



NFL

Clinton Portis

The Prey

Position **Running Back**

Career Rushing Yds **4,414**

40-Yd Dash **4.28 seconds**

Stats **5'11", 225 pounds**

College **Miami**

NFL Experience **4th year**

RUNNING BACK CLINTON PORTIS AND LINEBACKER ROBERT McCUNE

BEASTS OF THE

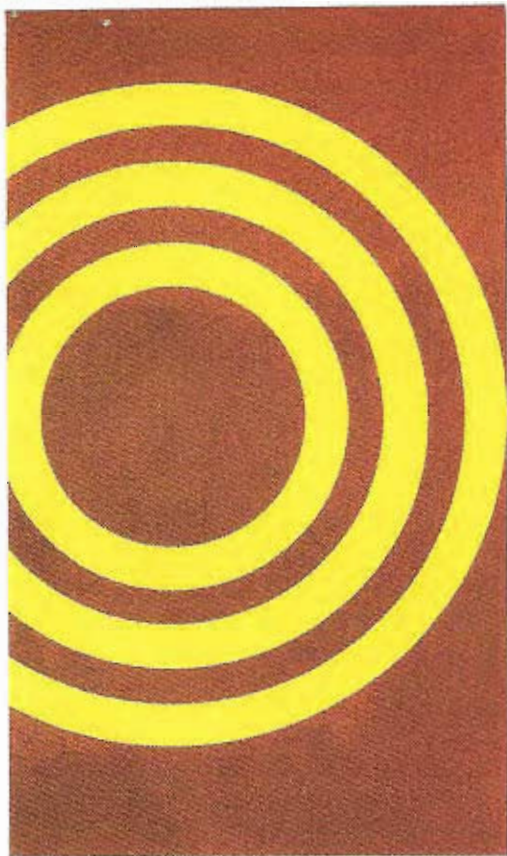
**In a league filled with physical specimens,
unleashing two menacing creatures of**

PHOTOS BY NITIN VADUKUL

Robert McCune
The Predator
Position Linebacker
Nickname The Hammer
Bench 535 pounds
Collegiate Tackles 320
Stats 6', 245 pounds
College Louisville
NFL Experience Rookie

EAST

the Washington Redskins are
their own **BY MATT TUTHILL**



ON THE SURFACE, they might seem completely different.

Robert McCune stands tall and firm at 6', and when his 245 pounds of bulging, tattooed muscle isn't forcing his teammates to stop and stare, it's hidden beneath a clean T-shirt that he always keeps tucked in. He speaks slow and clear in a thick Southern accent, thanking even a passing water boy with a hearty, "Yes, sir."

Clinton Portis, on the other hand, doesn't walk. He swaggers, his feet dragging behind him the whole way. His beloved No. 26 jersey is half on, forcing his arms straight out in front of him. His tired brown eyes hide behind gold-framed Ray-Bans. This is Clinton Portis, the image. To think that this is the real Portis is to ignore an inner humility that rarely, but surely, shows itself, mostly when no one's watching. There is a Portis who, despite possessing a body most men can only dream about having, isn't fond of showing it off. "MUSCLE & FITNESS magazine?" he asks, his voice showing an almost imperceptible tremor. "I hope I ain't gotta take my shirt off."

Despite these obvious differences in mannerism, the two share rock-hard physiques — prototypes of strength,

speed and power at their respective positions. Portis is a running back who has already amassed 4,414 rushing yards in his short three-year NFL career, and McCune is a linebacker who has yet to step foot on a professional field. They are two of the finest specimens the league has to offer, perfect beasts to be feared by the opposition. How these two men came to share the Washington uniform, however, can only be told in two very different stories.

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ALTERNATE ROUTE

For McCune, nothing has come easy. As a dominant high school linebacker, he dreamed of playing Division-I football for Alabama or Auburn, but his talent somehow went unrecognized by the scouts who routinely comb the ranks of places like his hometown of Mobile, Alabama. He could have, perhaps, chalked it up to bad luck, but less-than-stellar grades kept him from attending his first choice and walking on. Still, he saw no room for compromise. "I was talking to my sister and my dad and they both had military backgrounds, and they told me it would pay for college."

