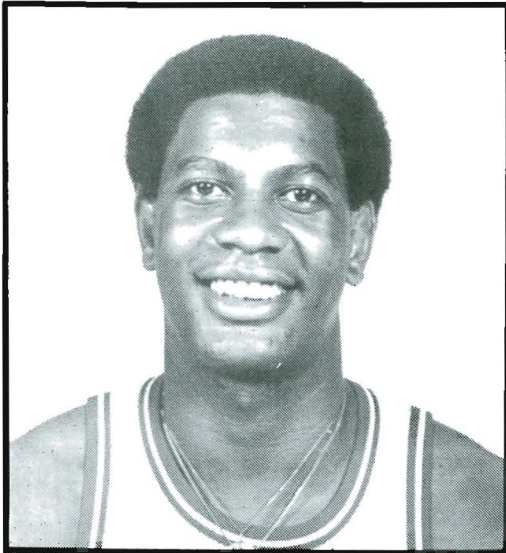
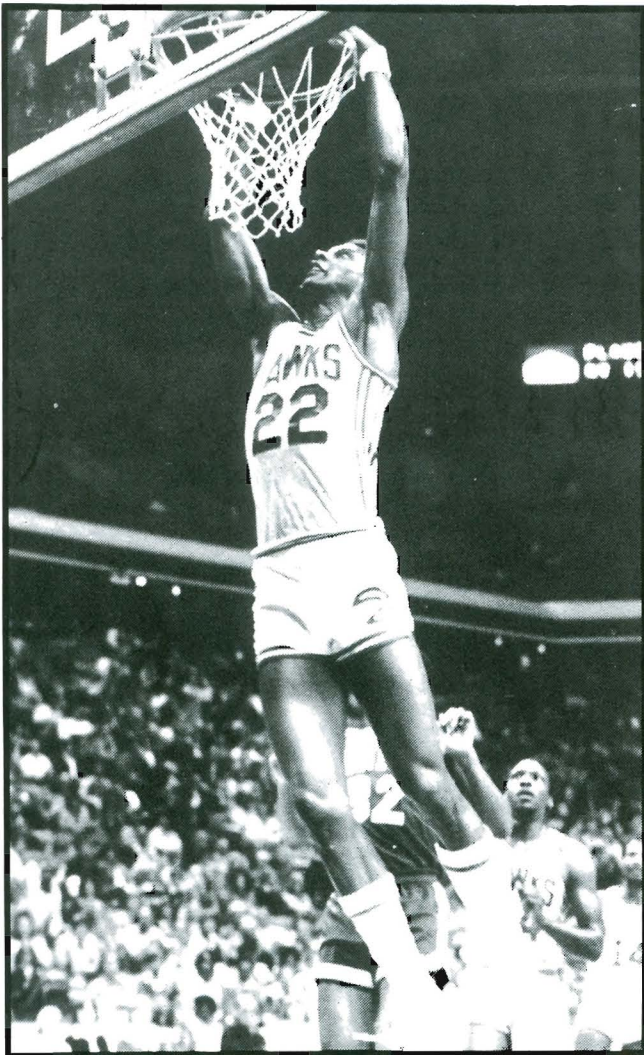


TRAGEDY OF TALENT

By Dr. Greg Shepard



John Drew: A Tragedy of Talent



John Drew: EX NBA All Star

A 6'6", 210 lb. scoring machine with severe drug problems.

Two years ago we featured John Drew in an article: "John Drew's Winning Battle Against Drugs." Tragically, today another battle has been lost and possibly the whole war. While John was off cocaine, he preached to coaches and kids about the evils of drugs. He tried to educate coaches about drugs in an effort to help coaches help their athletes. At one time John Drew stated "I'd rather be dead than back on drugs." John must take the ultimate responsibility for his actions. However, I would like to discuss some important BFS clinic philosophies focused and centered around John Drew's story. The purpose of this article is not to rake John Drew through the mud but to help coaches and athletes realize a more profound perspective to life and sports. If this article helps even one person, I know John Drew would be very happy.

