



ANDY HARMON'S INVENTION A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

By Bob Kent - As a former NFL defensive lineman, Andy Harmon knows the importance of working out during the offseason. That's precisely why the former Eagles defensive tackle has spent the last four years designing a state-of-the-art product he believes will make athletes quicker, be it at the pro, college or even high school level.

From conception to manufacturing and development, Harmon has been the point person for The R.A.T.T. (Reaction Agility Technique Trainer) and he stopped by the NovaCare Complex last month to let the players test it out.

"I know that there's a need in the offseason for something, especially for d-linemen and o-linemen where you can work on reaction, agility, punching and all that stuff," said Harmon, who played with the Eagles from 1991-97. "This is my way of getting back into the game and trying to make it better."

At first glance, the R.A.T.T. Elite Training System resembles a typical blocking sled. But Harmon is quick to point out that it's so much more.

"It's really a training system," said Harmon, an Ohio native. "There's five core drills -- a reaction drill, a speed drill, an agility drill, a force drill and a lateral reaction drill. And of those, there's a bunch of different sub-drills that you can do.

"The coaches look at it as a sled, just a d-line thing. My challenge is to get them to understand how they can incorporate it in and make their players better and faster."

The idea for the R.A.T.T. actually originated from Harmon's playing days in Philadelphia. He was introduced to a homemade apparatus that Dale Haupt, his defensive line coach at the time, called the "Buck Board." It was comprised of five small pads attached to telephone poles buried into the ground. Each pad was a couple feet apart and about two and a half feet off the ground. Harmon and his linemates hit the "buck board" every day before practice, getting repetition after repetition of hand punches along with proper first steps. From day one, coach Haupt stressed how important fast hands and a strong hand punch was in the NFL.

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With the use of the latest technology available, Harmon's company, Get Quick Athletic Training and Equipment LLC., took the "Buck Board" concept and developed a system that is able to develop fast hands and quicker reaction times. It is also capable of developing an athlete's acceleration, foot speed and enhancing an athlete's ability to recognize and react to stimulus through the use of Visual Recognition and Response Training technology.

"It runs on a computer-based system. It measures hand speed reaction time, foot speed, power, energy, whatever the coach wants. The lights on it have many different functions but they are mostly for visual stimulus recognition," Harmon explained. "It can put players in space with the wireless cones. The wireless cones, we call it drop zones, the players can come from the sled, drop into a zone, come back and it will time all of that. There's a ton of different features.

"The coach controls it with a wireless hand-held computer so all the feedback comes right to the coach and he can see it."

With his first production model in tow, the former player-turned-inventor is busy pitching the R.A.T.T. to high school and college programs as well as professional teams.

"I feel that this thing is going to make a player faster," Harmon said. "It could be an o-lineman, it could be a d-lineman, it could be a linebacker, it could even be a DB. Even a receiver.

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HEALTH & FINANCES

Congressional Report Identifies Health Concerns Not Addressed by NFLPA

April 9, 2008 - The House Judiciary Committee has announced the release of a 144-page report recommending legislation to address the health problems faced by professional football players, and also released the responses to questions posed by the Committee to the NFLPA.

Initiated by a bipartisan request, the CRS report examined the types and severity of health problems suffered by current and former National Football League (NFL) players focusing on the disability benefit programs and the health and safety initiatives of the NFL and NFL Players Association (NFLPA). "I commend the NFL and NFLPA for having taken some affirmative steps since our last hearing, but in my view they still fall short of the goal line," said Committee Chairman John Conyers, Jr. "This report identifies major concerns about the long-term health of NFL players that demand further attention. The Committee intends to hold hearings and explore possible legislation to address this matter."

The report made the following conclusions:

- The injury rate for NFL players was nearly eight times higher than that of any other commercial sports league, including hockey and auto racing.
- Neither the NFL nor the NFLPA maintain data on the number or percentage of players who retire because of injury.
- Former players find access to health benefits very difficult.
- The current system is subject to a variety of conflicts of interest which appear to be detrimental to players.
- The NFLPA has very limited authority and capabilities regarding health and safety issues, devoting only a part-time advisor to attend to these matters.

