

BLIND COURAGE

THE TRUE STORY
OF
FRED GARNETT
by
Bruce H. Gray

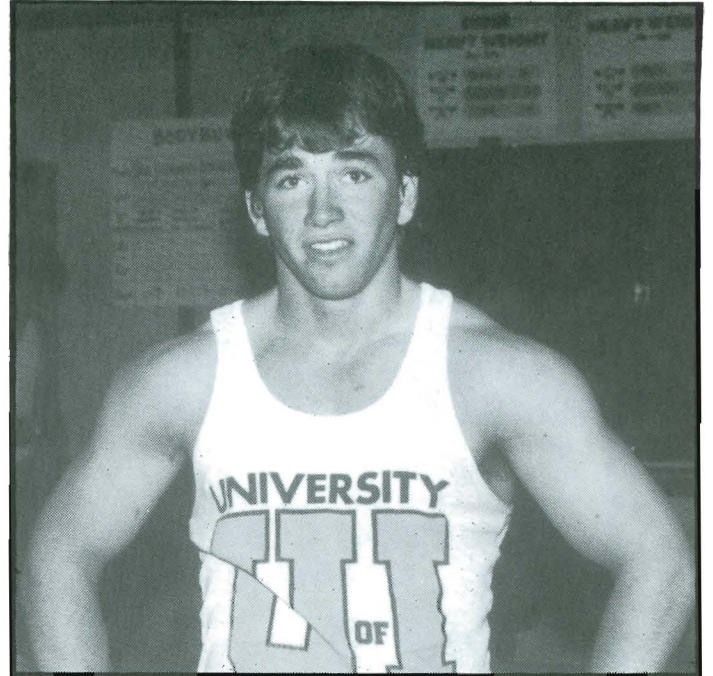
The Rogue Valley of Southern Oregon lies in the middle of some of nature's most inspirational beauty. Evergreen carpeted mountains look down on rivers, streams, and lakes. It is the land of such natural wonders as the Southern Cascades, the Rogue River, and Crater Lake. But for Fred Garnett, the beauty that abounds around him can now inspire only through memory. Fred Garnett is blind.

Fred sailed through the first sixteen years of his life without a hint of warning of the darkness to come. Born in Iowa, he moved to Oregon with his parents while still in grade school. Living in Central Point, a small town adjacent to Medford, Oregon. He entered Crater High School and played as a running back and defensive end on the Freshman football team. He also wrestled. The next year he started on the Sophomore football team. After his Sophomore season, Fred became involved in powerlifting. In March of that year (1980, Fred won his class in his first High School powerlifting meet at Grants Pass, Oregon.

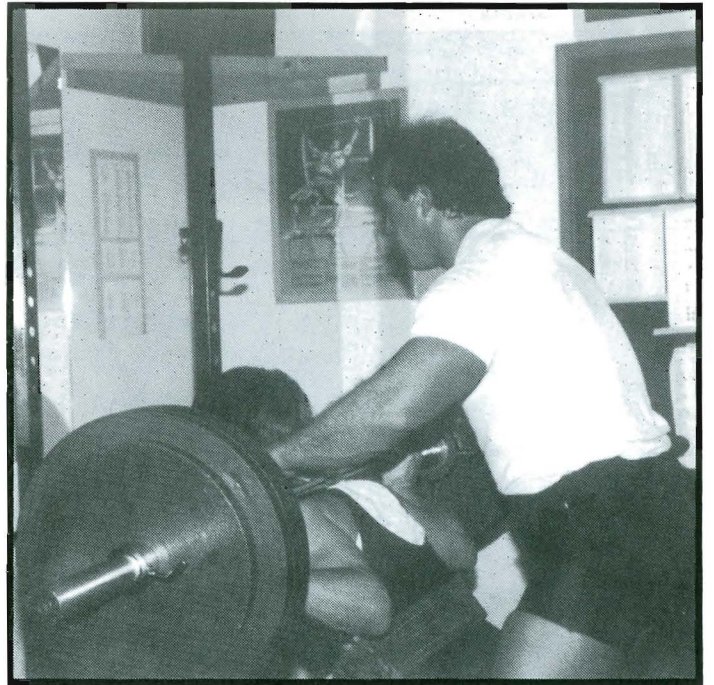
Blessed with the kind of handsome features that teenage girls talk and giggle about; a rising varsity football player; a winning powerlifter; Fred was riding high and ready for his junior year. Cruelly, life dealt a blow that would have staggered the bravest of champions. After sixteen years of sight, the light would close to darkness in just four short months.

