

Come on in, the oxygen is fine!

Chamber a charm for Bengals DT

Georgetown, Ky. — When his hyperbaric chamber is open and empty of pressurized oxygen, it looks like a cloth-and-vinyl coffin. Maybe that's why Michael Jackson uses one. Terrell Owens has one, too. There is no explaining Terrell Owens. But Bryan Robinson?

"I've heard all the jokes," Robinson said. Not that he cares. All Robinson knows is, 90 minutes inside the 8-foot-long, 4-foot high pumped-up bag, breathing pressurized oxygen that is 95 percent pure, and his aches and pains no longer ache and pain.

On Tuesday night, the Bengals' new defensive tackle spent the whole night in there. At least until 3 a.m., when he got out and flew around town, looking for necks to bite.

"There's always skeptics," Robinson said. "At first." When Justin Smith saw Robinson and his fiancée hauling the \$21,000 chamber to Robinson's training camp room, Smith said, "What the hell is that?" Not long after, Smith spent a few hours inside, getting, uh, oxygenated. He's not scoffing now.

"It works for me. It keeps me out of the training room, and that's all I need it to do," said Robinson.

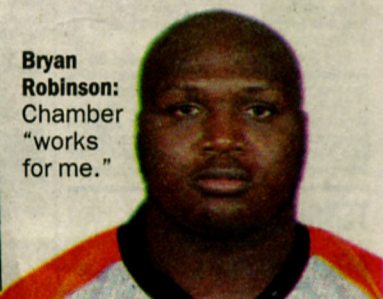


Paul Daugherty

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Bryan Robinson: Chamber "works for me."

Daugherty: Bengals' Robinson

finds hub for healing

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The chamber occupies half his dorm room at Georgetown College. It has two oxygen pumps that suck in the air from the room, filter it and pump it into the chamber. The tube fills up in about three minutes, big enough to hold two normal-sized humans or one 300-pound football player. Pumped, it looks like a little, blue submarine.

Robinson climbs inside, zips himself in and goes to sleep. Or watches DVDs of practices on his laptop computer. Or does sit-ups. Yeah,

sit-ups. "It's like a country club in there. The only thing you have to make sure of is to go to the restroom before you get in."

According to literature provided by the Hyperbaric Therapy Center in Cumming, Ga., where Robinson first used the device, the chamber "promotes healing and general wellness by allowing wounds to heal faster."

Doctors have claimed that, combined with other treatment, "mild hyperbaric therapy" effectively treats everything from ankle sprains to autism. Much of the evi-

dence is anecdotal. Some is psychological. If athletes believe it helps them, it does.

It figures Bryan Robinson would buy in. If ever there were a survivor in the NFL, Robinson is one. He does what he has to do. Any time an undrafted free agent makes it nine years in the league, he has more going for him than a big bench-press.

"I am still trying to survive the game," he said. "Every year is survival. That's what training camp is about. Their mission as coaches and scouts is to get us ready and to find people to replace us. I

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understood that coming into the NFL. That has never left me. I prep every day like someone is here to take my job."

His mother, Louise, worked 28 years at the Hunt-Wesson plant in Toledo, first on an assembly line, then as a foreman. The summer after he graduated high school, Robinson took a job there, to help pay for college. He lifted boxes of ketchup and cooking oil onto a conveyor belt. He lasted three weeks.

"I don't know how my mom did that all those years," he said. "It made a huge impression on me."

Robinson is one of those "character guys" Marvin Lewis tries to bring in as free agents. After two good years at Fresno State, Robinson went undrafted and figured "there was something I had to change. I took a hard-hat approach. I go to work every day and grind."

The Bengals got Robinson to play the left side of the defensive line and stop the run. He got the hyperbaric chamber to stop the hurts from nagging him. He tried it first after the 2002 season, when an ankle he hurt halfway through the year refused to heal. After his first 90-minute

session in the oxygen bag, he said he felt better than he had in months.

It isn't just Terrell Owens among jocks who have them, either. Atlanta pitcher John Smoltz has three, Miami linebacker Zach Thomas has one. Robinson's fiancée, a marathon runner, uses his. So does his mother, who suffers from diabetes. Robinson calls it simply "an investment in my career, and beyond."

We won't worry about him. Until he starts wearing a white glove.

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