

PROPER PREPARATION PAYS OFF

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Wide receiver Jacoby Ford took five days off after his bowl game with Clemson in December before resuming workouts. Florida safety Major Wright rested up a whole week.

"If you don't come back quick, all that work you did last year is wasted," said Ford, a former Cardinal Newman standout who is projected as a second-round pick in the upcoming NFL Draft. "Then you've got to get back in shape again."

Ford and Wright joined nearly 30 other draft-eligible prospects, including projected first-rounders Eric Berry, Rolando McClain and Dan Williams, for two months prior to the NFL Scouting Combine at Delray Beach's Level 5 Fitness, where Tony Villani runs one of about 50 programs across the nation designed to prepare players for the combine in February and the draft in April.

Ford and Wright will be among a group of South Florida players who will work out for the Dolphins today at their facility in Davie. After the draft, and after their respective mini-camps, Ford and Wright will be among another group working with Villani until training camps begin this summer.

Both are sure to be drafted: Ford likely in the second round and Wright likely the third or fourth. Both feel their work with Villani, 35, has helped solidify their draft standing.

"He's done a lot for me," said Ford, whose 4.28-second clocking in the 40-yard dash was the fastest of any wide receiver at the combine.

"He's put weight on me. A lot of teams said they wanted me at 185, and I came in at 186 for the combine. That helps a lot because I'll have to take more hits in the NFL. And he got me a little faster."

Wright, whose 4.48 clocking was tied for fourth-fastest among safeties in Indianapolis, said his speed and "explosion" improved after working with Villani.

Preston Parker, who graduated from Atlantic and finished his career last season at North Alabama after playing three problem-plagued years at Florida State, said he's seen steady progress in his 40-yard-dash performances since joining Villani last December.

"I ran a 4.66 at the combine, then a 4.59 at the North Alabama Pro Day and a 4.58 at the FSU Pro Day," he said. "I'm more in shape than I've ever been."

Villani said Berry, a safety from Tennessee, is proof of just how important such numbers can be. When Berry ran a 4.48 at the combine and had a 43-inch vertical jump and Florida cornerback Joe Haden ran a 4.57 and had a 35-inch vertical, Berry emerged as the consensus choice for best defensive back in the draft. Many experts now project him as a top-five pick.