

# The Science of Speed

TOP DRAFT PROSPECTS AND NFL VETS HAVE FOUND AN EDGE WORKING WITH TONY VILLANI,  
AN INNOVATIVE SPEED GURU WHO GETS RESULTS AND PROLONGS CAREERS.

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**BY JAMEY EISENBERG** / April 23, 2015  
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BOCA RATON, Fla. -- Shane Ray's feet are moving quickly on this day. The defensive end from Missouri, who is projected to be a first-round pick in the [NFL Draft](#) and a potential top-10 overall selection, is jumping in and out of an agility drill with ease.

He's standing on a turf field inside a giant former warehouse, which is located about two miles from the beach. But this isn't a vacation -- Ray is here to work. It's well over a month before he will become a professional football player, but Ray wants to be ready. And a 40-year-old man, who has never played a down of football at any level in his life, is helping him prepare.

Tony Villani runs XPE Sports, which stands for Extreme Performance Enhancement, and he trains football players for the NFL Scouting Combine and throughout their careers. His current clients heading into the [NFL Draft](#) are highlighted by Ray and Vic Beasley, an outside linebacker from Clemson, who is also projected to be a first-round pick and a potential top-10 selection. His clients already in the NFL include [Anquan Boldin](#), [Mark Ingram](#), Mike and [Maurkice Pouncey](#), [Brandon Flowers](#) and [Byron Maxwell](#), among many others.

"Bang," Villani yells at Ray to get him off and running on a drill. "You feel that? Good. Keep that up."

It's a busy day at XPE when CBS Sports got a look at one of Villani's training sessions. First up for Villani were Ray and the other rookies, which included Michigan State's Jeremy Langford, who was the fastest running back at the combine at 4.42 seconds in the 40-yard dash.

Langford showed up at Villani's door running 4.6 seconds, but his technique improved and his time went down. Now, Langford said "people are talking about me a little more" heading into the [NFL Draft](#) because of his results at the combine.

"I give all the credit to God and Tony Villani," Langford said.

There are plenty of stories like this and praise going Villani's way since he started XPE in 2002. He started working with Jamal Lewis, Hines Ward, [Osi Umenyiora](#) and Takeo Spikes while they were in the NFL, and then he eventually moved on to combine training.

Villani said combine training became a business when the NFL started showing it on TV, which was in 2004. Now there are trainers like Villani all around the country, including Pete Bommarito of Bommarito Performance Systems and Matt Gates of Fit Speed in South Florida. But Villani has no problem putting his results up against the competition.

Since 2006, Villani has helped 98 players get drafted, including 21 in the first round. His players have set records at the combine, including receiver [Jacoby Ford](#) from Clemson running the 40-yard dash in 4.28 seconds in 2010, safety Gerald Sensabaugh from North Carolina jumping 46 inches in the vertical jump in 2005 and safety Jason Allen from Tennessee running the 20-yard shuttle in 3.81 seconds in 2006.

This year, Villani's clients also posted impressive numbers in Indy, which has helped their draft stock (Ray did not participate in the on-field workouts because of a foot injury, which is fine now). Phillip Dorsett from Miami was the second-fastest receiver at 4.33 seconds. Stephone Anthony from Clemson was the fastest inside linebacker at 4.56 seconds. And Beasley dominated the defensive ends and became the star of the combine with his vertical leap (41 inches), broad jump (130 inches) and 40-yard dash (4.53 seconds), which was as fast as 2014 No. 1 overall pick [Jadeveon Clowney](#) and faster than quarterbacks [Colin Kaepernick](#) and [Cam Newton](#).

Beasley did all of this while adding 15 pounds since the end of last season without losing any speed or quickness.

"Tony, he has a way," Beasley said. "He was able to do that with me and a couple of other guys. He put weight on me, he got me faster. He just works with you. He helps you develop the right mindset over that time to get you to perform for Indy."

It's been a good offseason for Villani when it comes to his pro clients as well. He takes pride in his clients getting contract extensions or new deals past their rookie contracts, and several

of his players hit it big.

