The Final Exam: **2008 NFL COMBINE**

Once again the best college football players faced off in Indianapolis to determine the biggest, fastest and strongest



The fastest 40-yard dash at the 2008 NFL Combine was 4.24 by running back Chris Johnson of the University of East Carolina. Johnson also had the third-best broad jump for his position: 10'10".

Wide receiver Arman Shields of the University of Richmond had the highest results in two events. He had the fastest 20-yard shuttle with 3.96, and the best 60-yard shuttle with 10.87, the only athlete to break 11 seconds in the test. For his position Shields also had the third-best vertical jump at 37.5, the second-best broad jump with 10'8", and second-best 3-cone drill with 6.67.

2008 NFL COMBINE

t's been said that numbers don't lie. If that's true, then the numbers produced at the NFL Combine will tell scouts much about an athlete's potential to play at the highest levels of the game. Of course, the athletes who run the fastest, jump the highest and lift the most weight do not always make the best football players. But professional football is a big-money game, and franchise owners want to get as much information about their potential players as possible before spending millions of dollars, often on just a single player. That is why the NFL Combine, held



annually in late winter in Indianapolis, Indiana, is such a big deal that ESPN televises the highlights of the event and results are reported in all other forms of news media.

What is especially appealing about the Combine is every athlete competes on an equal playing field, under the exact same conditions. So those quarterbacks who couldn't put up the big numbers due to an inexperienced offensive line or a tough schedule can really shine at this event – or at least get some serious attention from the pro scouts who may not have paid much attention to them during their final college seasons.

The Combine is such an important event that many athletes practice the tests for months before, often enrolling in special programs run by professional strength coaches to help them prepare. And the emphasis on these tests has even trickled down to the high school level, with major athletic companies such as Nike sponsoring these events for the best high school athletes.

The tests are divided into the major positions: Quarterbacks, Running Backs, Wide Receivers, Tight Ends, Offensive Line, Defensive Line, Linebackers, Defensive Backs, and Specialists (i.e., Kickers and Punters). Although many of the tests have changed since the Combines were first held, Table 1 shows the tests that are currently used and what they measure. In addition to undergoing these tests, each player is put through positionspecific drills, team interviews, an IQ test, body measurements including bodyfat percentage, flexibility tests and a thorough injury evaluation.

Primarily due to better conditioning programs at a younger age and emphasis on practicing the tests, the results continually get better at the NFL Combine. As proof, let's compare the results of three tests performed at the 2002, 2006 and 2008 NFL Combines in major positions (Table 2).

Many athletes, due to injury or the specific requirements of their position, may decide not to participate in a specific test. For example, this year only one quarterback decided to test on the bench press. Some athletes who had exceptional performances in college may decide to skip the testing, confident that their results are enough to satisfy their future employers. Running back Darren McFadden of the University of Arkansas, who placed second for the past two years in the Heisman, could have skipped the Combine and still have been assured a first-round pick in the NFL Draft. He elected to participate anyway and, to no one's surprise, ran a blazing 4.33 in the 40.

Sure, there's more to football than just numbers, but if there's one thing you can count on, the NFL Combine is here to stay! EBS

TABLE 1

NFL Combine Tests MEASURES

40-Yard Dash Bench Press Vertical Jump Broad Jump 20-Yard Shuttle 60-Yard Shuttle or Long Shuttle 3-Cone Drill

Speed and Explosiveness Upper Body Strength Explosiveness and Leg Power Explosiveness, Quickness and Leg Power Lateral Quickness, Coordination and Change of Direction Speed, Endurance Lateral Quickness, Coordination and Change of Direction

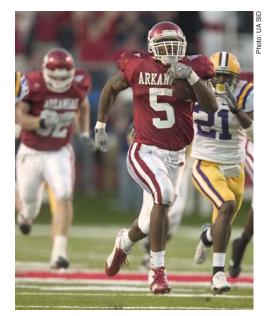


TABLE 2



One of the premier positions in the NFL is running back, and two notable participants in the 2008 NFL Combine were Darren McFadden (left), who had the second-best 40 for his position with 4.33; and Jonathan Stewart, who had the second-best vertical jump for running backs with 36.5".

	NFL Com	bine:	2002 v	s. 2006 vs	5. 2008	
	POSITION	YEAR	40 (seconds)	20-YD SHUTTLE (seconds)	VJ (inches)	
	Quarterbacks	2002 2006 2008	4.59 4.35 4.55	3.87 4.07 4.19	38.5 39.5 33.5	
	Running Backs	2002 2006 2008	4.42 4.39 4.24	3.93 4.07 4.18	42 38.5 39	
•	Wide Receivers	2002 2006 2008	4.31 4.32 4.31	3.76 3.97 3.96	41.5 38 38.5	
	Tight Ends	2002 2006 2008	4.59 4.38 4.55	4.10 4.01 4.14	38.5 42 38	
	Offensive Line	2002 2006 2008	4.69 4.88 4.99	4.19 4.36 4.47	37.5 35 30.5	
	Defensive Line	2002 2006 2008	4.47 4.43 4.45	4.19 4.08 4.21	40.5 42 35.5	
/	Linebackers	2002 2006 2008	4.51 4.40 4.47	3.83 3.96 3.98	42 42.5 36.5	
	Defensive Backs	2002 2006 2008	4.39 4.30 4.31	3.86 3.81 4.07	41 41.5 38.5	

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