

# JOHNNY TANNER

## BFS HIGH SCHOOL ALL-AMERICAN

*Editor's Note:* Johnny Tanner was dedicated to a noble cause in wanting to be the best he could possibly be. His life was short but the memory of his great spirit and determination will be an inspiration to all who know his story. Marshall Seay, Johnny's strength and football coach, has written his story so that we all may appreciate what we have a lot more. Our thanks to Coach Seay and to the friends and family of Johnny Tanner.

### Johnny Tanner — What a Difference You Made

By Marshall Seay

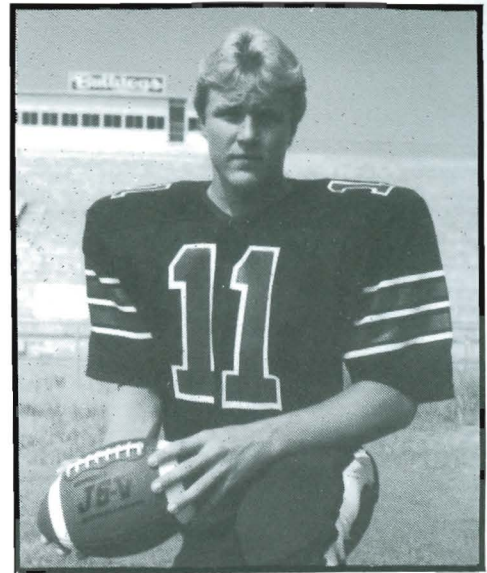
I began coaching Johnny Tanner when he was in the eighth grade. At that time, I was the head ninth grade coach. Johnny played for our seventh and eighth grade team as an eighth grader. He was average at best.

That football season of 1981 was a dismal one indeed. Our seventh and eighth grade team was 0-7, our ninth grade team was 2-7-1, and our Varsity was 2 and 8. This was my first year at Boiling Springs, South Carolina.

The problem was crystal clear. We were a small 4-A school with 1500 students. Our opponents had between 2000 and 3000 students, and one had over 3000. We simply had to have an edge. I felt this edge could come in the form of a solid free weight training program. At this time, our opponents, as well as our Varsity, were into the Nautilus philosophy. After talking to the athletic director and the principal, I found that they were willing to allow me to start a Jr. High weight training program. I went to the superintendent and he agreed to clear out a room in a storage building on the Jr. High campus for such a program. The seventh, eighth, and ninth grade football players raised \$2000 in a short period of time. The district matched that amount and pretty soon we had a nice little weight room.

The Jr. High kids started lifting weights before Christmas after that dismal season. I will never forget this experience. I remember when those eighth graders first began lifting. They were the boniest looking bunch that I have ever seen. I remember thinking how it was no wonder that they were 0-7 and this was the crowd that I had to line up with next year. Even though few people believed that Boiling Springs could compete on any level in this region, these scrawny boys came faithfully to every workout. They were well informed that they were the only eighth graders in the region with a weight program. We had an edge and we knew it. Little did anyone know that these kids were soon to change the football atmosphere in Boiling Springs.

Johnny Tanner was one of those boney little eighth graders. He, like the rest of them started with little more than the bar. After a few months of weight lifting and proper diet, these skinny little eighth graders began to resemble athletes. Their first goal was to get 135 on the bench and squat. This is when you get to slide on those impressive looking 45 pound plates. They reached this goal quickly.



