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From The Gym to the Pro Bowl for Star Running Back

By Martin Wilbur

When he was a collegiate football player at Rutgers University, Ray Rice would come back to his native Westchester during the summers and work out with trainers at local gyms.

Just because Rice, having completed his second full NFL season last month, is now a Pro Bowl back with the Baltimore Ravens, doesn't mean he forgot about the people or the places that helped him realize his dream.

Last week, the 5-foot-9 sparkplug made his first appearance at The Gym in Armonk since racking up more than 1,300 rushing yards and seven touchdowns in just his second NFL season, a breakthrough campaign that preceded his eye-catching 159-yard,

from Rutgers is all of a sudden a star in the NFL."

For Rice, the biggest adjustment he was forced to make in the pros was to adjust to the speed of the game. A superior athlete can make things happen by himself on the gridiron in high school and college but a back needs to be able to use his blockers to be effective in the NFL no matter how talented.

"You cannot prepare yourself coming from college to the NFL, you can never prepare for the speed of the game," he said. "You step on the field and you realize you've got linebackers running as fast as you and offensive linemen running as fast as you. The speed of the game is totally different."

Since playing his first two pro seasons with the Ravens, Rice said he now splits his



Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice takes direction from trainer Matt Delaney during last week's workout at The Gym.

two-touchdown performance in the opening round of the playoffs against New England.

"The work that I put in in the offseason is the work that comes out in the season," said Rice, a standout at New Rochelle High School, who led his school to a state championship in 2003. "It's just one of the things that hard work pays off and I'm a big fan of that."

Rice was greeted by The Gym's co-owner Jerry Rivers shortly after he arrived for his early afternoon workout on Feb. 17. Rivers

time between Baltimore and New Rochelle, where his mother still lives. Some of Rice's earliest sports memories are from his hometown, particularly the 2003 state championship game against North Rockland, which showcased his budding talents.

"I remember beating North Rockland 35-7 and I scored all 35 points because I was the field goal kicker as well," Rice remembered. "So I scored all five touchdowns, three on offense and two on defense and kicked all five extra points."



Ray Rice with The Gym's co-owner Jerry Rivers. Rice, from New Rochelle, works out at the Armonk facility during the off season.

recalled that when Rice first stepped foot in the facility three years ago, it didn't really register that a future NFL star would be training there during the off season. After all, Rice is small by NFL standards, plus there are plenty of top-notch college players, who for one reason or another, aren't heard from after their collegiate days are done.

"Three years later, he's a Pro Bowler. Who knew? You know what I mean?" Rivers marveled. "I mean a kid, a good running back

Despite Rice's breakout season, he found it disappointing the team didn't go further in the playoffs. Still, with a young team, Rice is optimistic there will be chances to return to the post season and make it to the biggest sporting event of the year. "To know that I was basically, 120 minutes away from the Super Bowl, there's that feeling going to the offseason that you were 120 minutes away and that's just finally setting in," he said. "But it was a great experience."