Ingram signed a four-year deal for \$16 million to stay with the [Saints](#). Flowers (four-year deal worth \$36 million to stay with the [Chargers](#)), Maxwell (six-year deal worth \$63 million to sign with the [Eagles](#)) and [Kareem Jackson](#) (four-year deal worth \$34 million to stay with the [Texans](#)) dominated the cornerback market. And [Mike Pouncey](#) signed a five-year deal worth \$45 million to stay with the [Dolphins](#) and become the highest-paid center in the NFL.

Ingram, who did not train with Villani for the combine, was looked at as a first-round bust out of Alabama in 2011. But he worked with Villani for the past two seasons, and he had a career year when it counted in 2014 with a contract on the line (226 carries for 964 yards and nine touchdowns).

"He's just an awesome trainer," Ingram said. "He just gets us right going into every offseason and training camp. He's very supportive. He's down to earth and cares about us. He wants us to do well off the field and on the field. Tony's a great person to have in your corner."



**Mark Ingram, who landed a 4-year, \$16M deal in the offseason, credits Villani for helping him shed the bust label. (USATSI)**

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Villani, who was born and raised in Myrtle Beach, S.C., never expected to only train football players. It just sort of happened that way. After graduating from Clemson and getting a master's degree at George Washington University, Villani worked on the training staff for the NHL's Washington Capitals and then the NBA's Orlando Magic.

He then got a job in 2000 working for Hall of Fame receiver Cris Carter, who ran a training program in South Florida similar to XPE when he was still in the NFL.

"We probably had 50 resumes that we went through," Carter said. "We were looking for young people around the country who had a passion for the sports science part of it. I really believed then it made my career with that type of training and technology because it drove me to heights I could have never done myself. We hired him as an intern. Once I saw his energy and the way he was so athletic -- he wasn't just a knucklehead trainer. And the workouts he started creating within the program, I could see that one day he would grow beyond here. I knew he would have his own facility one day. That's what's happened for him. It's been a pleasure to see him grow and get great results."

Carter now helps Villani with XPE, working with receivers and running backs on catching the ball, running routes and getting off the line of scrimmage. He also helps the defensive backs in what a receiver might do against them on the field.

Carter's son, Duron, who just signed with the [Colts](#) this offseason, has also worked with Villani since he was in high school.

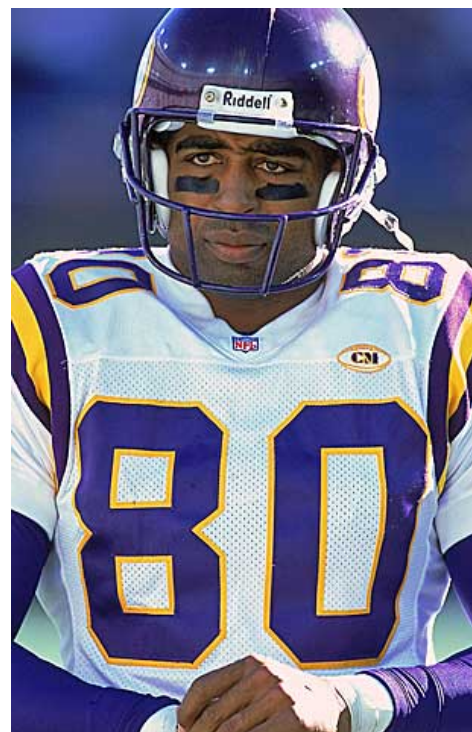
"I just love being associated with him," Cris Carter said. "He's a big dreamer, and he really believes in athletics and trying to give young people the best opportunity to take advantage of their body."

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Villani credits Carter and fellow trainer Bill Welle from Wellefast Elite Sports Training with helping him develop his program for XPE. He also has taken things he learned from the Capitals and Magic and applied it to his NFL training, which is to make players not only run faster but run smarter. As Boldin said, "he works on every aspect of running."

He has a four-step program that he uses for combine training: (1) conditioning and weights (2) building stride length and footwork (3) building power with that stride length in and out of cuts and (4) turning it all into speed, agility and explosion.

