

## Training for NFL Combine worth the effort Franklin facility helps Williams, Martin, others reach peak



**DeAngelo Williams, left, listens as Judd Granzow, co-founder of D1 Fitness, helps him prepare for the NFL Combine. GEORGE WALKER IV / STAFF**

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**FRANKLIN** — DeAngelo Williams pushed aside his contempt for the drills he'll perform at this week's NFL Scouting Combine and spent the better part of the last three months training for them.

He simply accepts the intensive work, geared specifically toward what the former University of Memphis running back will be asked to do at the combine, as a necessary part of life approaching the

NFL Draft.

"I totally disagree with it, but it's something you have to do if you want to play at the next level," Williams said on a recent morning after an hour of speed and agility work. "Any guy can come out and run a great 40 and just blow away these drills. That doesn't mean he can play football.

"But you've got to do it. That's what they want to see, that's their measuring stick. I'm not going to change it. It's crazy. Half the cuts we make out here in these drills, you'll never have to make them in a game."

Nevertheless, just about all the 300-plus college prospects hoping to be drafted April 29-30 have spent the last couple months training to improve their performances in combine-specific drills.

Since the beginning of the year Williams has worked at one of those cottage industry training centers — D1 Sports Training, housed in a modernistic building with the feel of a field house tucked behind Cool Springs Galleria.

At such facilities, people like D1 Pro Performance Director Judd Granzow film the players' workouts, study their style and tweak their technique, all in the hope of producing a better performance at the combine, which begins tomorrow at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis.

The ultimate goal: earning the players better ratings on the draft boards of all 32 NFL teams.

Along with Williams, who is rated as the draft's second or third best running back, D1's current client list includes offensive tackle Marcus McNeill from Auburn, quarterback Brodie Croyle from Alabama and quarterback Ingle Martin, a Nashvillian who played at MBA, Florida and Furman.

Some agents funnel their clients to specific training centers or put together training teams of their own. Plenty of prospects are recruited by multiple facilities that want to count them among their alumni once they hit it big in the pros.

Williams said he chose D1 and Granzow over other suitors because he wanted more individual attention. He's become a huge fan of his coach and said Granzow should be recognized along with the most popular training names in the country.

### About Granzow

**FRANKLIN** — Judd Granzow, the pro performance director at D1 Sports Fitness, categorized himself as a self-made coach. He grew up in Southern California and was a fourth-round pick of the Los Angeles Dodgers out of high school. He played a season and a half of minor league ball, then played football for two years at Moorpark Junior College. He transferred and lettered at the University of Tennessee in 1998 and 1999 while studying history.

Once his playing days ended, Granzow said he traveled and studied a number of trainers he admires, and pieced together his own training programs. He started D1 five years ago out of his basement and became partners with another former Volunteer, Will Bartholomew, in 2002. Granzow, 29, sells himself as a hands-on mentor who will give each player plenty of one-on-one time.

—PAUL KUHARSKY

McNeill is from Decatur, Ga., just outside Atlanta. He considered training options in Atlanta, Phoenix, Los Angeles and Orlando, where Tom Shaw's well-known program moved from Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina.

"I just liked D1 the best," said McNeill, who will have spent almost two months with Granzow before the combine and plans to return later to prepare for his pro day. "It's up and coming. I knew they had a lot of state-of-the-art stuff and I get real good work up here."

Granzow said the business of preparing NFL prospects for the combine and pro days is booming.

"Within the last five years these things have really started to pop up," he said. "What we sell is the training and the facility. You're going to come in here, you're going to work hard, you're going to get better. If you want the Cadillac, go somewhere else because we're not about that."

"When they see what's going on, they see the results, they see they are getting faster and stronger in a short amount of time, they know this is where they need to be."

As the combine drew near, workloads were scaled back to put players in line for peak execution.

One morning last week, Williams and seven others toiled under the watch of Granzow on a 60-yard stretch of FieldTurf in D1's new building.

They took small, choppy steps on a grid, then made sure they cleared a foot-high orange hurdle before accelerating forward. They pivoted around orange cones.

They worked on 40-yard dash starts, running through a narrow passage set off by the miniature hurdles and concentrating on a point off in the distance. They clipped onto a bungee cord linked to Granzow, who pulled them along for the first half of a 40.

"That's an overspeed drill. It's trying to teach their body to move faster and turn over faster than you're really capable of doing it," Granzow said. "So we're kind of tricking the body to run a little bit faster."

Martin said he's shaved his time in the first 10 yards of the 40 from 1.67 seconds to less than 1.6. He is also on a diet which calls for a big protein shake every morning and no carbohydrates after 2 p.m. to help him "lean up."

Williams said he feels faster and more explosive operating at 10 or 12 pounds less than the 220 he carried at Memphis. He laughed and said he's lighter on Fridays than he is after a weekend.

McNeill said the agility drills for offensive linemen he'll do in Indianapolis are unfamiliar, even unnatural. He needed time to get comfortable with L drill, for instance. It sends a player racing a short distance between and around cones on two lines that form an L.

"The receivers are real good at it. For a big guy like me, that's something I had to come up here to work on," McNeill said. "That's what the coaches and them come to see (at the combine), so you've got to practice at it."

Granzow doesn't hesitate to be hands-on. At one point during a recent morning session he crouched behind Williams to adjust his back foot for his 40-yard dash takeoff.

Prospects are also schooled on nutrition, prepared for the NFL's Wonderlic test (a rough measure of intelligence) and counseled on interviews they'll face with general managers and media.

While physical work seems to be the core of the operation, Granzow said his tutoring helps prospects handle the incredible mental strain of their draft auditions. •

"It's pretty intense, and we try to get every phase that they go through," he said. "They're going to be there four days. If you're not going to run until the fourth day, how does that affect you the first three? What is it like to stand around and have MRIs all day? What if you don't have MRIs? What if I don't have interviews with teams?"

"These guys come back so mentally drained. It's a tough deal. They put them all out there and see who wants to survive it."

McNeill and Williams said training at D1 will definitely help their games, but they're ready for some actual football.

"Pancaking people, I'm ready to get back to that," McNeill said. "I can leave all these 40 times and all that to the wide receivers."

"There won't be any cones on the field when you're playing on Sunday," Williams said. "It's not going to be about how many times you can (bench press) 225. It's going to be get in between those white lines and see if you can perform, make a guy miss, score touchdowns." •

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