John was born in a small town in Alabama and played basketball at J.F. Fields High School in Beatrice, Alabama. John scored over 50 points a game. Only once in a great while does a high school player or anybody average 50 points a game. John has never lifted weights. We almost got him to try a 6 minute workout in the fall of 1984 but he decided against it. It is extremely doubtful whether John has ever done anything extra. I do not believe he ever did pushups or ran extra. I don't believe he ever worked on a program of agility or flexibility. I don't even believe he really ever worked extra in practice. However, John Drew had an unusual ability to score; to really score. An extremely rare talent. However, this great talent proved to be a great obstacle.

We ask athletes at BFS Clinics who has the greater obstacle in life: John Drew with his tremendous talent he never really had to work for or Tom Southall. Some of you may remember Tom was the subject of one of our movies and a past BFS Athlete of the Year. Tom Southall was born without his right arm.

It is almost always unanimous at clinics. High School athletes come to realize it is the JOURNEY not the DESTINATION that is important in life. True, John Drew arrived at the destination of an NBA All-Star. However his journey was easy. This is what I mean by "Tragedy of Talent." On the other hand, Tom Southall (5-9 145 lbs.) had to overcome unbelievable odds to become Colorado's Most Valuable Football Player, score in double figures in basketball, set the state long jump record and go on and become a small college football star. Tom's final DESTINATION in sports will not be as glamorous or as high as John Drew's but his JOURNEY was so ever more rewarding and fulfilling in every sense of these words. His willingness to valiantly wage battle against his great obstacles has forged Tom into a giant among men. Yet, Tom remains humble, quiet and sensitive while also making the Dean's List academically every semester as he graduates this spring.

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John could have gone to any major college but chose instead Gardner-Webb College. He liked the assistant coach. Again, he was a super star. I suspect that if John Drew had a problem in high school or college he would immediately have loads of support. In fact, John may have never really had the opportunity to work out for himself any problems. He may have indeed even been given special privileges because of his super star status. I don't know for sure and I don't want to imply anything negative about John's high school or college. However, such a tendency does exist in our society.

Special treatment, favors and privileges on the surface seem fun and exciting. However, it is extremely hard to handle for anyone let alone a teenager. Coaches, schools, boosters, etc. have the responsibility of keeping things in the proper perspective. Things can get out of hand quickly and cause great damage to the personal growth of the individual. I believe every school has an individual that fits the John Drew mold. Every school has an individual who is blessed physically at the upper end of the scale. He may not feel the need of working like others. He may feel the world owes him something extra because he was born with above average talent. Both coach and athlete must realize the danger of this thinking.

After college, John became an NBA All-Star with the Atlanta Hawks. After several years, John Drew became hooked on drugs especially cocaine. There were times when John would snort that stuff right before games. He then began to go downhill fast. Atlanta did not want him. Frank Layden needed John Drew's scoring punch for the Utah Jazz and Coach Layden thought he could help John and his drug problem. So the Jazz acquired John Drew. John wanted to stop but made the mistake of returning to his old friends and questionable places. Even in Salt Lake City, John found cocaine. It was then the Jazz made arrangements to help John. The Jazz paid for his drug rehabilitation program which lasted 3 1/2 weeks. When John came out he said, "I'm cured can I now play basketball?" Everyone eagerly welcomed John back and quickly forgave him. He was humble and said he was sorry. He wanted to make amends. We should have wondered, "How can 3 1/2 weeks undo years of bad habits and a sometime \$5,000.00 a day cocaine addiction?" Even more important, years of everyone taking care of John Drew.

John was like a new man for a while. He came close to being selected as comeback player of the year. He helped the Utah Jazz win the Midwest Division Championship in 1984. However, after one game I noticed he was in a bar drinking a hard drink. I wondered at the time, "was this dangerous?"

Then on June 19, 1984, while the NBA draft was under way, Coach Layden received a frantic call from Atlanta that Drew had gotten himself in deep trouble with several Atlanta drug dealers. (John broke one of our BFS Rules for Success: He should have never gone back to Atlanta, where his drug problems began).