The full text of the CRS Report may be found online at www.split-n.com/crsreport.html.



EAGLES HEAD ATHLETIC TRAINER CONTINUES TO HONOR OTHO'S LEGACY

By Tug McErlain - There is no bigger stage than the Super Bowl and no better opportunity to be remembered by millions of people... for better or for worse. For Rick Burkholder, it

was a moment during Super Bowl 30 that ultimately led to his hiring by the Eagles in 1999. As an assistant on the training staff for the Steelers, Burkholder had the opportunity to oversee Rod Woodson's recovery from a devastating knee injury in 1995. Miraculously, Woodson was able to recover in time for the Super Bowl and after making a play early in the game, the defensive back pointed to his rebuilt knee in celebration and confirmation of the fine work done by Burkholder and the Steelers training staff.

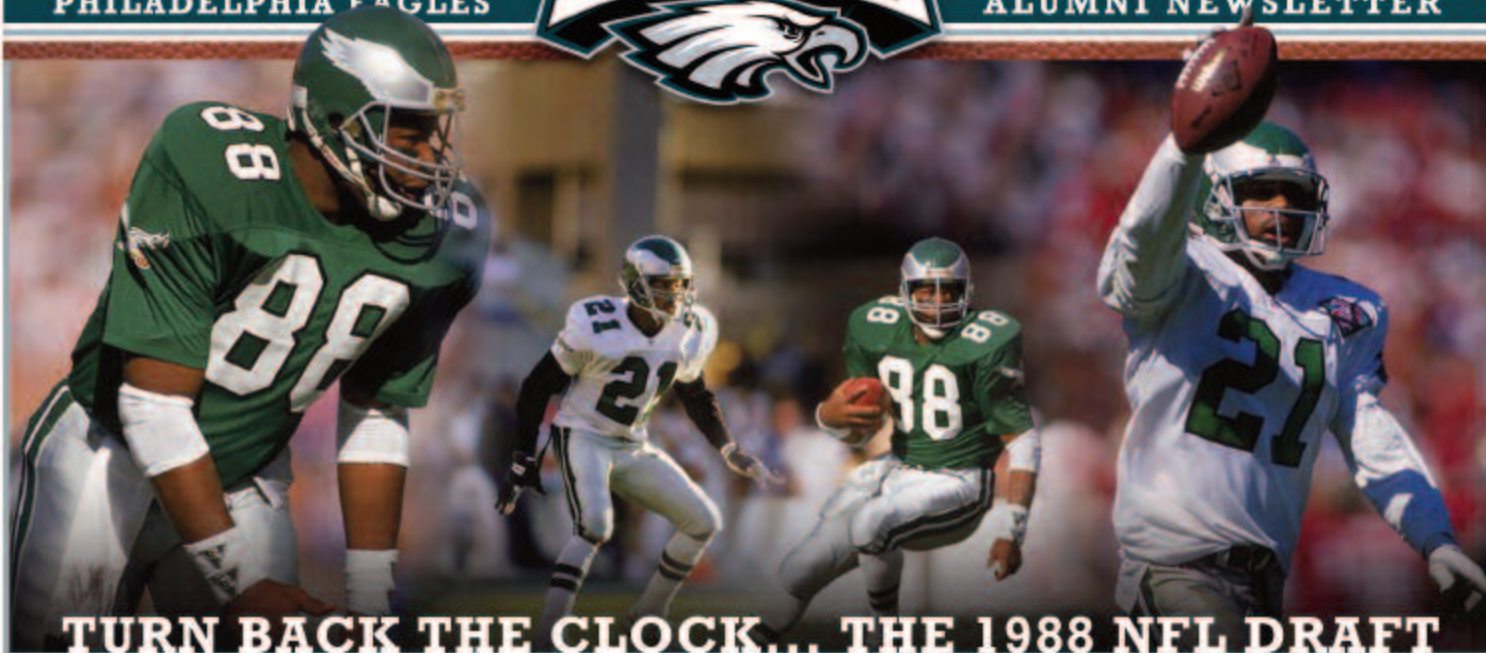
Years later, Burkholder found himself thrust onto the Super Bowl stage once again as Terrell Owens attempted to make an unlikely comeback from December ankle surgery to play in Super Bowl 39. With a stiff-arm, turn and burst after his first catch of the game, Owens made it clear that all of the training staff's hard work had paid off. Once again, on the biggest stage of all, Burkholder and his team of athletic trainers had got the job done.

