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Finding Their Ideal Weight

Article By: Kyle Stack

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NFL players lose and gain weight to meet their position's requirements

Football's physical and athletic nature leads to its players closely scrutinizing their weight. Overweight players must shed the pounds and trade fat for muscle in order to keep up with their quicker foes. Players on the lighter side look to gain healthy weight so that they can withstand the physical pounding that characterizes the game.

WeightWatchers.com spoke with noted performance coach Tom Shaw and dietitian Rikki Keen, MS, RD, CSSD, CSCS regarding two current NFL players they have helped lose and gain weight to meet the requirements of their profession.

Glenn Dorsey Defensive Tackle, Kansas City Chiefs (No. 5 overall pick, 2008)

Dorsey was a two-time All-American at Louisiana State University, but he began his pre-NFL Draft training in January 2008 with excess body fat. At 311 pounds, the lineman who was revered in college for his quickness in the trenches had to step up his explosiveness while maintaining a more reasonable weight.

Shaw, who trains college and NFL players, among other athletes, at Disney's Wide World of Sports complex in Kissimmee, FL, knew his speed-focused training program couldn't single-handedly improve Dorsey's body. He needed the help of Keen, who runs a private practice from Anchorage, AK, and travels to Shaw's pre-Draft camp every year to give players much-needed nutritional instruction.

Keen developed a 7-week program that held a 298-pound mark as the dangling carrot. (They beat it by an additional pound.) Under the plan, Dorsey consumed roughly 4,000 calories per day—three meals plus two snacks—on the back of "control" carbohydrates. These are carbs with minimal starch, such as refined/processed bread, rice and pasta. Since he expended about 5,000 calories every day, there was less concern about his carb-filled intake.

"We can't do a major caloric drop because that's when you start losing muscle and that's not supporting what he's supposed to do in the weight room," said Keen, who advises those seeking weight loss to eat normal but healthy portions rather than to diet.

Fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meat and healthy fats like those found in nuts and olive oil were encouraged. Pre- and post-workout, Dorsey focused on consuming protein-infused Muscle Milk and Cytomax.

Still, he also needed training, which Shaw provided with his jump-higher-to-run-faster philosophy. "We do plyometrics and jumping and ankle flexor hops," Shaw said. "The higher you jump, the more explosive you are, the better chance that you're going to run fast."

Tony Carter

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Cornerback, Denver Broncos (undrafted, 2009)

The same training philosophy applied to Carter, a lean rookie cornerback currently on the Broncos' practice squad. After spending four years at Florida State, Carter still found himself in need of a speed refinement to compete at the next level.

"We're trying to work on stride length and stride frequency," Shaw said of his ability to help players like Carter who already run fast. "The longer your strides are, the faster you're going to be able to run a 40-yard dash." Shaw emphasizes resistance runs using bungee cords and launch belts at 20-yard distances to build explosiveness, usually completed in no more than an hour.

Keen's nutrition plan for Carter, a 7-week program in which he was expected to pack on 9 pounds to his 168-pound frame, focused on his absorbing 4,500 calories per day while burning 3,800 to 4,000 calories.

Carter measured his success simply by maintaining discipline. "Being more consistent and following the diet day in and day out helped me tremendously," Carter said.

Many of the same foods and sports drinks emphasized with Dorsey were deemed important for Carter, although Carter required a greater amount of water. Unlike Dorsey, who wouldn't want to consume too much water because of possible excess water retention that would stymie weight loss, he needed it to help build muscle. (As Keen noted, muscle is 70 percent water.)

Keen also implored Carter to go for an extra scoop of rice or a larger chicken breast at meals so that he could maintain his heightened caloric intake. Just as important was his consumption of the proteins leucine (whey) and casein (milk). Leucine is fast-acting, which is why Keen notes that protein shakes should be downed an hour prior to a workout and within a half hour afterward. In contrast, the slow-acting nature of casein enables people to drink a glass of milk in the hours leading up to sleep in order to promote muscle repair for the new day.

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