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Training x Technique  
Train Like A Fighter

BUILD MUSCLE

# Dead Solid

Welterweight **Tarec Saffiedine** added five pounds of pure muscle and then another 10 pounds of championship belt

By MIKE CARLSON Photography by JAMES LAW



**I**f there is a right time to win a championship belt, Tarec Saffiedine nailed it. The Belgian-born fighter took the strap from the reigning welterweight champ and former UFC middleweight contender Nate Marquardt in the final fight staged under the Strikeforce banner. The unanimous-decision win earned Saffiedine a unique place in MMA history and vaulted him into the UFC's welterweight mix.

Saffiedine's success was the result of a long and detailed approach that began months before the fight when he sat down with his strength coach Brian Richardson.

"We sat down and went over Tarec's biomotor abilities: strength, speed, flexibility stability, et cetera," says Richardson, M.S., NASM-CPT, PES, a former Olympic-level skater turned sports scientist. "If you are grading on a 10-point scale, then strength to us would be an Olympic weightlifter. We grade Tarec where he is on that scale, and then we see where he is compared to his opponent. We thought, 'Tarec is a five compared to an Olympic lifter, and then Nate is a seven, so we need to get Tarec as close to seven as possible. My job as a sports scientist is to take an athlete who is already phenomenal and make him better.'"

When the team assessed their fighter against Marquardt, two things became clear. One, Saffiedine had always been blindingly fast and thus didn't have much of a margin for improvement when it came to speed. And two, Marquardt was big for a middleweight. He had fought for the title at 185 pounds, where he was already lean and strong. At welterweight, he looked like a monster. They decided to put some quality weight on Saffiedine to counter Marquardt's size advantage.

Richardson devised a hypertrophy (muscle-building) program for Saffiedine by incorporating his own unique approach called Dynamic Fitness Training System, which utilizes his experience as an athlete, his education as a scientist, and his training as a holistic wellness practitioner. Three days a week for more than two months, Saffiedine showed up at Richardson's gym and burned off part of the 4,000 calories a day he consumed. After about 10 weeks he had added close to five pounds of lean, quality muscle.

"It was a good controlled move," says Richardson who, along with his partner, trains a wide variety of elite athletes out of their facility Dynamic Fitness in Temecula, California. "We wanted to put on a little bit of size—but not so much that it made the weight cut difficult or that he would lose speed. At his heaviest weight he was about 187 pounds with 178 pounds of lean body mass. There is not much body fat there."

After the hypertrophy phase of the program, Richardson moved the fighter into a speed and power protocol, which helped reclaim any of the snap the fighter lost from adding more muscle to his frame. The results speak for themselves. Saffiedine, out-moved, out-struck, and outlasted his opponent, trading Marquardt a grotesque purple hematoma on his lead leg in exchange for his Strikeforce belt.

"I was well prepared physically and mentally," Saffiedine says. "Training like that three times a week got me in shape, got me strong and explosive, ready for any situation in the fight. I didn't feel weak or overpowered by Nate. I didn't feel he was stronger than me. I felt good."

## THE WORKOUT

In preparation for his title fight with Nate Marquardt at the final Strikeforce show, Tarec Saffiedine trained with strength coach Brian Richardson three times a week over an eight-week period to add more muscle to his frame. During a muscle-building phase like this, Saffiedine will work with loads that are 70 to 80 percent of his one-rep

max and rest for 60 to 90 seconds between sets. One trademark of this phase is the tempo of each lift. Saffiedine lowers the weight for a two-count and brings it up for a two-count. In the next phase, when Saffiedine focuses on speed and power, Richardson has the athlete move the weight faster and more explosively.