It was on a much smaller stage during Burkholder's college days that the dream of becoming the head athletic trainer of the Philadelphia Eagles began to take shape. As he sat listening to a speaker at an athletic trainer's conference in Arizona, Burkholder nudged his friend beside him and said, "Someday, I'm gonna be that guy." That guy on the stage was Otho Davis, Head Athletic Trainer of the Philadelphia Eagles and a family friend since Burkholder was a young boy. Rick's father was a trainer for 48 years and had joined Davis as one of the 16 original certified trainers in Pennsylvania. Otho and Rick's dad sat on the Board of Directors together during Rick's youth and between the two of them, Burkholder had a great pair of role models.

"Otho changed athletic training forever," Burkholder said as he described the change in perception that Otho engineered during his 23-year stint with the Eagles. "He made it a healthcare profession." Otho continues to inspire the man who followed in his footsteps by way of a painting that sits in his office at the NovaCare Complex in Philadelphia. "Coach Reid knew how much Otho meant to me and when Otho passed away, he had this painting made for me," Burkholder shared, as we gazed at the image of the former "Prince of Trainers" hanging on his wall. "When things get tough and I'm faced with a challenge, I look at that picture and I can hear Otho saying 'I've been through it and you'll be fine.'"

"He's the greatest trainer that ever lived and he belongs in the Hall of Fame," Burkholder continued. It is because of his respect for Otho's legacy that Rick not only strives to provide excellent care to the current players on the team, but also to those former players who once counted on Davis to make them whole again. "If Otho was alive, he'd want me to take care of them, so I do."





TURN BACK THE CLOCK... THE 1988 NFL DRAFT

By Tug McErlain - With the 2008 NFL Draft right around the corner, let's turn back the clock twenty years to one of the better drafts in team history. The year was 1988 and after 6 consecutive losing seasons, the Philadelphia Eagles were poised for a turn-around. With an electric young quarterback in Randall Cunningham and the legendary Reggie White just entering his prime, the sky was truly the limit. The Eagles would go on to win the division title that season for only the second time in 28 years thanks in no small part to the contributions of two rookies taken in the draft that year.

To say that the Eagles first round selection in the 1988 draft raised some eyebrows would be an understatement. With the 13th pick, Philadelphia selected a tight end out of Oklahoma who had the grand total of 62 catches during his four years in the run-oriented Sooner offense. Keith Jackson would go on to catch 81 passes during his rookie season, a team record at the time and a rookie record that still stands today. His 142 yards receiving in the Fog Bowl that postseason still stands as the most receiving yards in a playoff game in franchise history. Jackson was named the NFC Offensive Rookie of the year and was the only first year player to be selected to the Pro Bowl that season.

Unfortunately for Jackson and the Eagles, the historic rookie campaign would be the high water mark of a nine-year career. Contract squabbles with the team led to a two game holdout at the beginning of the 1990 season that would prove costly to both parties. Missing their big-play tight end, the Eagles dropped both games by a total of 9 points including a 7-point loss to the eventual Super Bowl champion Giants. With Jackson on board later in the season, the Eagles turned the tables on New York with a 31-13 drubbing. As a matter of fact, the Eagles never lost to the Giants with Jackson on the field during his four seasons with the team, posting a 7-0 mark. Had he been available during those first two weeks of the season, it is not a stretch to say that the balance of power may have shifted to the Eagles that year. Instead, the 1990 season culminated with the firing of Buddy Ryan and one season later, Jackson's departure via free agency heralded a new era in professional football history.

Despite the bitter ending to his time with the Eagles, Jackson went on to some productive seasons with the Dolphins before capping his career with a Super Bowl championship in Green Bay. In his nine seasons, Jackson made the Pro Bowl five times, and in 2001, he was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame.

