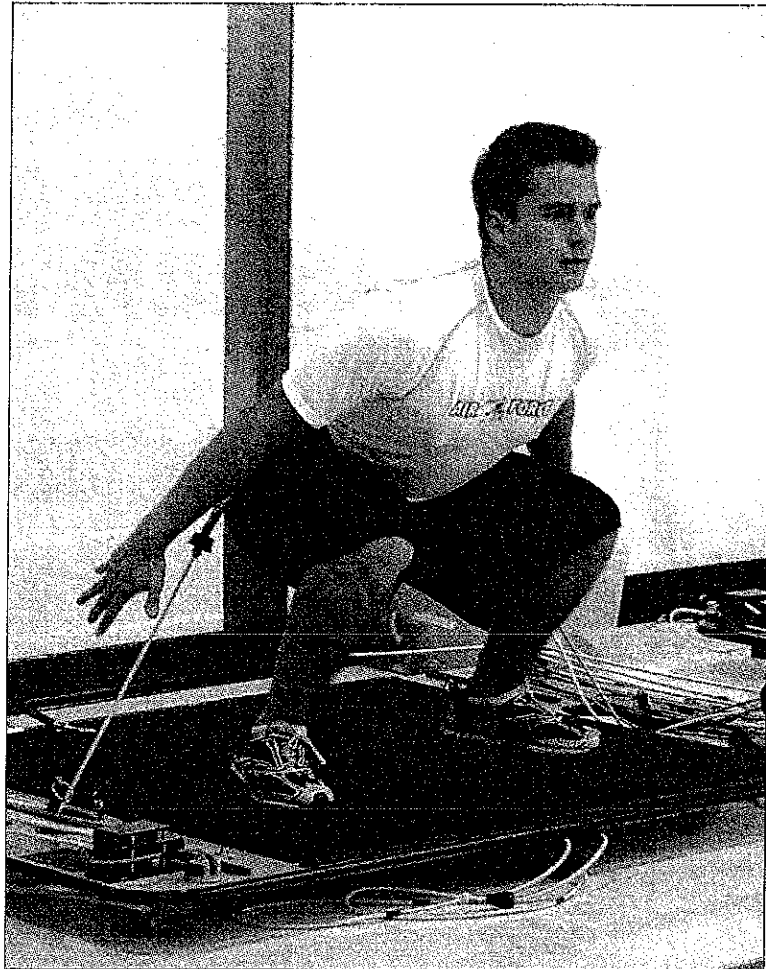


Sports



JIM DONOVAN/MCKINNEY COURIER-GAZETTE
McKinney North linebacker Colton Floyd works on his explosion techniques with Michael Johnson Performance Center director of performance Lance Walker during a high school football speed training class this week.

Room for improvement

MJPC workouts focus on better preparing athletes for upcoming football two-a-days

BY JIM DONOVAN

MCKINNEY COURIER-GAZETTE

The Michael Johnson Performance Center is continuing to grow into its reputation as one of the world's most renowned training centers in the world, but for now the center's chief focus is on helping a lucky group of local athletes to become the best football players they can be.

Long-time football player and self-proclaimed fitness "nerd" Lance Walker, one of the most well-respected trainers in the world, is leading a group of northern Collin County high school football players, in addition to a few local high school grads now playing football at the collegiate level, through an eight-session, speed-intensive training center at the month-old facility.

"We brought in coaches from all around the county - I think every school was represented - and we sat around and talked about football speed," Walker said. "They all know a lot about speed training, but chances are, with 300 athletes to look after, they can't work on the little things like I can. I'm a nerd, this is all I do. It's easier for me to pick out one caveat and boom, tell them that's what you need to focus on that drill with that specific athlete."

That pegged the interest of many coaches, who began to recommend their players for the program, which is in its third week.

"The coaches realized that we're only

here to help, and we know what we're talking about," Walker said. "There is no magic in a drill. You still have to coach each drill. What we do is we pull back away from the drill and set up the motor patterns so when they get into the drill they know what to do."

The two main focal points of the program are on posture and force production that leads to acceleration. While a majority of football coaches put the focus on weight training - which Walker says is equally as important to the progression of athletes - posture is the one aspect that transcends itself through every sport. Be it a linebacker moving laterally against the line of scrimmage or a receiver busting out on a deep post, posture can often define the limitations of each individual.

"We teach basic fundamental postures, and then we can tweak them up," Walker said. "The collegiate guys, for the most part, are in some cases better and worse."

One such player is 2006 McKinney High graduate and Richmond University red-shirt freshman and defensive lineman Casey Cooley.

A player that developed some bad habits in high school that were somewhat compounded in his first year at Richmond, Walker is working on his basic motor skills, including how to strike the ground to get more power, how to lean and the proper position of the knee and ankle before combining it all together. The focus of Tuesday's workout was on Cooley's range of movement in his hip.

