

Camp helps players prepare for NFL combine

By RICHARD ROSENBLATT
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla.

D'Brickshaw Ferguson is one confident 300-pound lineman heading to this week's NFL scouting combine, thanks to training guru Tom Shaw.

"I'm happy with my progress. I'm faster, stronger and more explosive," the 6-foot-5 offensive tackle said. "I'm ready to show what I've got. The camp has been very productive for me."

NFL personnel are eager for a close-up look at Ferguson, an All-American from Virginia expected to be among the first six players chosen in the April draft.

What they'll see at the NFL's testing ground in Indianapolis are Ferguson and about 40 other finely tuned players fresh from Shaw's intensive training program, Tom Shaw Performance Enhancement.

This year, Shaw is based at Walt Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., in a deal reached late last year after Hurricane Katrina



damaged his spartan facility in Kenner, La., near the airport in New Orleans.

"We were ready to go again in 17 days, but the facility was need-

ed to house people in our apartments, and the fields turned into a tent city," Shaw said. "We were lucky to find a new home."

Shaw, a 45-year-old former

WORKING OUT

What: NFL scouting combine
When: Today through Tuesday
Where: RCA Dome in Indianapolis
Who: More than 330 NFL Draft prospects
Admission: Not open to the public
TV: NFL Network. Players' news conferences will be shown at 2 p.m. Thursday through Sunday; player drills will be televised at 11 a.m. Saturday through Tuesday; news of each day's events will be shown at 7 p.m. Thursday through Monday; and a 1-hour wrapup program will air at 9 p.m. March 1.

strength and conditioning assistant for the New England Patriots and the New Orleans Saints, is one of the most respected training coaches around.

He was among the first to open his doors to players hoping to improve their NFL stock.

He was a track coach at Florida State, too, and when he began his camp, his top pupil was Deion Sanders, an All-American with the Seminoles who played on Super

Bowl winners in Dallas and San Francisco.

Today, there are about 20 different camps around the country offering a variety of programs and run by former coaches, trainers and even sports agents.

"Shaw was a forerunner of these workout programs," NFL draft adviser Gil Brandt said. "He's highly recommended by a lot of people. His program gets an athlete to do the best he can possibly do and to be prepared for the combine."

His training philosophy is simple: SPARQ, as in speed, power, agility, reaction and quickness.

"Speed is emphasized," Shaw's business manager Dave Lowman said. "He's looking to increase speed, plus lower times in the 40 and the shuttle, two big things the combine examines. We also work on stamina and study."

"Yes, there's class work, too. The players leave with a sense of what to expect and are usually in the best shape of their lives."

During the past six years, 54 players who ended up as first-round picks went through Shaw's

program, including Michael Vick and Peyton Manning. But his greatest satisfaction is taking a projected mid-rounder and turning him into a high-round choice, or a late-rounder into a mid-rounder.

Cornerback Ike Taylor, who had a key interception in the Pittsburgh Steelers' Super Bowl victory against Seattle, is among Shaw's most prized pupils. Shaw has known him for about 10 years, since Taylor spent summers at Shaw's camp while growing up in New Orleans.

"His uncle would send him around in the summers, and he'd be around Deion and Terrell Buckley," Shaw said. "He's fast, and explosive."

Taylor went from a walk-on at Louisiana-Lafayette to one of the best players at his position in the NFL. And he isn't done working.

Just two days after the Steelers won the Super Bowl, Taylor showed up at the camp. "Got to get back in the program," he said. "The guys are bigger and stronger every year and you've got to keep up. Plus, this is a great place."

Mets' Franco still going strong at 47, 20 years in majors

From wire reports

PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla.

Sleep, food and religion have made Julio Franco's career on the baseball diamond last a long time.

At age 47, Franco is a 20-year veteran player who will backup Carlos Delgado at first base for the New York Mets this year. He has batted .284 during his past five seasons with the Atlanta Braves.

"To stay in shape as long as he has is phenomenal," New York manager Willie Randolph said. "His leadership is important. He's the type of guy who brings a lot to the table."

Franco attributes his prolonged career to going to bed as early as 8 p.m., eating organic and whole foods and staying firm in his Christian beliefs.

His mental and physical endurance has made him a man eager to dispense his knowledge. Franco said he cherishes working with players willing to listen and learn.

"You have to do things other people aren't willing to do. There are a lot of things written in baseball that are sometimes wrong," Franco said.

Franco said his aspiration is to reach the management ranks.

"Ultimately, I'd like to manage," Franco said. "My wish is to do it here."

Mets Second baseman Kaz Matsui stopped by the clubhouse Monday to collect six large duffel bags of equipment. He practiced outside camp Tuesday before returning to Tradition Field.

Position players were to report Tuesday, with the team's first full workout Thursday.

Along for the ride in Matsui's silver Mazda 6 was his new personal coach, Toru Kumazawa. Matsui retained the new coach during the offseason after an injury-filled 2005 campaign.

Matsui spoke to Japanese re-

porters Monday and said, "Everything is good so far."

He will battle Anderson Hernandez, who had only five starts at second base last season, for the starting position.

In other baseball news

FORT MYERS, Fla.

Red Sox give Ramirez permission to be late

Manny Ramirez was given permission by the Boston Red Sox to report to spring training March 1, six days after the team's first full-squad workout and one day after Major League Baseball's mandatory reporting date.

Ramirez asked the team through his agent to trade him during the offseason, but the Red Sox were unable to find a deal to their liking.

"Manny is in Florida completing an extensive training regimen and is prepared to have an exceptional season," said a joint statement from Ramirez and the team that was released by the Red Sox on Tuesday.

Boston general manager Theo Epstein has refused comment on his discussions with Ramirez, saying they are between the club and the player.

Position players are due in Fort Myers, Fla., today, the day before the first workout. Baseball's collective bargaining agreement sets the mandatory reporting date as 33 days prior to the major-league opener, which is April 2.

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz.

Bonds is no-show for Giants' first workout

The San Francisco Giants gathered as a full team for the first time this year Tuesday, with players getting the chance to hit, field, run and throw together as they prepare for the start of the season.

There was one notable exception. Barry Bonds was nowhere to be found.

"It's nice to see everybody, not quite everybody," manager Felipe Alou said Tuesday. "It always feels good when you see all of those guys."

Bonds was a no-show at the first voluntary workout for position players.

Bonds' agent told the team last week that because of personal issues, the star would come a day or two later than his teammates, who showed up Monday.

Players aren't required to come to spring training until Feb. 28. Alou expects Bonds to report later this week.



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