

“Engagement Must Precede Strength, So Speed Always Wins”

You locked yourself in the weight-room the entire off-season. You put on 10 pounds of muscle, you're now squatting the world, and your bench press is more impressive than ever. In your mind, you know you have worked harder than ever and will win every individual battle that you face this season. You have prepared yourself physically to dominate the guy across from you, each and every time you get your hands on him.

What if you can't catch him?

The entire game of football is being revolutionized. Old-school thoughts in training football players revolved around the fact that the biggest, strongest team will probably have a better opportunity to win. From professional athletes all the way down to the high school ranks, the off-season was spent solely in the weight-room. As long as you got in your “squat – bench – dead” each day, you did all you needed to do to get ready for the upcoming season. These programs accomplished what they set out to do: enhance size and strength. While these will always be key components in this sport, they are not the most important.

Think about this one concept: On the football field, ***engagement must precede strength***. In order to be able to demonstrate strength and power, you have to engage your opponent. Whether the play calls for the fullback to pick up the scraping linebacker or an open-field tackle on a tailback that got through to the secondary, if you cannot catch your opponent and engage him, you will never get the opportunity to show how strong or powerful you are.

The hard truth of the game then is simple: speed always wins. This is demonstrated in all corners of the sport, as the skill position are getting faster every year and linebackers run like defensive backs of 10 years ago. Even the top offensive and defensive linemen, who are traditionally the heaviest bodies on the field, have sub-5.0 forty yard dash times and agility way above what men their size should have. In the NFL, defensive linemen are outweighed by more than 50 pounds in some match-ups, yet they still have the advantage if they are able to outmaneuver or get around the offensive man in front of them.

Off-season programming, then, must include much more than just strength training. Linear speed training involving the development of efficient sprint mechanics, agility work, plyometric training, foot-speed drills, and some form of anaerobic conditioning, should all be included in weekly workouts. An ideal format would involve three to four days of strength training with plyometric exercises built in, two days of speed training, and two days of conditioning work. Foot-speed and efficiency drills can be incorporated into all of the workouts in the form of warm-up drills or in-between activities. Implementing all of these components into your program will ensure that you are developing the tools necessary to increase speed and quickness... which is now what this game is all about.