In August, 1986, just prior to the start of his junior year, Fred started to notice some dimness in his left eye. The problem grew worse, and by late December, Fred was legally blind. Doctors diagnosed a rare hereditary eye disease – Leber's Optic Atrophy. Strangely, neither of Fred's parents could remember anyone in known family history with the disease. Doctors could only surmise that the disease probably skipped several generations before surfacing in Fred. Cut off in closing darkness, Fred must have felt a desperate bitterness and cried out to himself, "Why me?!"

It would have been easy to quit. If anyone could be indulged self pity, bitterness, anger and alienation, Fred certainly qualified. But Fred was not without weapons of his own in the fight against despair and depression. For one thing, he has the kind of inner strength, not found in all individuals, that enables one to sustain courage in the face of adversity. He has loving and supportive parents. He has powerlifting. Not least of all, he has a special friend.



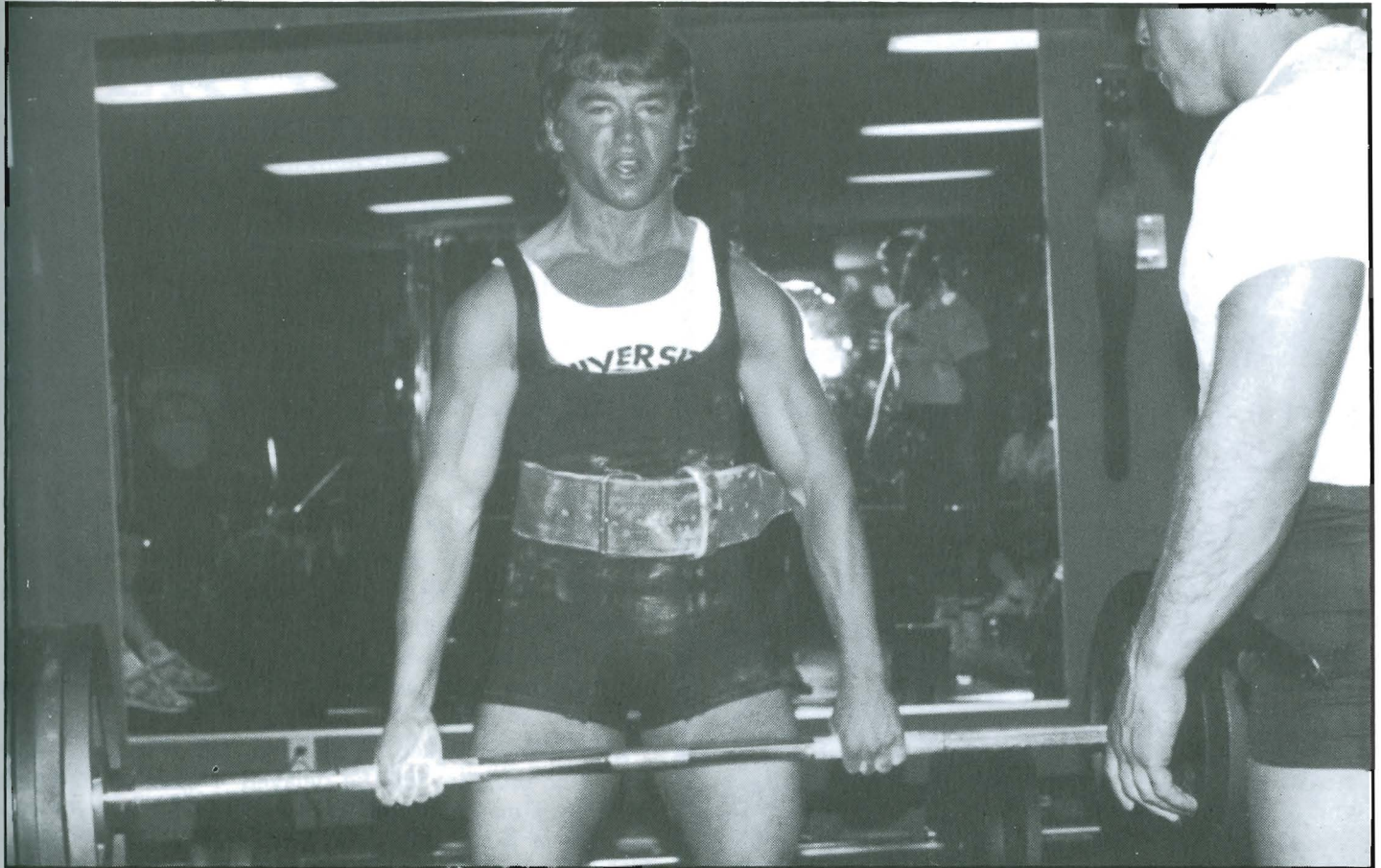
Fred Garnett looks you in the eye and says, "Do your best no matter what."