### DYNAMIC WARM-UP

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
High Knees	2	30 yards
Lateral Shuffle	2	30 yards
Inchworm	2	30 yards
Back Pedal	2	30 yards
World's Greatest Stretch	2	30 yards

### SQUAT COMPLEX WARM-UP

EXERCISE	2-3 MINUTES TOTAL
Prisoner Squat	varies
Pummel Lunge	varies
Lateral Lunge w/ Pummel	varies
Back Lunge	varies

### MAIN SETS

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
Trap Bar Squat	3-4	6-12
Multi-Directional Lunge	2-3	2-3 rounds
Romanian Deadlift	3-4	6-12
Dumbbell Bent-Over Row	3-4	6-12
Thick Grip Pull-Ups	3-4	6-12
Multiplanar Shoulder Press	3-4	6-12
Dumbbell Crunch on Exercise Ball	3-4	6-12
Multiplanar Neck Exercise	2-3	60 seconds per side
Metabolic Chest Press	2-3	95

(lasts two weeks only)

## Poker Face

Sports scientist Brian Richardson's five-point plan for optimal athletic development includes one tenet that is often neglected in strength and conditioning programs: mindset. Mental strategies will vary for different athletes, but for MMA fighters such as Tarec Saffiedine, Richardson puts an emphasis on controlling telltale signs of fatigue.

"I give Tarec cues when he is suffering during training," Richardson says. "I tell him, 'I don't want to see faces. I want you to make it look easy. The judges don't care how you feel.' When you do that, it is huge psychological advantage for the athlete. If your opponent doesn't know that you are tired, that is draining to him."

Whether sitting on a stool between rounds or standing up between sets, Richardson has Saffiedine maintain good posture. Not only does this allow the diaphragm to work more efficiently and better supply oxygen but also an erect confident carriage tells your opponent that the next round is not going to be a pleasant one for him.



## TRAP BAR SQUAT

**WHY DO IT:** The trap bar provides the same stimulus as the traditional deadlift—a load lifted through the hips—but puts less strain on an athlete's back and shoulders, which are vulnerable to overuse injuries.

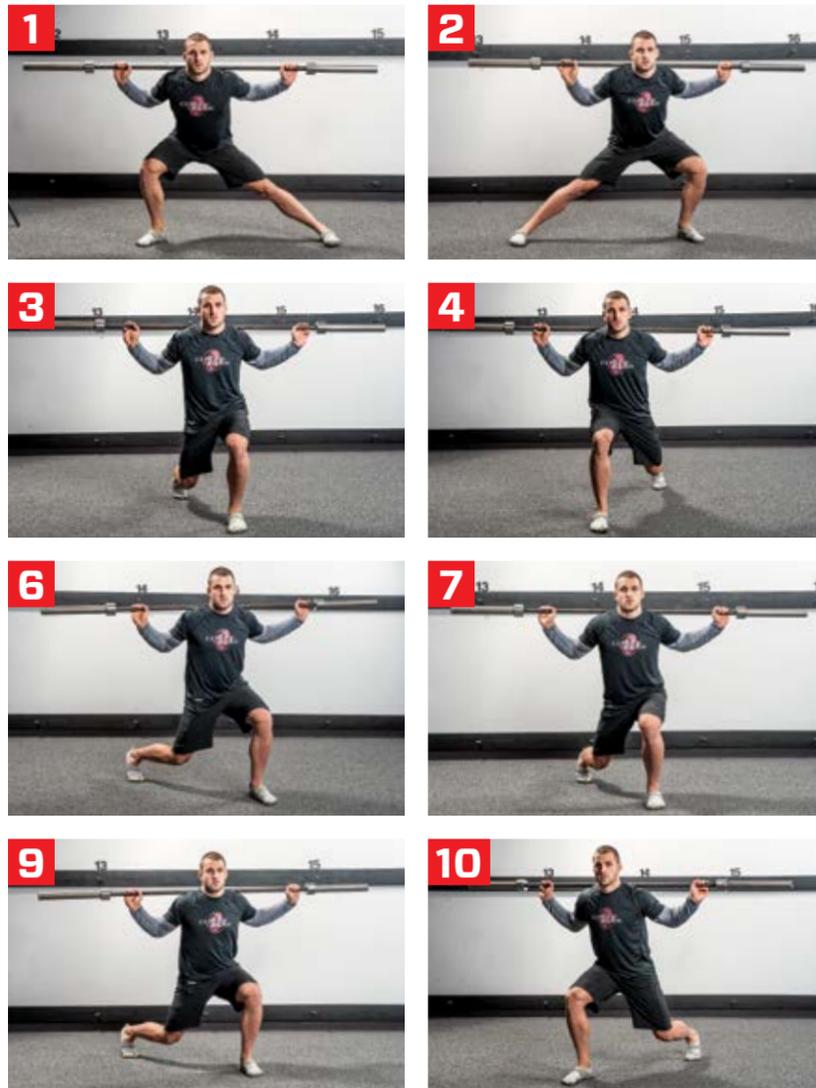
**HOW TO DO IT:** Stand inside of the bar and take a deep breath, pulling your belly button to your spine. Bend your knees and hips and lower yourself down to grab the handles. Maintain the natural lumbar curve in your spine. Drive hard into the floor and push through the center of your foot to come to a standing position, with your hips and knees fully extended at the top of the movement. Descend by sending your hips backward and then bending your legs once the bar reaches your knees. When the weight touches the floor begin another rep.