"I wanted to increase my speed, power and agility and basically everything I want to get to the next level," Cooley said while undergoing treatment after his workout. "For anyone who wants to get better, to be

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the best that they can be, I definitely recommend this because the things they teach us are very easy to understand."

Not that Cooley, who begins two-a-days next week, needed to see an immediate improvement, he did. After his first plyometrics workout he improved his vertical jump from 32 inches to 34. Walker believes Cooley will continue to improve during the season thanks to his hard work at the center.

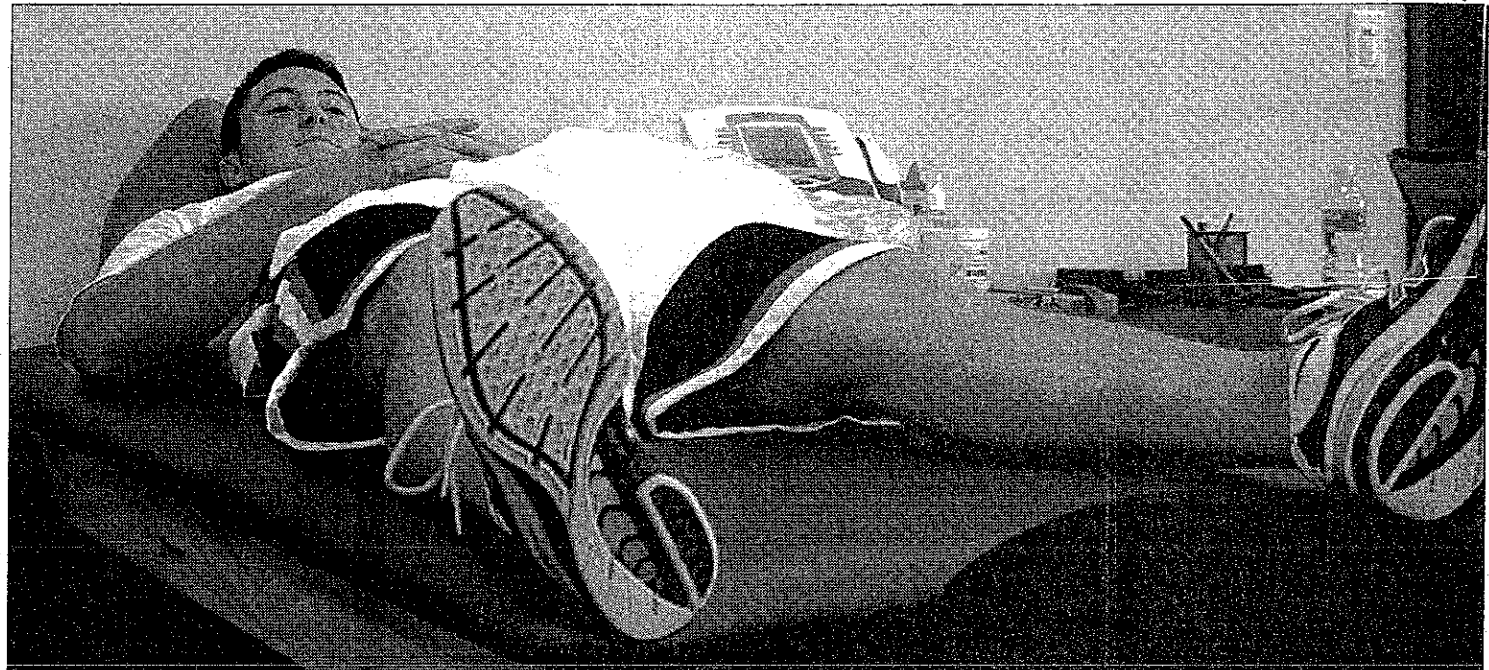
"When he comes back [after the season] we're going to see some striking differences," Walker said of Cooley. "He's going to figure out that this is a more efficient way of moving, that helps him get to the ball faster. And that's going to become automatic. An automated process is always faster than a

motor-programmed process and that's what these [high school] kids have to learn."

Among the high school participants include McKinney North standouts Colton Floyd and David Douglas and McKinney High sophomore lineman Nate Leonard. Their Tuesday workout started out with an intense warm-up session, followed by a session of plyometrics and speed form work.

"We looked into [the speed program] and came up here, and from Day 1 it's just been hitting it and getting it," said Floyd, who earlier this month committed to play football at Air Force and constantly strives to improve every facet of his life. "We have two-a-days coming up here in a few weeks, and I want to be in the best shape I can be. This will definitely translate into [success] on Friday nights."

There's no doubt that is something North head football coach Shawn Pratt is excited to hear.



2006 McKinney High graduate and current Richmond Spider Casey Cooley receives treatment following a workout at the Michael Johnson Performance Center this week. JIM DONOVAN/MCKINNEY COURIER-GAZETTE