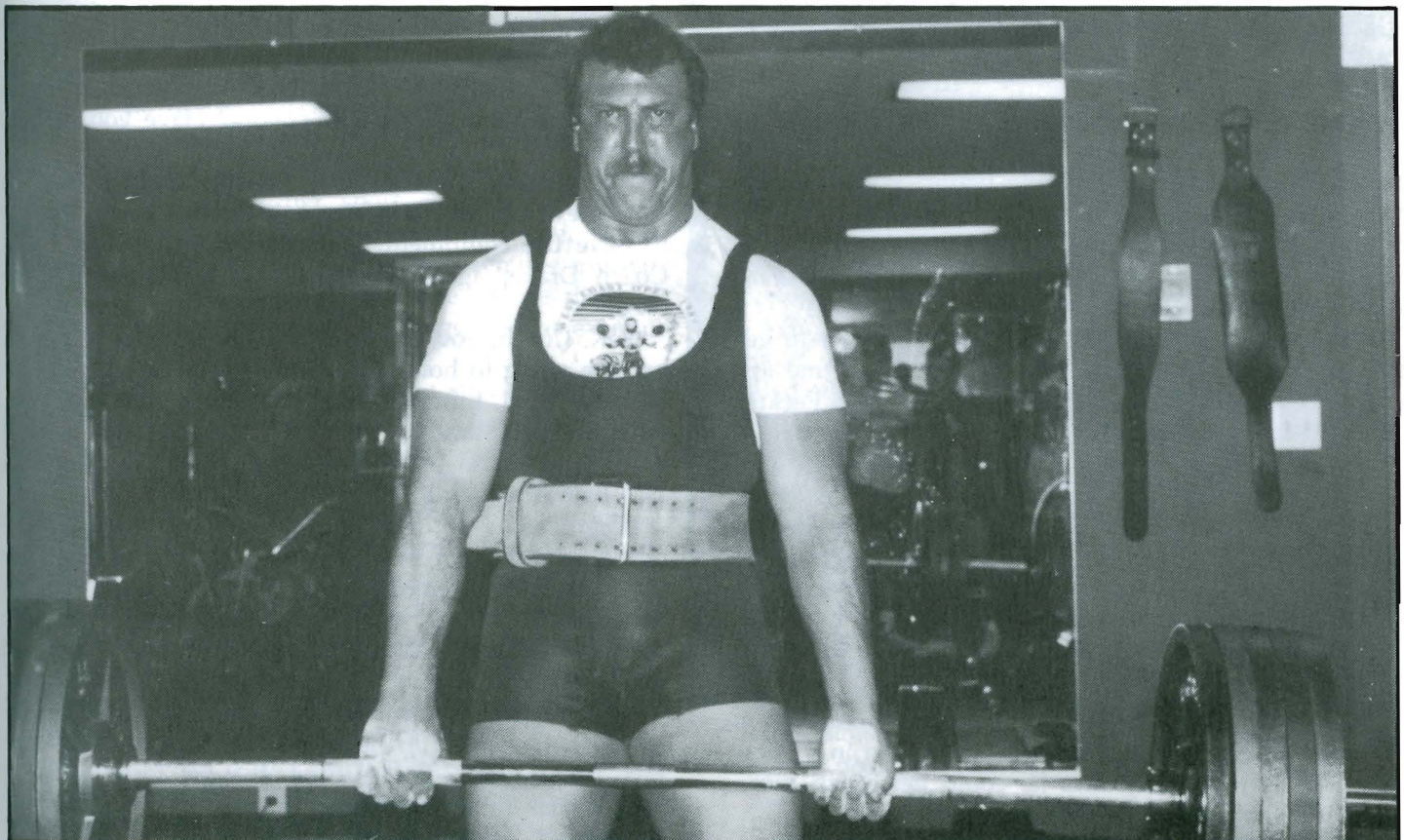
Coach Sam Pecktol of the "American Fitness Center in Medford, Oregon spotting Fred on the squat. Fred's max is 475.