## MULTI-DIRECTIONAL LUNGE

**WHY DO IT:** This version of the highly effective compound exercise introduces a novel movement pattern in which the athlete moves in the transverse plane as well as the frontal and sagittal planes. The relatively long duration of the exercise will also activate the large Type 2 muscle fibers that have greater growth potential than Type 1 fibers.

**HOW TO DO IT:** With a barbell on your shoulders, step your right foot forward into a lunge. Go deep enough that the front knee is bent at a 90-degree angle while the back knee stays about three inches off the ground. Keep your hips under your shoulders and the natural curve in your lumbar spine. Stand back up and then lunge forward with your left foot. Next, lunge your right foot out at a 45-degree angle, but keep your shoulders squared and belly button facing forward. Lunge to the left side at a 45-degree angle. Complete the circle, lunging your left foot and right foot to 90, 135, and 180 degrees. Perform this complete cycle three times.



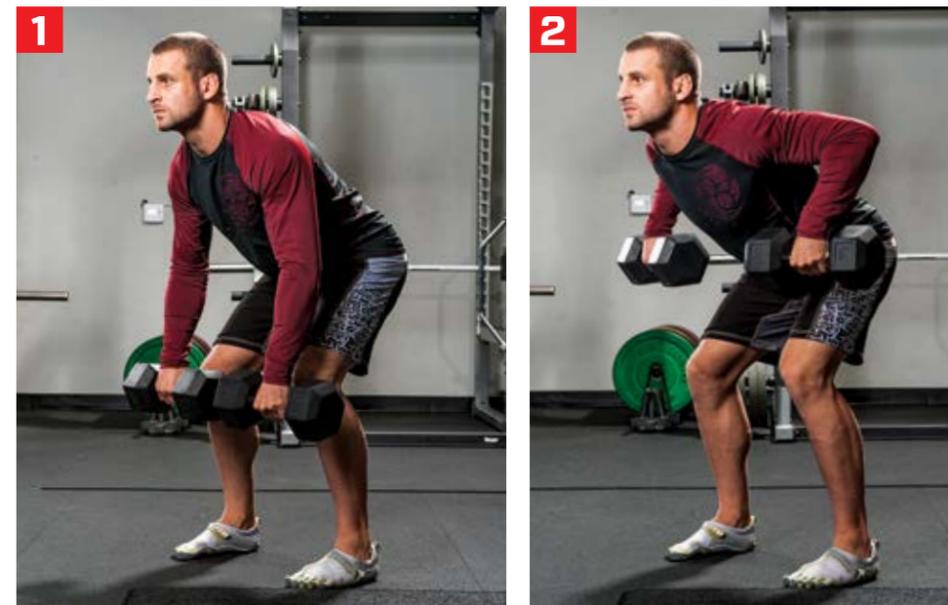
## ROMANIAN DEADLIFT

**WHY DO IT:** This exercise strengthens the powerful muscles of the posterior chain and trains the system that is responsible for transferring force from the ground up.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Stand over a loaded barbell so the balls of your feet are under the bar. Take a deep breath and bend at the waist to grasp the bar with your palms facing down and hands a little wider than shoulder-width apart. Your knees should be bent slightly while your arms are extended and your back is straight and parallel to the floor. In a slow and controlled motion, extend your hips so that you raise the bar along your shins and up to your quads. As the bar reaches the top of the motion, extend your knees. Once you are standing completely straight up, and have opened your hips, slowly lower the bar by pushing the hips back and bending the knees slightly.



## DUMBBELL BENT-OVER ROW



**WHY DO IT:** When it comes to fighting and grappling, pulling movements—exercises that utilize the muscles of the back and biceps to bring an object close to your body—are used much more than pushing movements. The dumbbells allow more freedom of movement than a machine or barbell provide and are less likely to irritate the shoulder.