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## 'A Different Concept' In Athletic Conditioning Jaguar Tackle Finds 'Functional' Strength

DEL MAR, Calif. — Tony Boselli was dead last as he followed the 30 or so other athletes across the high school field, hopping on one leg. With half the distance, 50 yards, to go, he fell to his knees. A sigh of sympathy came from those who had already completed the drill.

"The Big Bear goes down," someone said. Others called to him, "Come on baby, you can do it" and "Go Tony!"

The 6-foot-7-inch, 323-pound Boselli staggered to his feet and finished the drill.

It was 6:30 A.M. on Boselli's last day at T.H.E. (Therapy, Health and Education) Athletic Training Camp, which offers a Rocky Balboa-style regimen devised by the fitness guru Pete Egoscue for athletes from high school, college and the pros.

### A shift in emphasis from raw strength to agility.

Boselli, an offensive tackle with the Jacksonville Jaguars, had come across the country earlier this month to run hills, scale fences, throw logs and crawl, vault and hop his way into shape for this third National Football League training camp, which opened Saturday in Jacksonville, Fla. Among participants at the camp, Boselli was determined to be the fastest big guy there.

"I try to keep up with the smaller guys," said Boselli, whose speed is matched by a grace not often associated with someone his size. "I push myself more than my body wants to be pushed. I give myself the best advantage, and that's what this camp is all about. Quickness and agility and work on



Summer camp has hardly been a stroll in the park for Tony Boselli, the Jaguars tackle, as he prepares for the National Football League season.



the total body. It's what a real athlete should be doing. Strength, speed, jumping over things, crawling under fences, stadium crab crawls.

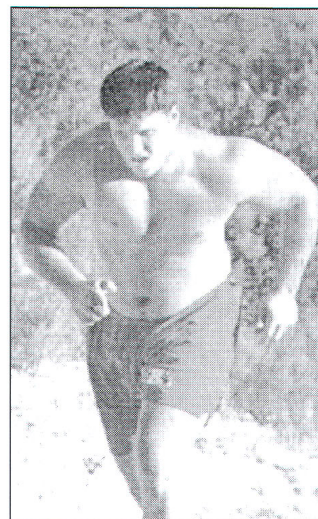
"It's a different concept."

The usual N.F.L. training calls for running sprints, lifting weights, blocking dummies and dancing through rope boxes.

"I think guys in the N.F.L. are still getting low in their stance, moving well," Boselli said, "but this training allows you to get your body into a better position on the football field.

The Jaguar's physical training program does include a lot of lifting with free weights, including scheduled days of power lifting, while the Egoscue regimen treats weight lifting as an adjunct. But Jerry Palmieri, Jacksonville's strength and conditioning coach, wonders how substantive the differences really are.

"I think what Tony does out in California is what we are doing," he said. "We believe in triple extension — ankle, knee and hips. We do a lot of jumping: in-place jumping, jumping with dumbbells against resistance,



jumping through the rope boxes for fast-twitch muscles. The more things we do

that are functional, the better the athlete is going to be. We put in balance drills prior to speed drills."

Harland Svare, the supervisor of T.H.E. summer camp, also talks about the "functional" athlete, but he questions the N.F.L.'s emphasis on weight lifting.

"A player needs to be functional," said Svare, who was a New York Giants linebacker from 1955-60, "then they can have a weight program. When you squat from a power lift, you take the hips out of position and the rest of the body is out of position. The average lineman is duck-footed and his hips are way tilted forward. Injury rate is connected to alignment."

"Guys today should look at 10-year careers. Why is the injury rate to joints in the N.F.L. so high? A person can't handle lifting 30 to 40 pounds in their joints. Weights should be an adjunct to a player's program, not the center. The weight room will go down in history as a major mistake."

If Boselli agrees with Svare, he keeps his opinion to himself. He has only two N.F.L. seasons under his belt and he is aware that at 25, he is "still one of the younger guys." But he hasn't had an injury since his rookie year, when he dislocated his left knee and sustained cartilage damage, missing five weeks of pre-season training camp and the first two games of the regular season.

After that inauspicious start, Boselli has lived up to the hyperbole of his coach, John Robinson of Southern California, who called him "the best lineman I've ever coached." Boselli has also had to fulfill the expectations raised by a seven-year, \$17 million contract as the second overall pick in the 1995 draft. He has filled the bill, proving himself especially adept as a pass protector, allowing only three sacks last season. During the wild-card playoff game against the Buffalo Bills, he limited defensive end Bruce Smith, the 1996 defensive player of the year, to three tackles and no sacks, and earned the game ball. Then, in January, Boselli played in his first Pro Bowl.

"That's my job," Boselli said. "I make sure I am in between my guy and the quarterback. We are blocking the defensive ends that are the best athletes in the game."

Palmieri has high praise for the way Boselli does his job. "He's got great feet," the Jaguars' conditioning coach said. "Tony runs extremely well. His feet are very skillful, yet he is a powerful man. He has good body control."

Always a student of his position, Boselli

began coming to Egoscue's training camp in 1994, before his senior year at U.S.C., and has returned the last four summers. Even when he's a continent away, Boselli includes a specially tailored Egoscue menu of stretching exercises with the Jaguar conditioning program.

"When your body is in alignment, it comes naturally and you are in a proper position and you're not thinking," he said of the edge Egoscue gives him on the line. "You just work hard and allow the body to perform at its peak level."

The heart of Egoscue's camp, in this small city 30 minutes north of San Diego, is a developmental course with fences and logs called the patch. Athletes jump and dive, going over and under the logs and fences. Training on alternate days includes running hills, sprints and stadium stairs, throwing logs and completing a lower- and upper-body routine with free weights. Boselli remains a believer in the patch, and a few months ago he brought Jaguar quarterback Mark Brunell here.

"During the season you need to do what the rest of the team is doing," Boselli said, "and in Jacksonville there is a different emphasis with more weights and running. I'm not a veteran yet. I'm still one of the younger guys, so I'm not going to try to change things, but I always do what feels best."