

NFL players reach deal for workouts

Fox Sports 3/17/11

Alex Marvez

NFL players now have an official avenue to conduct workouts under professional trainers during the current work stoppage.

With players locked out from reporting to NFL teams, the NFL Players Association and Athletes' Performance have agreed to a deal that will allow for monitored group and/or individual sessions. This could prove especially helpful for players like quarterbacks and wide receivers who want to work on their timing in the passing game or position groups hoping to stay close during the work stoppage.

"(Players) want to be ready to go at a moment's notice," NFLPA executive George Atallah said Thursday at the NFLPA's annual meeting in Marco Island, Fla. "They're preparing themselves and continuing to work out so if the (lockout) is lifted, guys can go back to work and will be in shape and you won't see a decline in the players' ability to perform at a very, very high level.

"That's one of the things going on: How do we make sure we're prepared to get back on the field? That's our No. 1 goal here."

Athletes' Performance already was aligned with the NFLPA and annually trains many of the top college prospects in preparation for the NFL draft. The company has state-of-the-art facilities as well as trainers and medical staff who may be able to help prevent some of the injuries that could occur if players conducted workouts on their own.

Mark Verstegen, who founded the company in 1999, said players will have access to "evaluation, education, training and therapy" through the internet or by attending one of the five Athletes' Performance centers located across the U.S. Each in-person session would cost players \$500 apiece.

"Each guy can roll through for 2 1/2 days, leave to see their family and come back or stay continuously through the offseason," said Verstegen, the NFLPA's director of player performance since 2004. "It's our culture through the NFL Players Association to make sure the players have the best support.

"Teams created a great infrastructure for (offseason workouts). These players want to stay in shape and be at their best. That's why we put all these systems into place."

Players from the Pittsburgh Steelers, Tennessee Titans, Detroit Lions, Philadelphia Eagles and New Orleans Saints are among those that have either planned or discussed conducting their own workouts during the lockout. The work stoppage began last Friday with the expiration of the collective bargaining agreement and the NFL locking out players after the NFLPA decertified as a union.

Under rules of the lockout, NFL strength and conditioning coaches are among those league employees prohibited from having contact with players.