For a man as single-mindedly confident as Robert McCune, it was as simple as that: He would go into the military, serve his time, train for football at every spare moment, use the GI Bill to pay for a Division-I school, walk on and eventually start at linebacker. Then, with God as his witness, he would play in the NFL, a rookie now at the ripe old age of 26, not surprised in the least that a plan

seemingly hatched in the throes of desperation had actually worked.

He simply stood there, practically born for the moment, the hot Virginia sun bearing down on his massive lats after his first NFL practice. And yet, even standing there in his Washington Redskins practice pants, the living validation of a dream, he seems just a bit surprised when someone asks him how he could stay the course, how he could build this incredible body while keeping together the pieces of a dream that nearly fell apart in his hands at every turn. "This — all this that I have here?" he asks to no one in particular, casting a suspicious look at his biceps, which seem ready to shred his skin to pieces. "This is just a gift from God."

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WORTH HIS WEIGHT

For Portis, coming from the national-champion Miami Hurricanes, playing in the NFL was never a matter of "if," only a matter of how much and where. But a chip on his shoulder had been growing steadily since the 2002 NFL draft when, despite being a projected first-round pick, he slid to the second round and was picked up by the Denver Broncos and given a four-year contract at the bargain-basement price of about \$350,000 a year. After two amazing seasons in which he ran for more than 1,500 yards each, management knew Portis would want to renegotiate. It was only fair. But times were tight in Denver and Portis was suddenly up for grabs.

The Redskins capitalized, sending Champ Bailey and a second-round draft pick to Denver and then paying



REDSKINS STATS

- HEAD COACH: JOE Gibbs
- STADIUM: FEDEX FIELD
- LOCATION: LANDOVER, MARYLAND
- CAPACITY: 91,000
- 2004 RECORD: 6-10
- SUPER BOWL TITLES: 3 (XVII, XXII, XXVI)
- NO. OF FANERS: 21
- ALL-TIME RUSHING LEADER: JOHN RIGGINS (7,472 YARDS)
- ALL-TIME PASSING LEADER: JOE THEISMANN (26,206 YARDS)
- ALL-TIME SACKS LEADER: DEXTER MANLEY (12.5)



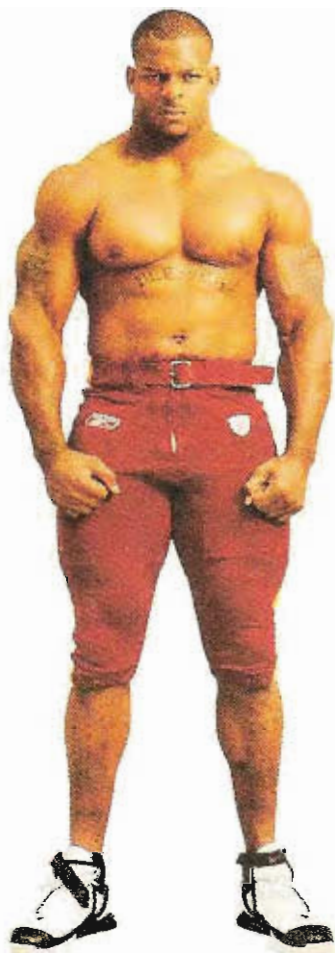
Field of dreams:
The 'Skins
train in nearby
Ashburn,
Virginia

full-market price for Portis with an eight-year contract worth more than \$50 million. Portis was ecstatic, printing T-shirts upon his arrival in D.C. that read "Clinton: 8 More Years."