After hitting on their first round selection in 1988, the Eagles traded a fourth round pick to move up in the second round and nab Eric Allen out of Arizona State. Head Coach Buddy Ryan touted the selection as the steal of the draft and the defensive back did not disappoint. His five interceptions during his rookie campaign were a glimpse of things to come as he went on to a stellar 14 year NFL career. His 34 picks as an Eagle are a team record and his 54 interceptions overall place him in the NFL's top 20 all time. The 6 time Pro Bowler retired after the 2001 season having only missed three games due to injury over his entire career. Allen is currently an NFL analyst for ESPN and they recently named his selection by the Eagles in 1988 as the greatest 30th pick in NFL draft history.

In addition to their master strokes in the first two rounds of the 1988 draft, one of the Eagles fourth round selections that year was surrendered as part of the NFL's Supplemental Draft from the previous September. The player taken with that pick? 8-time pro bowler and future Hall of Fame wide receiver Cris Carter.





NFL ALUMNI NEWS & NOTES

NFL PLAYERS ASSOCIATION EXPANDS DISABILITY BENEFITS PROGRAM FOR RETIRED PLAYERS

The NFL Alliance, comprised of the NFL, NFL Players Association, Pro Football Hall of Fame and NFL Alumni Association, recently announced a further series of improvements to the NFL disability benefits program as part of the Alliance's continued commitment to address the medical and disability needs of retired NFL players and their families.

The improvements will significantly expand eligibility for disability benefits and increase the amount of the benefit paid to certain recipients. The particular changes announced were:

- A doubling of the minimum benefit post-career, non-football "total and permanent" disability from \$20,000 to \$40,000 per year for retired players who become disabled unrelated to football. Players would otherwise receive the full amount of their pension, if greater.
- Players who took their NFL pension early, and are therefore ineligible to apply for and receive disability benefits, will be offered a new one-time opportunity to apply for total and permanent disability benefits. These players may establish their disability through either a medical examination or by a total and permanent disability determination from Social Security. The opportunity to apply for benefits will begin on April 1, 2008. Applications will be accepted through July 31, 2008.
- Players who have received a total and permanent disability determination from Social Security will not need to separately establish disability under the NFL plan. Players who were denied benefits under the NFL plan but have subsequently been found disabled by Social Security may have their NFL cases reconsidered. The other good news for retired NFL players is that NFL disability awards are not offset by the amount of any award paid by Social Security.
- The time within which to apply for line of duty disability benefits has been lengthened from the current 48-month period to 48 months or the player's actual number of credited seasons. For example, a 10-year veteran would have 10, rather than, as previously, four years, to apply for this benefit.

"We are proud to improve upon the most extensive benefits package in professional sports by going well beyond what has been available through our Collective Bargaining Agreement," said Harold Henderson, NFL executive vice president of labor relations. "These voluntary improvements are consistent with our commitment to address post-career issues and improve the benefits of retired players."

"These improvements are part of the longstanding commitment of current players and the Players Association to the retired players who came before us," said Gene Upshaw.

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HARMON'S INVENTION A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

(continued from page 1) And if you can get a player faster in the offseason, especially with the visual recognition stimulus and the lights and the reaction time, you get them a step faster, their hands a step quicker, their punch a little bit more powerful through the whole offseason they're going to be better football players."

A former sixth-round pick from Kent State, Harmon was an undersized defensive tackle who collected 39.5 sacks during his seven years in the NFL, a stint shortened by a career-ending knee injury. He attributes much of his success in the NFL to a few key factors -- the ability to continually improve his technique, his speed and his ability to recognize then react to any situation faster than his opponent. The R.A.T.T. Elite Training System was designed and developed to maximize these concepts.

Harmon retired from the NFL and got into coaching at the high school level. He coached for about six years before devoting himself to the R.A.T.T. project.

"This is what bored, retired d-linemen do," laughed Harmon.

For more information, check out:
GetQuickTraining.com

EAGLES ALUMNI TRIVIA

Prior to the selection of Tony Hunt in the 2007 NFL Draft, who was the last Penn State player drafted by the Eagles?

1. Kenny Jackson
2. Mike Zordich
3. Tony Stewart
4. Ron Heller

(Answer from last issue: BILL BRADLEY)

