

ATLANTIC HEALTH JETS TRAINING FACILITY

Florham Park, NJ

Designed by Roger Duffy/Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

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In August, the New York Jets proclaimed the arrival of their messiah: Brett Favre, at 39 a graying idol of the guts-and-glory set and a reasonable claimant to the title Greatest Quarterback of All Time, suspended his retirement to don the forest green of the National Football League's champions of futility. It's now been four decades since his brazen forebear, Joe Namath, guaranteed and delivered the team's lone Super Bowl victory. They haven't been back to the big game since.

The Jets will leverage Favre's bionic right arm and throwback image for all they're worth, but the team's redemption is in fact contingent on a pristine new football laboratory set on 27 acres in the exurban woods of Florham Park, New Jersey. The Atlantic Health Jets Training Facility, a sprawling complex of more than 200,000 square feet, cost the team \$75 million and was designed by Roger Duffy of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. "Gang Green" will now practice its formations on land that was previously home to an Exxon research center.

If you call the place sterile, no one will complain. Duffy has carefully calibrated the environment to keep the team's enormously costly workforce in top form. With salaries in the millions and only 16 regular-season games, illness and injury are corporate expenses to be mitigated with actuarial diligence. Interior surfaces are faced with antimicrobial materials and are easy to clean.

Strategically located hand-washing stations encourage good hygiene. It's no accident that the facility is sponsored by Atlantic Health, the team's medical insurer.

Every last inch of the complex has been engineered to deliver what team executives like to call "competitive advantage." The main outdoor practice field is oriented along the same axis—just slightly off true north, to subtly throw off opponents—as the field at the team's new stadium, now under construction a half-hour's drive away at the Meadowlands. An indoor field house can be opened to the winter elements or superheated to sweltering levels, a swing that allows the team to simulate conditions in Buffalo and Miami, where they travel every season to face divisional rivals. The structure's 100-foot-tall "seam-metal" roof will allow Favre to practice his favored bombs with no fear of architectural interference.