But despite the superstar money, many in the media were still unwilling to grant him superstar status. A common argument made against Portis by some analysts was that the success of his early career was based largely on the Denver offensive system, whose line, in previous years, had created gaping holes for the likes of Terrell Davis, Orlandis Gary and Mike Anderson. According to their theory, Portis was merely a product of that system. It's a criticism he takes personally. "Last year [in Washington] I had 1,300 yards in my worst year of football," he says, pulling down his Ray-Bans to rest on the end of his nose. "If you want to say it was the system, fine. I don't care."

Analysts aside, Portis' NFL career thus far has been an undeniable success. But unlike most players in the NFL, he can't attribute any of it to time spent in the weight room, claiming he didn't complete a single rep during his two years in Denver. "They pretty much asked me to stay out of the weight room," he says. "You know, I was a beast."

Washington head strength coach



“Robert has a drive inside of himself that the average man does not have”

John Dunn has finally begun to make some headway with Portis' apparent disdain for weightlifting. During the 2005 off-season, Portis committed wholeheartedly to Dunn, hitting the squat rack and the bench with zeal and packing on more than 20 pounds of muscle — up to 225 pounds from 204 last season. The sudden change in attitude was a matter of Portis listening to his body. "I know I'm getting older," he says. "I'm starting to get pain in places that pain has never been

before. And with that, I've been trying to get in the weight room...and pad up."

Hardgainers the world over must cringe to know that Pottis could pack 20 pounds onto a physique that was muscular to begin with. Fred Anapol, PhD, a physical anthropologist at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee offers a possible explanation. "Muscle doesn't grow by itself," he says. "He could have a higher testosterone level [than normal]." In such an individual, Anapol states, such a physique could be built outside of the weight room through other athletic activities such as football practice. Adds Dunn, "Every guy at this level is a genetic freak...they're just gifted better than the average person."

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DIVINE INTERVENTION

While both McCune and Portis share stellar genetics and a deep-seated passion for football, the same could be said for nearly everyone in the league. It isn't until you look at God and family that you find a common thread linking these two men. They were born just 110 miles apart in a similar stretch of Bible Belt that reached from Portis' home of Laurel, Mississippi, to McCune's home in Mobile.

Portis would grow up going to Baptist services with his mother. And though he doesn't invoke the name of the Lord in nearly every sentence the way McCune does, his devotion to his faith has given his mother reason to smile and brim with pride when she relates a story about Clinton's days with the Hurricanes. "The preacher from Miami came out to Pasadena, to the Rose Bowl [in 2002]. He wanted to meet us...he told me that he could look out into the congregation on Sunday and see Clinton when he didn't see some of the other fellas," she says. "And we met the man who did the Bible study. He told us how well Clinton knew his Bible and that he would be at Bible study. He did not miss it."

McCune would strengthen his faith at the Apostolic Church of God — Rapture Preparation Center in Mobile. He is outspoken when talking about his

Grid=Iron

Washington head strength coach John Dunn has 22 years of NFL experience. He designed this workout to be done by every Redskin this off-season.

WEEKS 1:3:5

Each Workout Done Twice Per Week

Exercise	S	R
Neck Flexion/Extension/ Lateral Flexion	1	15
Dumbbell Shrug	1	15
Dumbbell Bench Press	3	12
Lat Pulldown	1	12
Hammer Strength Seated Row	1	12
Dumbbell Overhead Press	3	12
Dumbbell Pullover	1	12
Lat Pulldown	1	12
Hammer Strength Incline Press	1	12
Barbell Squat	3	15
Leg Curl	2	12
Leg Extension	2	12
Walking Lunge	1	30
Trap-Bar Deadlift	1	25

faith, deferring all compliments about his athleticism and astounding work ethic as a blessing. When he does this, it's far more than the fulfillment of a sports cliché or even that of the God-fearing Southerner. There is an angelic sincerity in his eyes and his speech. His manner is soft and easy, traits that belie his lethal frame. He is happy, and not just because he can play in the NFL or because he could probably throw his shoulder into a house and knock it down if he wanted to. He's happy because he believes that he is, as the tattoo that arcs across his midsection reminds everyone, BLESSED.

