

# Sam Baker Goes Pro

First-round draft pick Sam Baker is ready for the NFL

Photo: USC Sports Information



The typical football player will end his playing career in high school – and that’s not such a bad thing. Playing as part of a football team, even if you never make it to the varsity level, can be a rewarding experience that teaches you how to cooperate with others to achieve a common goal.

For those talented few who make it to the college level, the experience of playing in packed stadiums and possibly in nationally televised games is an amazing opportunity. And for those who get drafted to the NFL, now you’re talking what many consider the highest level of athletic achievement. This is what is in store for Sam Baker.

The achievements of Sam Baker at USC as a college offensive lineman are remarkable when you consider that he was playing for a team that frequently challenged for the national championships and has won a lion’s share of Heisman trophies. In fact, while at USC Baker blocked for Heisman Trophy winners Matt Leinart and Reggie Bush.

Some of his individual accomplishments include being selected as a three-time All-American, a semifinalist for the 2007 Lombardi Award and a Senior Bowl invitee. “We got great leadership from Sam,” said USC head football coach Pete Carroll of Baker’s four years at USC. “And his tenacity and savvy car-



Strength coach Charles Poliquin designed a workout and nutrition program that helped Baker gain 25 pounds of muscle in eight weeks and reduce his bodyfat from 26 percent to 16.9 percent. He is shown here working with Team BFS weightlifter Maegan Snodgrass, now a gymnast at Utah State, shortly before she broke an American record in the snatch.

ried over to the other guys.”

But to impress the scouts of the NFL, Baker knew he needed to get bigger and stronger – which is why he turned to Charles Poliquin and his team of performance-enhancement experts.



In college Baker was not exceptionally strong, but he was able to excel because he had exceptional quickness and great football skills – and

it helped to be able to practice against a great defense. At USC Baker packed 305 pounds on his 6-foot-5 frame, but he carried 26 percent bodyfat and could only bench press 225 for 16 reps. Those numbers had the NFL scouts concerned.

## NFL Boot Camp

Sam Baker’s father, C. David Baker, is the commissioner of the Arena Football League. At the end of the 2007 season David asked his son what he wanted as a graduation gift. Sam Baker’s request was an unusual one – he wanted renowned strength coach Charles Poliquin to design his workouts and he wanted to train for an extended period at the Poliquin Performance Center in Chicago. David agreed.

Come January 5th, Baker was on his way to Chicago to train at the 15,000-square-foot elite center owned by Mike

Bystol, which opened two years ago and is located 20 minutes north of downtown Chicago in Northfield. Coach Poliquin would perform the assessments on Baker and write the workouts, and Coach Bystol would supervise the twice-a-day, five-days-a-week workouts.

Because the Chicago center has a medical center associated with it, Poliquin was able to have Baker undergo many lab tests such as full blood analysis, comprehensive metabolic tests and food allergy tests. Due to environmental influences and Baker’s previously poor diet, Poliquin determined that Baker would require several specific supplements to correct deficiencies in his hormonal profile. Poliquin and Bystol make it a point to warn the athletes they coach to take only pharmaceutical-grade supplements because international drug testing organizations have found that as many as one out of every four sports-performance supplements may be tainted with substances that are banned from competition.

In terms of solid food, Bystol says he had Baker work with Julie Burns, a nutritionist for the White Sox and the Black Hawks. “Julie’s company prepared and cooked all of Baker’s meals in advance and delivered them to him – and all the meals were 100 percent organic.” Baker was put on a moder-

ate- to low-carb diet to keep Baker’s bodyweight up while burning fat.

At USC Baker was used mainly as a pass protector, an important function because his USC team’s offense was built upon it. However, Bystol says that the NFL scouts were not convinced that Baker would have the strength and power to run block. “Sam was relatively weak all around, especially in his entire posterior chain. For example, his lower back was so weak he could only use 10 pounds on the reverse hyper when we started.” His legs were also weak, as evidenced by a vertical jump of only 24 inches.

In an astonishing testament to the strength coaching team of Bystol and Poliquin, within just eight weeks Baker’s bodyfat dropped from 26 percent to 16.9 percent and he gained a solid 25 pounds of muscle. He also bench pressed 225 for 30 reps and increased his vertical jump to 28 inches. The scouts took notice: Baker was drafted by the Atlanta Falcons in the first round of the 2008 draft.

In the great game of football, few athletes have achieved what Sam Baker has. But Baker’s career has just begun, and with continued hard work he is sure to reach even higher levels of accomplishment. We’ll be watching. **BFS**



To get in NFL shape, Baker trained at the Poliquin Performance Center in Chicago.

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