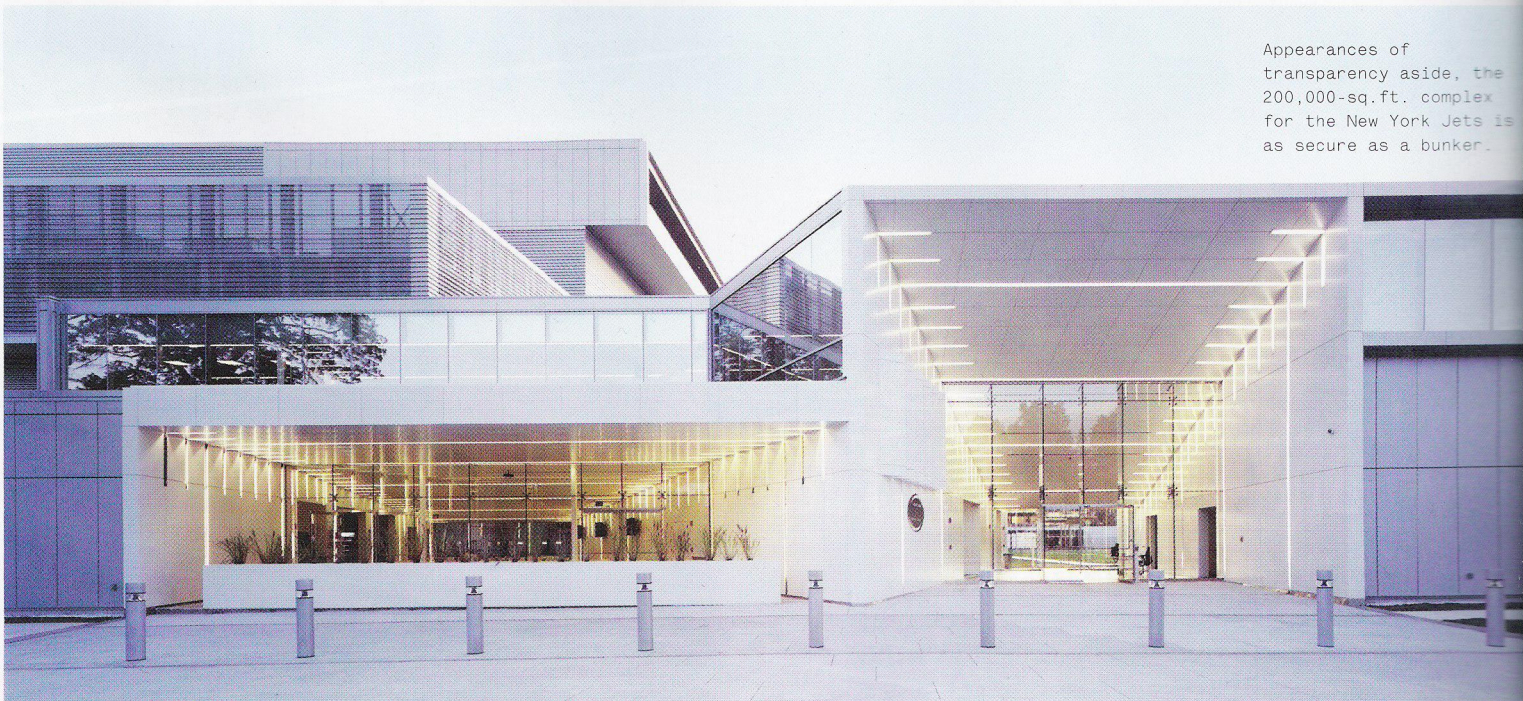
The facility's XXL inhabitants and unusual program demanded considerable attention from Duffy. Extra-wide hallways with non-slip, mar-proof floors accommodate men in shoulder pads and cleats. Reinforced concrete keeps the weight room from sagging and a medicine-ball wall from buckling. Digital clocks, present everywhere and synched to a central command, enforce the regimented schedule of athletes who spend as much time studying playbooks in classrooms as they do bludgeoning each other out on the field. As one team executive told me, the Jets like to think of their new complex not just as a training center but as "a graduate school of football."

Admission, predictably, is difficult. As victims of the NFL's "Spygate" scandal of 2007, in which the rival New England Patriots videotaped Jets signals in violation of league rules, the Jets took

pains to have their new home sequestered behind military-style security gates and obscuring hooded Offices that look out over the four practice fields. The fields are outfitted with automatic blinds that block the team's own administrative employees from monitoring play—there will be no stray phone calls or emails inadvertently letting slip even the most secret formation. Those employees don't even enter the same entrance as the athletes, and neither, you can be sure, do reporters. The media, like the front-office staff, has its own designated entry.

It's telling that, for this project, the team turned to SOM, builders of sleek corporate towers, and not to a firm more closely associated with athletic facilities. There's something ruthlessly efficient about Duffy's architecture that speaks to the highly controlled nature of the NFL experience. Even in its attempts at visual levity—corrugated metal cladding dimpled like pigskin, plunging perspective lines that seem to turn every gaze toward the practice fields, fluorescent tube lighting that marches in gridiron increments of 1 and 5 yards—there is a sense of rigidly calculated order. Every element in a coach's perfectly scripted game plan is considered and executed with absolute precision. How Favre, the quintessential football renegade, will adapt to this new environment is an open question. Practice, as they say, makes perfect. The Jets, perennial also-rans, need all they can get.

Mark Lamster profiled Chris Hacker, chief design officer at Johnson & Johnson, for I.D.'s May 2008 issue. An editor-at-large at Princeton Architectural Press in New York, he's the author of a forthcoming political biography of the artist Peter Paul Rubens.



Appearances of transparency aside, the 200,000-sq.-ft. complex for the New York Jets is as secure as a bunker.