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Grab a pair of relatively heavy dumbbells and stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Slightly bend your knees and let your chest come down until it is almost parallel to the floor and your arms are hanging in a straight line with your elbows. It is acceptable to bring the chest up a bit in order to maintain the curve in the lumbar spine. Bring the dumbbells straight up by flexing the arms at the elbows, pulling the weight toward your sternum. When your elbows reach the same height as your shoulders, slowly lower them back down.

## THICK GRIP PULL-UPS

**WHY DO IT:** This is a great exercise for simultaneously engaging the muscles of the hand and forearms while developing strength in the back.

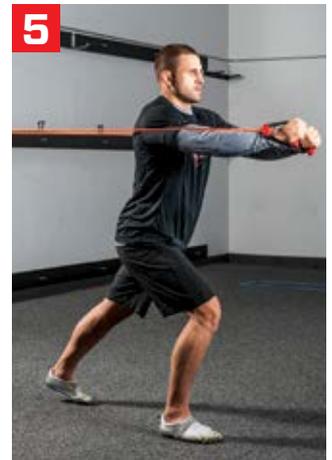
**HOW TO DO IT:** Hang some wide-gauge tubing from a standard pull-up bar or use a pair of Fat Gripz. You can also simply wrap a standard towel around a bar for the same stimulus. Grasp the bar with a pronated grip (palms facing away from you) and pull yourself up by activating your lats and biceps. Once your chin reaches the level of your hands, slowly lower yourself and repeat.



## METABOLIC CHEST PRESS

**WHY DO IT:** Saffiedine performs this in the last two weeks of his muscle-building program, as a transition exercise into his power phase. It also recruits Type 2 muscle fibers, the brute force fibers responsible for speed and one-rep max strength.

**HOW TO DO IT:** In this set you will perform 95 total reps. Attach a set of exercise bands with handles to a stable object behind you. Stand in a split stance with your right leg in front. Perform 20 fast chest presses. Switch legs and press the bands another 20 times. Switch legs again and this time alternate hands (left-right, left-right) with 20 fast reps of a unilateral press. Switch legs again and perform 20 more alternating presses. Next, square your feet, and perform 10 chest flies. Finally, finish with five explosive push-ups, bringing your hands off the floor at the top of the movement.



## DUMBBELL CRUNCH ON EXERCISE BALL



**WHY DO IT:** This exercise helps increase the muscle mass of the trunk, which will better protect the ribs and vital organs. Larger abdominal muscles will also pop out more when you get leaner, giving you a better-looking six-pack than before.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Grab one relatively heavy dumbbell

and lie down on an exercise ball with the soles of your feet flat on the floor. Extend your back so it becomes parallel to the floor, or just slightly beyond. Contract your abdominal muscles, squeeze your glutes, and crunch back up. Keep your neck in neutral alignment with the spine throughout the move.