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STONE'S THROW

If McCune possesses one advantage in his fight for playing time alongside steadfast veterans like LaVar Arrington, it's his uncommon patience and stupefying work ethic. It enabled him to remain focused on his goals over the past decade and to rise before early morning Army PT, fill his backpack

"[McCune] probably has the That includes Junior Seau,

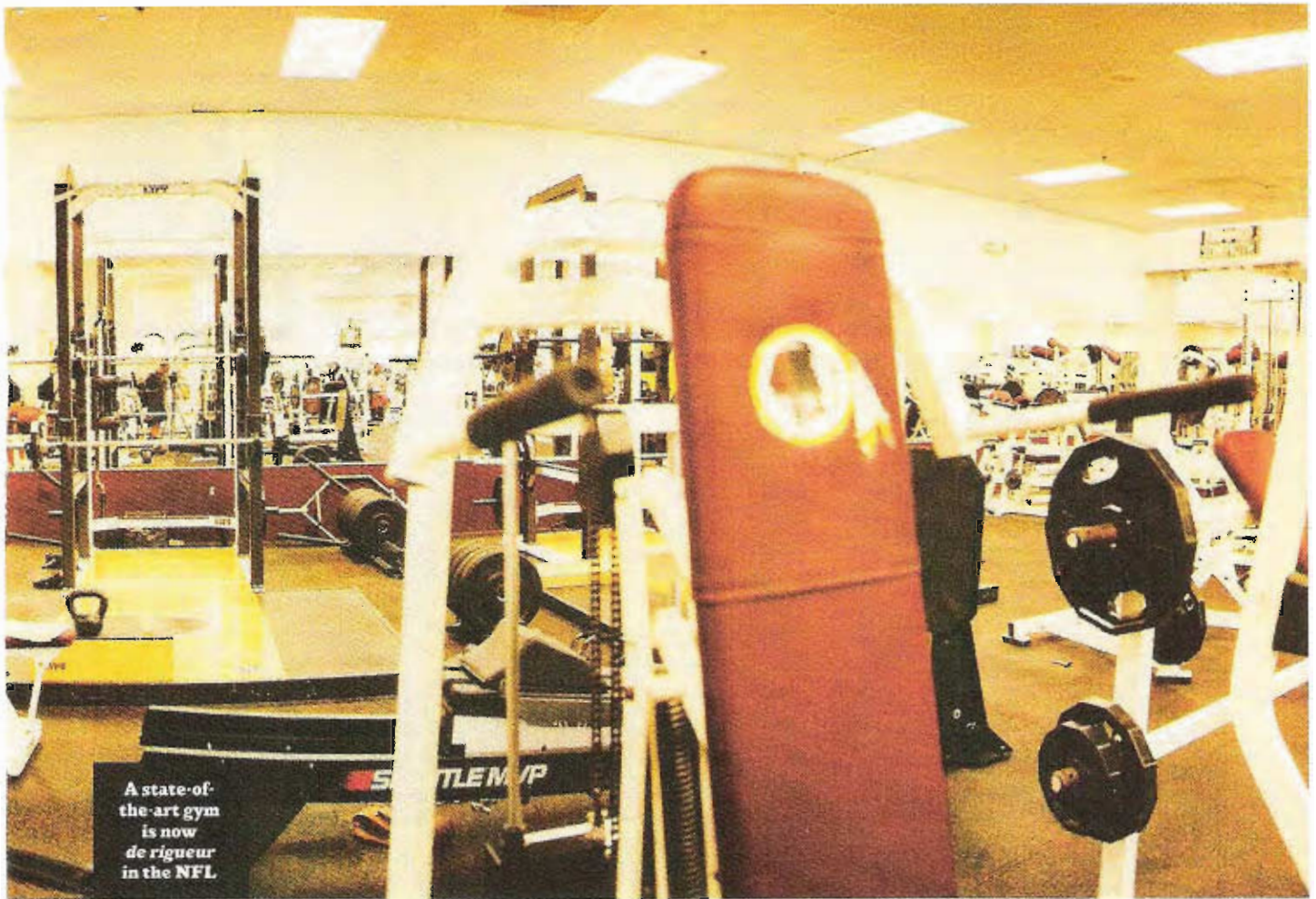
WEEKS 2:4:6

Each Workout Done Twice Per Week

Exercise	S	R
Neck Flexion/Extension/ Lateral Flexion	1	15
Dumbbell Shrug	2	15
Dumbbell Overhead Press	3	12
Dumbbell Lateral Raise	2	12
Dumbbell Front Raise	2	12
One-Arm Dumbbell Row	2	12
Hammer Strength Rear-Delt Flye	1	15
Dumbbell Incline Press	2	12
Reverse-Grip Lat Pulldown	1	12
Hammer Strength Wide Chest	1	12
Leg Curl	2	12
Leg Extension	2	12
Barbell Squat	2	15
Step-Up	1	10
Lateral Lunge	1	25
Trap-Bar Deadlift	1	15

with sand and rocks, and hit the dunes of Kuwait sprinting. "There would be some times out in the woods for 20-30 days or out in the desert, and I would just find little things to keep the blood flowing through the muscle, like a rock," McCune says. When he found a good rock, he would keep it with him, often for weeks at a time, curling and shoulder-pressing it whenever he got the chance. These extracurricular workouts were a microcosm of McCune's larger plan: No matter the obstacle, he would find a way. At times, his uncle, Anthony Jones, saw cause for concern, fearing that Robert would burn himself out. "I would talk to him and say, 'Robert, you know, just take it easy.' But he never would...he was on a mission."

The benefits reaped from such Herculean efforts have caused a stir wherever McCune goes. Dunn, a 22-



best physique I've ever seen on an athlete. Bo Jackson, Howie Long, Dexter Mann....”

year NFL strength coach, says that only one word echoed in his mind as he looked at McCune for the first time: “Damn.” No one arriving for camp, Dunn says, was in better shape than McCune. “He probably has the best physique I’ve ever seen on an athlete,” he says. “That includes Junior Seau, Bo Jackson, Howie Long, Dexter Mann, John Riggins....”