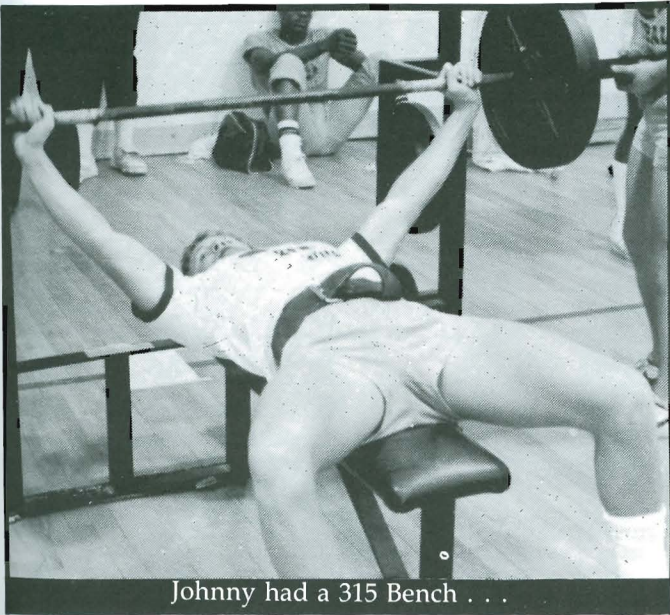
Johnny Tanner: All-American

It was spring before I began to realize that Johnny was a very special kid. He wanted to run track to improve his stride, but he did not want to miss any workouts. I saw that he would not run track until I worked something out so he could do both. I adjusted my personal routine where he could lift after track practice with me. All of track season this eighth grader would jog back to the Jr. High weight room and lift after practice. During this time that we spent together, I began to see the desire, determination, and character of this kid. I knew he was quality.

Johnny had good speed and height. With all these qualities rolled into one, I felt that Johnny could make a fine quarterback. He had physical tools as well as good leadership qualities, and he definitely was not afraid to put in the time. Well, spring gave way to summer and those boney little eighth graders had become very physical. Body weight had increased more than twenty pounds per kid. They all showed good improvement in their 40 times. They were all benching more than 150 and nine were over 200! These kids were confident going into their ninth grade schedule. Johnny quarterbacked this bunch to a nine and one season — beating teams that Boiling Springs had never come close to beating before. Our only loss was to an undefeated Gaffney team, and we dropped that one in the last 38 seconds of the game. After this 1982 season the kids took two weeks off and back to the weight room we went. The theme was "One more rep for Gaffney!"

Johnny really emerged from his ninth grade season as a leader. All of those qualities that I saw the previous spring became evident to everyone.

Soon after the 1982 season there was a coaching change on the Varsity level. Andy Jones was brought in as head football coach and athletic director in February of 1983. Soon after taking the job Andy came over to take a look at his rising 10th graders. He was amazed. This was March and these kids were working heavier than the Varsity. He



Johnny had a 315 Bench . . .

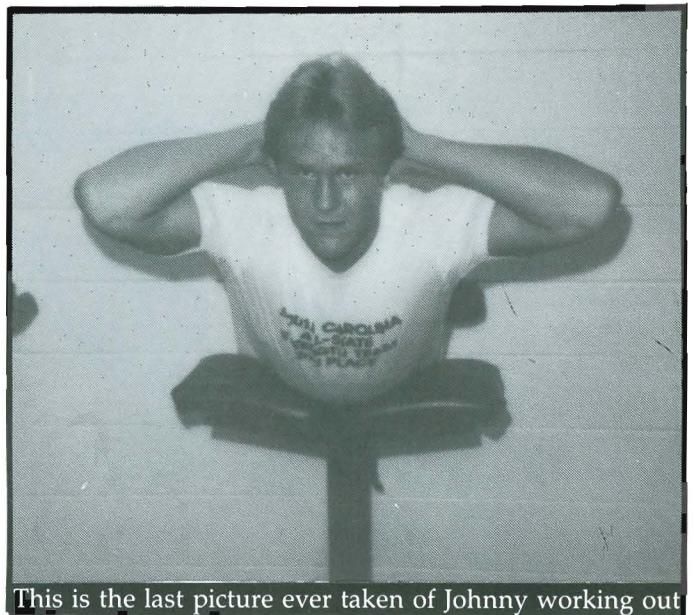
came in during a workout session and Johnny was one of the first kids to catch his eye. Being a free weight advocate himself, Andy enjoyed watching the kids work. I will never forget what he told me that day. "Coach, these are the best looking boys that I have ever seen. We can win with this crowd!" He also made me the strength coach for the entire program and the Varsity offensive line coach.