"Tony specializes in really pushing the little things," Ray said. "As far as your leg mobility, your flexibility, where you bring your legs when you're running. It's so many little details you don't really think about when you're in college because you're training mostly on athleticism and strength. With Tony you're working on the combine things. He knows what little things need to be strong and what you need to work on."



Hall of Fame wide receiver Cris Carter gave Villani his start working with NFL players.(Getty Images)



Flowers said one of the best things about working with Villani is he does every drill with the players. It's teaching by example not by yelling from the side of the field. You see Villani sprinting all over the facility with his guys.

"While you're complaining, you see him just zoom through the drill," Flowers said. "Whenever you feel like you're dead tired, he has the most energy in the world to keep going. It pushes you even more. If Tony can do it, I have to get through it because we get paid to do this kind of stuff. That's the best trainer you can have. He's not going to talk the talk, but he can walk the walk. He surprises us. He's pretty quick and he looks good in these drills."

He also has created a unique treadmill called the Shredmill, which he helped design with a mechanical engineer. It looks somewhat like a normal treadmill, but Villani said it moves by the player's own power and can handle up to 400 pounds of resistance and can increase up to 28 percent elevation.

They use three Shredmills at the XPE facility, and there are six at different training facilities around the country. Boldin, Ingram and Jackson all bought one to use at home, too. Villani is hoping to eventually sell them to every college and NFL team.

"Most people think we're just running on a treadmill," Villani said. "I still can't get people to understand what it is until they use it. Once they do it's 100 percent satisfaction. I have every guy in here telling their team to buy one, but their strength and conditioning coach doesn't understand it. They're like, 'We don't know how to use it.' Every guy wants their team or college to have one. I can't get through that door yet. Hopefully we will soon."

Added Boldin: "I work out on it pretty much every day. It works on your endurance, your strength, your stride length, overall turnover speed. For me it's a way to work out completely with speed and work every aspect. It's done wonders for me."

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Diet is also a big part of what Villani does with the combine guys to help them eat right. A typical workout day starts early in the morning, and Villani wants them to have protein when they wake up and go to bed. The players then snack at the training facility and only eat a big meal during lunch when they have at least a two-hour break. They also eat two "simple" dinners after an evening workout, which is usually position specific.

"We're trying to put weight on them but not bad weight," Villani said. "It's a nutritional plan that everybody knows. Eat healthy, eat often and eat a lot."



Villani doesn't just train his clients, he works out with them, too.(XPE Sports)

But it's not always easy for athletes in constant motion to gain weight. Sometimes Villani has to be creative, and that happened with Beasley.

Villani said Beasley loves peanut butter, so they put it on everything from pancakes to Rice Krispie treats. Anything to help Beasley pack on a few pounds in a good way.

"It was good meals," Beasley said. "They got a good plan down there. We were eating a good bit. He kept a good diet program down there."

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The business side of training football players can be tricky. Villani only likes to work with 15-20 guys for the combine, and he has different ways of recruiting players. Agents recommend him to their clients, he uses current clients to reach out to players at their former schools and his pipeline to Clemson, his alum, is strong, which helped with Beasley.

Cornerback [Darqueze Dennard](#), who was a first-round pick for the [Bengals](#) in 2014 from Michigan State, helped bring Langford to XPE. Villani was recommended to Ray by his agent. Lewis helped Villani get in contact with Ingram, and Ingram helped bring in [Rams](#) running back [Tre Mason](#) when he was done at Auburn. And on it goes.

Once the combine guys commit to XPE, it then falls on Villani to find them housing. Agents pay Villani \$10,000 to \$15,000 per client, but that has to cover all their expenses, which isn't easy based on the location.

"We have to provide housing for them in Boca Raton in the winter, which stinks," said Villani, who puts the players in two-bedroom condos for two to three months. "There goes 30 to 50 percent of that cost. That hurts my business, so I don't make that much off the combine guys."