## If The Shoe Fits

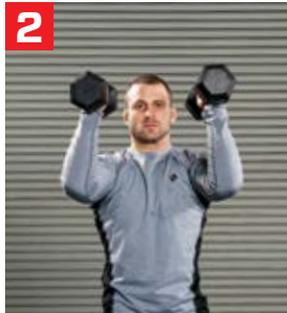


Tarec Saffiedine works out in a pair of Vibram 5-Fingers, the barefoot style shoe that has exploded through the fitness world. Virtually every major athletic shoe manufacturer now makes a barefoot-style shoe, also called a "zero-drop" shoe because there is no rise in the heel and the foot sits on the floor just as it would if it were naked. Powerlifters, CrossFit athletes, and all type of gym-goers have adopted this type of footwear because the lack of a big chunky heel makes big lifts like the squat and deadlift more efficient. They make even more sense for UFC fighters. "With these shoes we are getting optimal translation into the Octagon because fighters compete barefoot," sports scientist Brian Richardson says. "They are great for developing strength in the intrinsic muscles of the foot. Any time you have a shoe on with a big beefy heel, it disrupts the path of signals from the foot to the brain. And in the Octagon you get a little bit of wrinkle in the surface. Any time you can allow the feet to move freely as they were designed, it is great for the musculoskeletal system."

**WHY DO IT:** This is a great exercise for strengthening the rotator cuff and developing the whole shoulder complex. The dumbbells allow for a more natural movement pattern than a barbell or machine.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Grasp two relatively light dumbbells and bring them up to your shoulders, with your palms facing forward and your elbows bent 90 degrees. Press the weight straight overhead, making sure not to use your legs to drive the load. Rotate the palms, as if you were closing a book, so they face each other. Lower the weight until your elbows are again at 90 degrees and then move the elbows apart so you return to the starting position.

## MULTIPLANAR SHOULDER PRESS



“ I THINK A FIGHT BETWEEN TAREC AND GEORGES ST-PIERRE MIGHT BE THE PRETTIEST FIGHT YOU HAVE EVER SEEN. ” —SAFFIEDINE'S STRENGTH COACH BRIAN RICHARDSON

## MULTIPLANAR NECK EXERCISES



**WHY DO IT:** Any athlete can use a stronger neck, but MMA fighters are at the top of the list for depending on strong and stable muscles around their cervical spine. While there is little risk of injury with this move, to maximize safety, perform it at the start of the workout before you are fatigued.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Hold an exercise ball at face-height against a wall. Back up a few feet from the wall and then pin the ball to the wall with your forehead. Push up onto the balls of your feet so that you forcefully press your head into the inflated orb. Your body should form a straight line from your heels to your shoulders. Push your tongue to the roof of your mouth as if you were about to swallow. This helps activate the stabilization muscles in your neck. Hold this static position for 60 seconds, then switch to the left side for one minute, and then the right side.



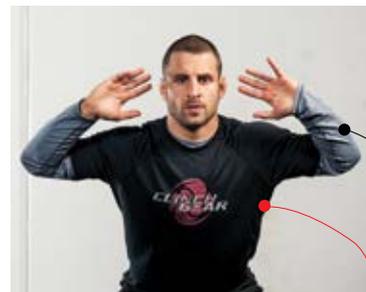
### BONUS VIDEO EXERCISES

Check out our video of Strikeforce welterweight champion Tarec Saffiedine going through his workout while elite trainer and sports scientists Brian Richardson explains how and why this workout is so effective at putting on muscle.



## Pro Shop

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The Signature shorts (on Saffiedine, left) are the flagship product for Clinch Gear and one of the most high-tech fight shorts on the market.

### FLEX TECHNICAL TOP / \$34

Designed for the fighter or fitness enthusiast, the Flex Technical Top's specially sewn seams eliminate chafing while its sweat-wicking features keep you dry.

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