you want to be successful running the ball, you've got to have that fullback."

Q: What type of physical beating does a fullback take?

Vickers: "Oh, you take it. It's kind of like a bull-ring position, an Oklahoma drill. But at the same time, the position is valued because it wears down the opponent. When the linebacker has to deal with a fullback and a

runner? That's a hard task. That's like getting double-teamed. I'm going to hit you, and the runner is going to hit you. And then you've got to come back and do it again and again and again. It takes a toll. That's why you might not break big runs at the beginning of a game. But come that second half, it's over."

Q: How did you wind up at fullback at the University of Colorado?

Vickers: "I was a big tailback dating back to high school. I played all the positions — linebacker, safety, quarterback. But when I got to CU, my position coach told me, 'You could be a good tailback or a great fullback.' I told him, 'I'll choose great over good.' "

Q: How have you fit in here with the Cowboys?

Vickers: "It's been good. I've had the chance to work with some younger guys. I get a chance to bring guys together. Usually, a team is divided into defense and offense. But a fullback is just like a defensive position, so you get more guys hanging around each other. It's all about camaraderie and doing whatever you can to make the team better. And, at the same time, I know every position on offense. I know what the tight end, the o-line, the running back are doing. That's what allows me to be efficient doing my job."

Q: How much did it help signing with Dallas right away after being cut by your hometown team, the Houston Texans, in the offseason?

Vickers: "I was going to come here the year before anyway, but I ended up signing with Houston. So when I got a chance to come back, I thought, 'I want to be here. They want me, too.' It was just a perfect fit. The Cowboys have got great tradition, an excellent owner, a great coach (Jason Garrett) who's a positive, smart guy I can learn from. I'm always into learning. And then you come into a place with a great quarterback like Tony (Romo)? Anybody who wants to win, you've got to have a great quarterback. We do."

Q: You changed your jersey from No. 34 to No. 17 while in college. Why was that?



POWER RANKINGS

Which teams are looking up in this week's NFL power rankings?

Vickers: "One of my friends got killed. A guy named Mike Spivey was our chaplain. He told me, 'You're filled with good and bad. If you could take away all the bad in you, you'd be a great person.' So I said to myself, 'I'm going to chop all the bad out of me and be more positive and see where it gets me.' That's why I went with No. 17. It was something to motivate me."

Q: Finally, did someone hack your Wikipedia page, or are you really allergic to ants?

Vickers: "I'm really allergic to ants. I've been like that since I was a kid. The first time I got bit, I swelled up. As I got older, I was getting a massage one time and I guess there were some ants around. I got bit and broke out in hives and had to get Benadryl and everything. It's not rare. I'm not allergic to anything but ants and fish."

Q: So Wikipedia should add fish to the list?

Vickers (smiles): "I guess so."

- Overrated, overrated! Tebow No. 1 in SI player poll