

How Sammy Watkins Built His Game-Breaking Speed

Zac Clark - sports.yahoo.com

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Sammy Watkins says he was “stiff, sore and out of shape” when he reported for his first NFL Combine workout at the Performance Compound in Tampa. “I wasn’t looking like the Sammy Watkins from the Ohio State game,” said the former Clemson wide receiver.

That game was the best of Watkins’ collegiate career. He exploded for 16 catches and 227 yards in a 40-35 BCS Orange Bowl win over the Buckeyes. It was a highlight-reel performance, validating his potential as a No. 1 wide receiver at the next level.

Following the game, Watkins was banged up from the wear and tear of a full season of football. This made his transition to the intense NFL Combine prep program difficult. “The first day I was here, I lifted like crap,” Watkins says. “I was really sore and hurting a lot. My body had to get used to the workouts.”

But by the final week of workouts before the Combine, Watkins was beginning to taper his training. He aspired to run the fastest 40-Yard Dash at the Combine, but he needed to perfect his technique. So he warmed up for one of his final speed sessions with “Get-Offs,” a drill focused on improving his drive during the first three steps of the sprint. He lines up and blasts off—pop, pop, pop—with three steps of pure power and explosiveness.

Watkins’ technique on those three steps wasn’t always so crisp. Jason Riley, director of performance at the Performance Compound says, “Our biggest goal with Sammy was changing his second and third steps. He had amazing power coming out of his start, but he just wasn’t maximizing that second and third step.”

Riley prescribed a comprehensive speed, strength and power plan designed to perfect those crucial steps of the 40. On the turf, Watkins performed Speed Bounding and Sled Pulls, which trained him to put force into the ground behind him so he could explode out of his starting stance and propel himself forward with maximum velocity.

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Barbell Box Lunge

Following his morning speed session, Watkins hit the weight room to perform a lower-body strength and power workout geared to reinforcing proper sprint mechanics. Riley's program does this via complex training—pairing a strength exercise with a plyometric movement in a way that maximizes power in the muscle group being targeted.

The first pair consisted of Barbell Box Lunges, where Watkins, with a barbell on his back, lunged onto a box, then stepped up, finishing upright with his knee lifted up to his chest; and Depth Drop Jumps, in which he stepped off a 12-inch box and immediately leapt onto a 54-inch one. Watkins' impressive display of

Depth Jumps developed his lower-body power while minimizing ground reaction time.

Complex #2 paired Barbell Box Step-Ups to Knee Drive, another single-leg strength movement, with Triple Jumps, a single-leg horizontal plyo drill that improves the ability to generate force into the ground.

His grueling reps on the turf and in the weight room paid off for Watkins, who corrected his technique and recorded an official time of 4.43 seconds at the NFL Combine, a top-10 time among wide receivers.

Watkins 40 time matched the game-breaking speed he had used to shred defenses all season long. He led the ACC with 1,464 receiving yards, racking up 12 touchdown receptions, seven of which came on plays of 40 yards or more—proof of his big-play potential.

Looking to build on his pass-catching prowess, Watkins ended his training day with a series of reaction drills. Several coaches tossed tennis balls and footballs at him from various angles. Watkins snatched every ball, even performing 180-degree pivots between grabs.

In this training day, Watkins completed two workouts and a bevy of additional position drills. But this is normal for him. "You've got to have the mindset of, 'I'm going to get better every day,'" he says. "For me, it's just waking up every morning, putting my best foot forward and giving 110 percent."

Check out STACK's Path to the Pros series for more on the training of 2014's NFL Draft class.

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SPEED TRAINING



Speed Bounding

Bound forward from one leg to the other in continuous fashion, covering as much ground as possible with each bound.

Sets/Distance: 2x15-20 yards

Sled Pulls

Assume start position with your body positioned at a 45-degree forward lean. Push through the ground with your back foot and drive forward into a sprint. Driving your arms forward and back, continue sprinting for specified distance.

Sets/Distance: 4x20 yards



Strength/Power/Skill Workout

1. Physioball Plank

Assume a plank position with your forearms on a physioball. Push the ball with your forearms to roll it forward two to three inches. Pull the ball with your forearms to roll it backwards two to three inches. Repeat for specified reps.

Sets/Reps: 2x10



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2a. Barbell Box Lunge

With a barbell on your upper back, assume an athletic stance approximately 12 inches in front of a 6-inch box. Step forward onto the box with your right foot and lower into a lunge until your back knee is just above the ground. Push through the heel of your right foot to stand upright on the box and drive your right knee up until your thigh is parallel to the ground. Return to start position and perform next rep with your left leg. Repeat in alternating fashion for specified reps.

Sets/Reps: 3x3-4 each leg



2b. Depth Drop Jump

Stand on a 12-inch plyo box. Slowly step off the box and land softly with your knees bent and both feet on the ground. Generate force through the ground to immediately jump up onto a higher box. Land softly on the box with bent knees. Watkins jumps onto a 54-inch box, but you should begin with one around 24 to 36 inches and work up from there as you advance with the exercise.

Sets/Reps: 3x3-4



3a. Barbell Box Step-Up to Knee Drive

With a barbell on your upper back, assume an athletic stance in front of an 18-inch plyo box. Step onto the box with your right foot and explosively drive your body up. Drive your left knee up until your thigh is parallel to the ground. Bend your right knee and hip to lower your left leg to the ground to return to start position. Perform the next rep stepping up with your left leg and driving your right knee. Repeat in alternating fashion for specified reps.

Sets/Reps: 3x3-4 each leg

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3b. Triple Jump

Assume a starting stance with your right foot forward and your left foot slightly off the ground behind you. Push off your right foot and drive your left knee up to hop forward. Land with your right foot flat on the ground. Immediately skip forward off your right foot and drive your left leg forward. Land with your left foot flat on the ground, lean forward and explosively jump forward off your left foot. Throw both feet in front of your body and stick the landing.

Sets/Reps: 3x3 each leg

4. Receiver Reaction Drills

Catch tennis balls with one hand as a partner throws them to you from 10 yards away. After each catch, immediately hop and pivot 180 degrees to receive a football being thrown by another partner. Repeat the pattern for combined total of 15 throws. Add difficulty by letting each partner choose which ball to throw.

Sets/Reps: 4x15