The NFL players pay Villani up to \$400 a week, which breaks down to about \$30 an hour. His staff consists of two full-time trainers, but he also brings in help for nutrition, massage, physical therapy and a chiropractor. When he goes to Indianapolis for the combine, he brings about 15 people with him.

All of that comes out of his pocket, and he makes less than \$100,000 a year.

"Everybody thinks because you're working with millionaires you're making millions. That's not the truth," Villani said. "You're working and trying to make a decent living. I can't charge these guys more for a Snickers bar. You can't charge them more for training. The cost of training is what it is."

Not that he's complaining. Far from it. Villani loves what he does.

"If I wasn't working, this is what I'd do for fun," he said. "Let's pick some cool NFL players I like and go work out with them for two hours."

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One of the biggest takeaways from talking to the NFL guys was how much Villani cares about the players. A failure to him isn't having a player run slower than expected at the combine or slip in the draft, which happens. A failure to Villani is a player who isn't successful when their career is over.

During his time with the players, combine guys and current pros, he brings in a financial advisor to give advice on managing money. He uses established guys like Carter, Boldin and the Pouncey twins to talk about the importance of saving and working toward multiple contracts to set your family up for life.

"It's more than just Tony getting us faster and stronger," Mason said. "He's actually getting us mentally prepared for the next level and the transition coming from no money to a life with money. He gets your mind set to realize nothing lasts forever. You have to continue to save now and be smart with your money now so later on in life when you decide to have a family you're financially stable."

Villani also checks in on his players during the season -- in good times and bad. When Mason, who was a third-round pick in 2014, wasn't playing during the first five games of the season because of pass-protection issues, Villani would text him on a regular basis to keep his spirits up.

The message was simple: Just stay with it.

"It's probably because you can't pick up the blitz," Villani said to Mason. "It's what you didn't do at Auburn. You start picking up the blitz you'll start getting the ball. He started in Week 6 and started killing it."

He had similar texts with Dennard, who played sparingly as a rookie despite being a first-round pick in Cincinnati. Villani would constantly remind Dennard that his time would come, and this year he's expected to compete for a starting cornerback job.

Now, it's not a total love fest with Villani and the players, especially on the field.

"During a training session we want to punch him in the face," Mike Pouncey joked. "But afterward we're very appreciative of him because we know what he's done for us."

XPE just moved into this 15,000-square foot facility, which was made possible by the JP Management Group. Villani hopes to eventually start training high school players as well as the NFL guys and expand his business, but he's only looking to be a personal trainer another four or five more years before he can "fade off into the sunset in Belize."

Villani spends his down time, which is typically after training camp starts, doing paddle boarding and just trying to relax his body. He recently got married, and he enjoys his time when he's not working with some of the best players in the NFL.

But training players is his passion, and he's looking forward to the [NFL Draft](#) to see if his hard work with guys like Beasley and Ray pays off. He'll be watching at home, but he'll be rooting

for his guys.

And, Villani hopes, that once their lives change when they become professionals they still come back to XPE to hone their craft. That's something Ray plans to do after his first encounter with Villani this year.

"I'll do everything in my power to come down and train with Tony again," Ray said. "He really cares. I can already tell the differences he's made in me as far as my running, my body, my weight. I really enjoyed it. I want to stick with him and keep working and see how far I can go."

**Topics:** [Anquan Boldin](#), [Brandon Flowers](#), [Byron Maxwell](#), [Cam Newton](#), [Colin Kaepernick](#), [Darqueze Dennard](#), [Jacoby Ford](#), [Jadeveon Clowney](#), [Kareem Jackson](#), [Mark Ingram](#), [Maurkice Pouncey](#), [Mike Pouncey](#), [Osi Umenyiora](#), [Tre Mason](#), [Cincinnati Bengals](#), [Houston Texans](#), [Indianapolis Colts](#), [Miami Dolphins](#), [New Orleans Saints](#), [Philadelphia Eagles](#), [San Diego Chargers](#), [St. Louis Rams](#), [NFL](#), [NFLDRAFT](#)

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