Well, Johnny continued to work. He ran track in the spring and lifted also. We got the Varsity on the free weight philosophy and had a productive summer. Soon came August, and the 1983 football season. Those skinny eighth graders were now sophomores. Four of them started on the Varsity and three made all region! Johnny gave the senior QB a battle for the job. We decided to let Johnny QB the 10th grade team and get him plenty of game experience. All those reps for Gaffney was not enough. They whipped the Varsity in double overtime and they beat the 10th grade team by stopping Johnny inches from the goal line in the last two minutes. Keep in mind that Gaffney went on to play for the State championship! They are where we are striving to be.

After the 1983 season we took two weeks off and started lifting again. The attitudes were very positive after a 5-5 season Coach Jones' first year. Boiling Springs had never won more than one 4-A game in a season on the Varsity level. We were a young team in '83 and we felt we would be much improved in 1984.

Johnny trained harder than ever. By now he was 6'1" and 170 pounds. He set six goals for himself. Johnny's goals were as follows: 1. Make the All-State Strength Team in the spring. 2. Get into the "Boss Dog" group. (Bench, squat, and power clean a total of 950 or more.) 3. Bench over 300, Squat over 400, and Power Clean over 200 by football season. 4. Run a 4.6 forty at 185 pounds by football season. 5. Be the starting quarterback and lead the Dogs to a 4-A state title. 6. Get Vince Dooley's attention.

Johnny never lost sight of these goals. He took the food supplements and trained religiously. By the time the All-State Strength Team competition came around that May, he looked like he had been chiseled out of granite. He made the All-State Strength Team along with six of his teammates. (Goal #1 accomplished.) During the summer,



This is the last picture ever taken of Johnny working out

Johnny trained on a 4-day split routine. He lifted in the morning and did his throwing and running in the afternoon. During the summer, Johnny reached goals two and three. He squatted 415, benched 315, and power cleaned 220. I will never forget when he benched 315. He and our tailback, Randy Norris, were lifting together. Johnny had been stuck at 300 for a while. Randy and Johnny got into a heated argument over who could bench the most. It had been a while since either of them maxed, so I let them settle the argument on the bench. This was great! Here we had two leaders of the squad going nose to nose, both highly respected by their teammates, both future major college prospects, and both just rising juniors! They warmed up as the rest of the crowd watched. Boy, was the adrenaline flowing. I thought they were going to max an incredible amount. Johnny's best lift ever was 300, Randy's was 310. They both did 315 very easy. Johnny barely missed 325; Randy got it easy. Randy then missed 335 on the lock-out. When it was over, Randy did not rub it in. He walked over to Johnny and shook his hand and said, "Hey, good job man." Everyone cheered! These two guys had just brought out the best in each other. At this moment, I felt like we could whip any team on the schedule. This was late July and soon practice started. Johnny reached goal number four a few days before practice began. I took him out on the track and clocked him at a 4.65 forty at a solid 186 pounds! When we left for camp we had 14 benching 300 or more, 8 squatting 400 or more, and almost everyone power cleaning 200 or more. Needless to say, everyone was eager to get the pads on!

Johnny never reached goals five and six. The week before our first game on Tuesday, August 21, 1984, Johnny played his last football game. We had a game type scrimmage that night. We won handily and everyone was happy. Johnny was especially happy because he really had played well. Little did I know that when Johnny left the dressing room that night that I would never see him again. The Lord took Johnny home. He died in his sleep that Tuesday night.

When news of Johnny's death hit our football team, it absolutely devastated the coaches and players. How could this be? Why? Johnny was the epitome of health! We could

A little motivation is fine and even desirable, but as an athlete becomes over motivated and more psyched-up; then psychological control is lost and performances decrease.

Coaches should know each of their athletes well enough to be able to use the proper motivational technique at the right time. Internal motivators are better than external motivators. One additional point needs to be made. The athlete needs to learn how to bring about this internal, personalized, individual motivation so necessary for athletic success. Where should he begin? Here are some suggestions:

1. **Set definite, realistic goals** with deadlines for their achievement. When one is reached, set another one. Make sure the goals are not beyond reach.