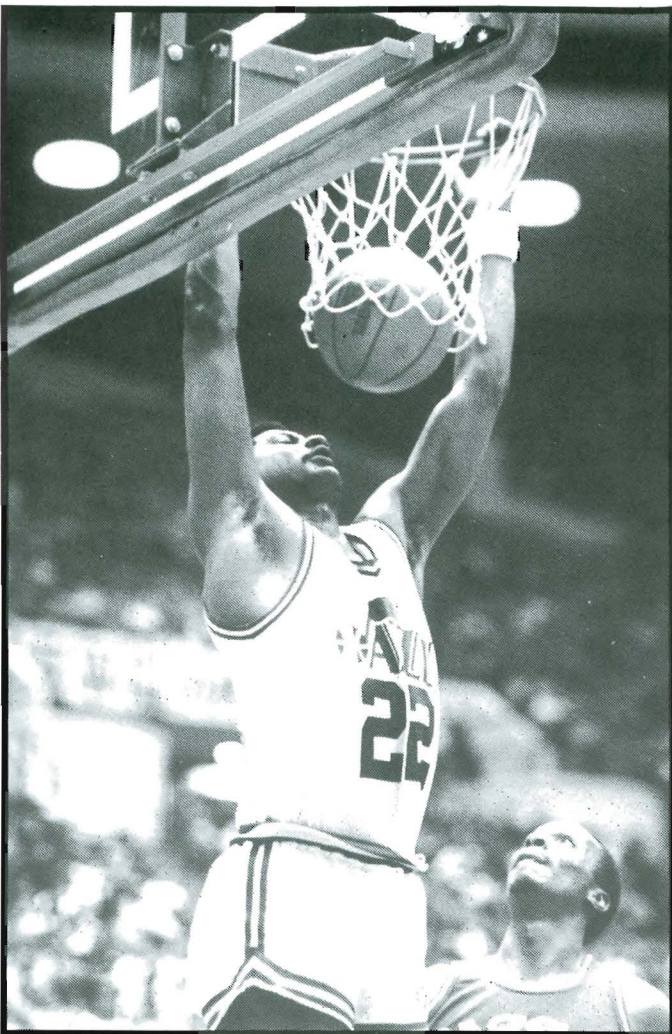


Tom Southall's obstacle was his right arm. He learned to pick himself up many times throughout his journey.



Tom rushed for 412 yards in a State Semi-Final game, scored in double figures in basketball, set the State Long Jump record and ran hurdles. He will graduate from Colorado College this spring with honors.

TRAGEDY OF TALENT



Jazzman John Drew before the Explosion in Oakland.



1984 NBA Coach of the Year, Frank Layden.

Coach Layden immediately went to the airport, flew to Atlanta and after a couple of dangerous cops-and-robbers scenarios, rescued Drew, who was again in trouble. Drew was again convinced to enter a drug rehabilitation center but he failed to stay for the prescribed period. He would later say, "I didn't have a problem". In reality, Drew was like a powder keg ready to self destruct at anytime.

The explosion was to come in Oakland!

John began the 84-85 season with an unusual contract. He was required to take a urine test 3 times per week. Can you imagine that! A 30 year old man having to be tested 3 times per week for possible drug usage. What a tragedy! A tragedy of talent.

John played in the first 19 games and averaged 16.2 points per game. Then after a game with the Golden State Warriors, Drew made a fatal mistake. Here is the story in John's own words. "I set myself up. I put myself in a position where I thought I could watch others do it. It just happened. That's how insane the disease is."

In spite of knowing he would have to take a urine test the next day, John did heavy drugs with his old friends in Oakland. He missed practice. Then Drew said, "I knew I was going to fail the urine test. I could have faked it, but I knew I had messed up, so there was no sense faking it." John Drew was suspended for the season. His NBA status is very questionable for the 85-86 season.

Drew came around to practice a month later and it was sad. He looked lost and as if he were saying, "What can you do to help me? Can you fix my problem?" Financially, he is in trouble. He has debts stemming from his exorbitant lifestyle. The future looks bleak. Once John's ability to score is gone, who will want him? I ask you. If a opening came up at your school, would you want Tom Southall or John Drew? I ask businessmen: Do you want to hire John Drew or Tom Southall?

The answer is sadly very obvious. Tom's obstacle of not having a right arm helped him learn many deep and great things. John Drew's obstacle was having no journey to complete. Both John and Tom are ready to begin a new journey towards a different destination. All athletes will reach a time when their athletic career is over and they must begin their new journey of life. We take our experiences of our athletic journey and hope they have taught us well. Now, John's journey towards a destination of a happy successful rewarding life after basketball seems practically impossible. Let us all pray that John Drew will overcome his new obstacles and reap rewards of battles hard fought throughout life's difficult journey.



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