

NFL

JETS

Pennington's return will have special bonus: Fullback Sowell, left, will be back in mix.

GIANTS

Coughlin trying to figure out why team continues to fall apart in second half.

BROWNS

Davis resigns as head coach of 3-8 team, assistant Robiskie gets interim job.

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The Star-Ledger

The next step for Kidd is back on practice court

BY DAVE D'ALESSANDRO
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

The drill would take only eight to 10 seconds, but it was designed — for lack of a better phrase — to bring Jason Kidd to his knees.

The smaller defender, former Seton Hall pocket rocket Shabeen Holloway, would front him in the post. Meanwhile, Holloway's 240-pound brother, Chris, would lean on Kidd from behind. And Kidd's therapist, Matt Gibble, would throw the ball into him.

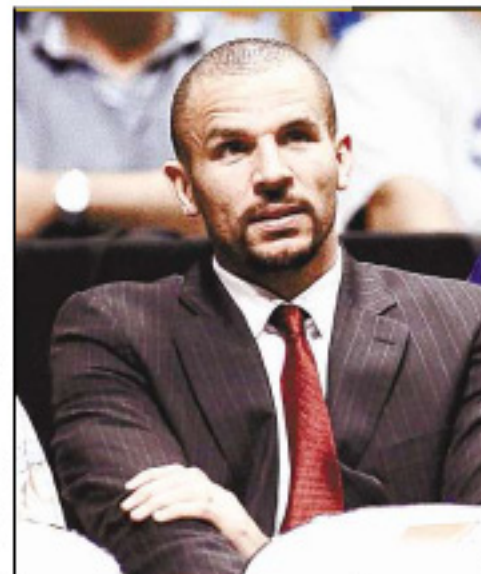
The trick, of course, is to extricate yourself from the double-team before you can create enough space for the catch.

Essentially, for someone coming off knee surgery, it's like trying to shoo a fly from your face while holding an SUV on your back.

"Jason would work to exhaustion just to get the pass, just for those 10 seconds," Gibble said yesterday. "It wasn't full speed or full contact, really. He'll get that later. This was to work on functional movement, because he'd have to put all the weight on his left knee when Chris would lean on him."

Over 25 long nights — usually in the Ramapo College gym, occasionally in the Jewish Community Center in Tenafly — Kidd did that kind of thing about 1,000 times, along with other forms of torture Gibble devised.

And now, with Kidd facing his first practice in six months with the Nets on Friday morning, this is [See **KIDD**, Page 50]



NOAH K. MURRAY/THE STAR-LEDGER

"Foot speed, strength, quickness, every area — he looks great," Jason Kidd's therapist says.

KIDD

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Gibble's assessment:

"Foot speed, strength, quickness, every area — he looks great," the therapist said. "He's ready for Friday."

But first comes graduation day.

After 14 pool sessions (mostly kicking and running in chest-deep water), 25 court sessions and more than 30 physical therapy sessions, Kidd will have his final rehab treatment this morning at Excel Orthopedic Rehabilitation in Fort Lee, where Gibble is the co-founder and director.

Kidd will get a rest day tomorrow — the team will also be off — and then he'll be back in the hands of Nets trainer Tim Walsh, who has been monitoring his rehab every step of the way.

"Back to some sense of normalcy," as Gibble put it.

Except it isn't exactly normal. For the rest of his career, Kidd will be on what Gibble calls "maintenance rehab," which involves exercises twice a week to stabilize the joint. It is a small price to pay for how far he has come.

For six weeks following the microfracture surgery, Kidd was on crutches, because his surgeon,

David Altek, convinced him that there could be no weight-bearing during the healing phase. Kidd complied, and stayed on crutches until mid-August. Then Altek sent him to Gibble in Week 10 — early September — and that's when the real work began, starting with burying Kidd chest-deep in the water for many weeks.

In late October, the court work began. The first week of basketball drills were done at half-speed. Gibble introduced more cutting and jumping drills in the two weeks that followed. By mid-November, Kidd was doing suicide drills at full speed.

"It's a tenuous process," said Gibble, who has worked with several Knicks. "Don't forget, when he got here, the leg was atrophied, and you have to be slowly progressive and don't want to take a step backwards."

"There's some luck involved, because a lot of athletes have had a few bumps in the road. We did everything we could to prevent those bumps. But Jason was extremely compliant. He trusted me, and I had to trust him to tell me if there was any soreness or stiffness, which is common. But we got lucky — there was none of that, and I got to see his confidence grow each week."

His hunger grew, too. Kidd had

his own strength coach, Robin Pound, working on his upper body for the last month, and now, as Gibble puts it, "He's jacked — I'm 185 pounds, I compete in ironman competitions, and he throws me around like I'm a kid."

Now comes the other part of the equation: How's Jason's head? And what can the Nets expect of him Friday?

"I just know this: He's very excited," Gibble said. "This man didn't play for six months — and he didn't play for the four weeks before his surgery. He's chomping at the bit, and the excitement has been building every day."

"I tell him, 'You don't want to exhaust yourself for the first 10 minutes. Pace yourself, be smart, with drills.' He still has to play basketball to get in basketball shape. But he has to be patient, get himself into the workout, and not get too excited initially."

The question Gibble cannot answer is whether Kidd is motivated to help a bad team that needs him, or motivated to showcase his skills just so he could expedite his departure.

"He wants to impress the Nets," Gibble said. "I asked him today, 'How excited are you to get back?' And he said, 'I'm pro-Nets — I want to get back and I want to help these guys, and I want to win.' And I believe him."