2. **Use positive imagination.** A person always acts, feels and performs according to what he imagines to be true about himself. Your mental picture of yourself may be the strongest force within you.

3. **Develop an indomitable craving, ambition, zeal and desire** to reach your goals.

4. **Maintain unshakeable faith in yourself** and your ability to achieve your goals.

5. **Develop an iron-willed determination** which will blast any roadblocks from your path.

6. **Avoid a negative mental attitude.** Don't even associate with negative people. It is easier to think negatively than positively. Don't succumb to this temptation.

7. **Develop a positive mental attitude.** Think only in positive terms.

8. **Pay strict attention to self-discipline.** Part of the price of success is hard work and clean living.

9. **Budget your time.** Time is a valuable commodity, especially in athletics. Don't waste it on worthless, superfluous or mundane projects.

10. **Learn from defeat or temporary failure.** Remember, anyone who is undefeated has never met strong opposition. Temporary setbacks can be valuable teachers.

11. **Be enthusiastic by developing your own enthusiasm.** Human emotions are not immediately subject to reason, but they are immediately subject to action. Here is how to create your own enthusiasm.

To be enthusiastic, ACT enthusiastic. The secret is ACT.

12. **Develop personal self-motivators.** Here are a few. When it is difficult to complete a drill during practice, repeat this self-reinforcer 25 times: "I feel happy, I feel great, I feel terrific!" When it comes time to perform a task, repeat this self-starter 25 times: "Do-it-now, do-it-now, do-it-now," etc.

These may sound silly, but they WORK!

A great athlete is a rarity. In order to win, his toughest battle is always within himself. If an athlete can **dream** of victory and **imagine** success, then he can motivate himself. For an athlete who can motivate himself, athletic immortality may be just around the corner.

not believe it. This was the hardest thing that I have ever had to accept. Johnny had died from sleep apnea. We were going to call off the Jamboree that Friday night, but Johnny's parents would not allow it.

Our football team went on and posted a 6-4 record in 1984. All those reps that we did for Gaffney finally paid off. They came in to our place undefeated and ranked No. 2 in the state. This time we whipped them in the closing seconds. Randy Norris' one yard plunge capped an 87 yard drive with 35 seconds left in the game to seal a 17-14 long awaited VICTORY! We made the 4-A state playoffs for the first time in the school's history. Randy Norris rushed for 1505 yards and is being actively recruited by several major colleges as a junior!

Looking back, I cannot help but wonder what might have been. Knowing Johnny like I did, I believe he would have reached goals five and six. Coach Jones said of Johnny, "Johnny Tanner is a winner. He is the most dedicated young man that I have ever coached. He would have definitely been a major college prospect. He is the kind of young man that you would want your child to be like."

## "Johnny Tanner is the kind of young man that you would want your child to be like"

Johnny is now gone, and we have finally come to grips with that. He left us with so much and we are very thankful that he came our way. You see, Johnny accomplished greatness far beyond what can be measured in the weight room or on the football field. He left Boiling Springs much better than he found it. His character and enthusiasm caught fire when he led his ninth grade team to a complete turnaround in 1982. This fire spread rapidly throughout our entire program, and this fire still smolders in the hearts of our young men and coaches today.

Boiling Springs has come from the cellar of 4-A football to contender status in two short years. No longer are our athletes ashamed to wear their letter jackets off campus. Just like Johnny, we believe Boiling Springs is the greatest. Those skinny little eighth graders are now awesome juniors and if I know them like I think I do, Boiling Springs will have a lot to cheer about in 1985!

### JOHNNY TANNER'S STATS

Date	Squat	Bench	Power Clean	40 Time	Vertical Jump
Jan. 1, 1982	*	125	*	5.4	*
Aug. 1, 1982	*	190	*	5.1	*
Aug. 1, 1983	300	250	170	4.9	*
Aug. 1, 1984	415	315	220	4.65	33"

\* Was not allowed to perform a one rep max