

Horton on Eddie Lacy: He's a genetic freak

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GREEN BAY - Shortly after the Green Bay Packers began practice Tuesday, the running backs gathered in the back corner of Ray Nitschke Field. One by one, the players moved quickly through a footwork drill. Coach Ben Sirmans was a phantom defender.

Like moths to a flame, the media horde assembled. This was the first organized team activity open to the public, which meant the first glimpse of slimmed-down tailback Eddie Lacy. So as he juke'd his way through a line of cones, the army of cameras was raised. As he maneuvered the drill a second time, the bouquet of cell phones honed in.

The grand reveal was met with mixed reviews: Lacy is undoubtedly leaner than he was at this time last year, but some thickness through his stomach and thighs contrasted slightly with images that circulated on social media in the last few months. Lacy feels quicker and sharper getting out of his cuts, but coach Mike McCarthy said the target has yet to be reached.

The tepid reaction to Lacy 2.0 undermined a transformative off-season designed to rework his mind, body and stomach after a disastrous 2015. For two months he was the pupil of fitness guru Tony Horton, the creator of P90X, who overhauled Lacy's body composition and eating habits during grueling stretches in both Wyoming and California. For the first time in a while — perhaps as much as two years — Lacy embraced a healthy lifestyle. By the end, Horton estimated Lacy had lost between 15 and 20 pounds.

"I knew that he had a belly when he started and he didn't have one when he left," Horton told the Journal Sentinel in an exclusive interview. "He had much bigger arms, he had much better endurance and his agility had improved tenfold."

Their unlikely union began in January, when Horton appeared in a video on the entertainment website TMZ and said he could help the wayward star. Eventually, Horton said members of Lacy's inner circle reached out to gauge the legitimacy of the offer. The two sides met in San Francisco during the week of the Super Bowl and hatched their off-season plan.

They agreed that Lacy needed "a new perspective and a new approach" after posting career-low totals in rushing yards (758), receiving yards (188) and rushing touchdowns (3) last season. Horton, a 57-year-old personal trainer most famous for his workout DVDs and A-list celebrity customers, agreed to take on a fulltime client for the first time in years. He trained Lacy privately, often one on one, in the same manner he worked previously with musical artists Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty and Billy Idol.

So Lacy flew to Jackson Hole, Wyo., where Horton owns a home, and began the process of reworking his body. The second phase of their training took place at Horton's residence in Los Angeles, and both times Lacy stayed in his house as a guest.

Their typical week consisted of a minimum six days of exercise. Horton said they dedicated two or three days to plyometric workouts, three days to resistance sessions — think body-weight exercises, balance, speed, range of motion — and one day for pure cardio to burn calories. Over the course of two months, they had just a handful of days off, and even those were usually due to travel problems.

"I wasn't here to do football stuff," Horton said. "I mean, I made him do yoga. We went to boxing classes. We did P90X, we did P90X2, we did 22 Minute Hard Corps, we did a lot of my personal workouts. We did pull-ups and pushups until we couldn't lift our arms. We did everything."

The toughest session was a plyometric routine Horton has done on Monday nights for the last 15 years. Those who have tried it with him, he said, include musical artist Usher and a number of Olympic speed skaters. Each time, the result is the same: A task as simple as walking will be difficult for the next four or five days.

In Lacy's case, Horton said the routine was so difficult that the running back had trouble sitting to use the bathroom. But by the end of their two-month retreat, Lacy could finish without feeling sore.

"You want to hear something crazy?" Horton said. "I'm in the best shape of my life because of training Eddie Lacy. I said to him, 'I'm not going to be just your trainer. I'm not going to just stand over you and hound you. I'm going to do everything that you do.'"

"I was more of a partner in the process than I was a guy just telling him what to do and standing there with a beer belly," he added.

Aside from physical labor, their partnership included an educational component when it came to Lacy's diet. Born and raised in the suburbs of New Orleans, Lacy developed an affinity for some of the region's heavier dishes. He ate things like pork and beans, crawfish, fried pork chops and fried chicken, almost all of which were prepared by his father. In college, where Lacy starred at Alabama, the staff put an app on his phone to identify healthier foods at various restaurants.

"He didn't know that healthy food could taste good," Horton said.

And so began the secondary focus of their relationship, with Horton often cooking for both himself and Lacy. He taught Lacy to whip up egg whites and vegetables in more flavorful combinations. He explained that excess alcohol lowers testosterone levels, so Lacy cut back on drinking. When tests showed Lacy was low on Vitamin D and fiber, Horton introduced him to supplements for the first time.

"He's a genetic freak," Horton said. "But he took it easy there the last year and a half. Just like anybody else, if you don't pay attention and think you're going to get by on pure genetics, it's going to catch up to you."

After the public unveiling at Ray Nitschke Field on Tuesday, Lacy sat in a familiar spot on a tabletop inside the Packers' locker room. For the umpteenth time, it seemed, Lacy answered a deluge of questions about his weight, his conditioning, his diet and his resolve.

The answers were short: "It was difficult, but it was kind of fun," Lacy said of P90X.

The answers were curt: "Enough to be lighter," he quipped when asked how much weight he'd dropped.

The answers were not really answers at all: "Definitely, yeah," he said when asked about the changes to his diet.

But more than anything, the answers belied the depths of his work. He spent the whole of his off-season transforming. And now he's trying like hell to be Lacy 2.0.