While McCune has been maniacal about his workouts, Portis has, according to Dunn, “just scratched the surface” of what strength training can provide him. But given the nature of the NFL, Dunn says he’s presented with similar challenges in training both of them. “McCune may be capped out, he may not be. We don’t know that yet...but we’re not as concerned if he’s going to bench 500 today or 480...[and] we just want [Portis] to be as function-

ally balanced as possible. At this level, getting as big and as strong isn’t always the right answer.”

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BORN SUPREMACY

Their paths couldn’t be more different, but both men, whatever disparities exist, seem destined to play football at the highest level. “I knew the moment he was conceived,” says Portis’ mother Rhonnel. “He would just kick, kick, kick.” Her voice fills with a misty sentimentality. “But looking back on it now, I know he was just trying to run.”

McCune’s uncle Anthony saw a similar destiny in young Robert. “Robert has a drive inside of himself that the average man doesn’t have,” he says, recalling the day he drove Robert from Mobile to the University of Louisville. “The coaches looked and

they told me, ‘You can go back home, but Robert’s gonna stay here.’”

Neither Portis, who was wooed by Washington’s big money, nor McCune, who has scraped his way onto the roster through sheer determination, seems to be in danger of taking anything for granted. A young man’s playing days, even his walking days, could be gone in a single play. They’re both cognizant of that fact, evident by their completing four sets of neck exercises with Dunn each day of lifting to avoid spinal injury.

When those playing days are gone, both know they have bright futures to look forward to because they both believe the same thing: that the body is transient, the soul is forever. Behold total fitness redefined. **M&F**

Matt Tuthill is a freelance feature writer living in Riverhead, New York.