BLIND COURAGE

Continued from Page 43



Fred Garnett, 17 year old Junior at Crater High School in Central Point, Oregon Dead Lifts 450 in the 165 pound class.



Coach Sam Pectol, an Upper Limit Coach, gave Fred a chance!

BLIND COURAGE Continued from Page 43

When Fred first started powerlifting, he came under the guidance of Coach Sam Pecktol. At that time, Coach Pecktol was coaching a teenage powerlifting team at a local gym in Medford. He was also competing and assisting one of the Medford high schools with their strength program. It was to prove a fortunate alliance as Coach Pecktol would become that special friend Fred would need in his corner.

When one gets to know Sam Pecktol, one learns that as an individual, he is direct and straightforward. He remembers the day Fred came to him with news of the impending blindness. He also remembers what he said: "I simply told Fred that there was no reason he couldn't powerlift."

Since that time coach and trainee have become like uncle and nephew, close friends and workout partners. "Working out with Fred makes me work harder," Sam stated recently. "He never misses a workout, and he always goes for the win."

And speaking of wins, Fred has his share. He has won six of nine contests; four out of five since becoming legally blind. Recently, both entered and won their classes in the "Big Boy Invitational", the Oregon drug-free open championships. Coach Pecktol won the 220 lb. class with a 1700 lb. total (including a 650 squat), while Fred took the 165 lb. class. Most recently, Fred won the 181 lb. class in the Southern Oregon High School championships at North Medford High School with a 1220 lb. total. His individual lifts were: squat, 475; Bench, 295; deadlift, 450. Not Bad!

Because he takes pride in himself and wants to insure that his accomplishments are his own, Fred avoids drugs, including steroids. As Coach Pecktol says, "What good is a PR lift if you don't know whether it's you or some chemical that did it?"

Fred added, "Too many people are using that stuff without really knowing what they're doing or what can happen. It can really mess up your body." It is important to mention that Sam and his teams enter only drug-free competitions, or competitions sponsored by the high schools and other organizations or clubs that strive to maintain drug-free attitudes.

At any rate, Fred provides enough inspiration to get his teammates on a natural high. "Fred makes me appreciate being able to see, that's for sure," Coach Pecktol recently related. "But he also causes me to have less patience with others when I see them goofing off." You won't see much goofing off when Fred's there. His determination to excel and the intensity he generates seems to always bring out the best efforts of those around him. Fred has made a giant leap from one who draws inspiration to one who is an inspiration.

Fred is the son of Harold and Margo Garnett of Central Point, Oregon.

QUEST FOR GREATNESS Continued from Page 42

Coach Drake was glad to find Dr. Kowalski in a good mood. He learned early that he could get much more from administrators when they were in a good mood.

46 "Well, how's your first day going? Are you getting

acquainted with everyone?" Dr. Kowalski asked.

"Yes, sir. Everyone's been great!"

Smiling, Dr. Kowalski said, "You must be here for something. What can I do for you?" Coach Drake laughed, "I won't always be asking for something. But you're right, I'm asking again."

Mr. Donaldson and I discussed using the storage room at the lower level of the gym for the weight room. I love it! With a little work, we can have the best weight room in the state. I'd like to get started today if I can. Where can I put all that stuff that's in our new weight room?"

"I don't know," said Dr. Kowalski, as he thought. "The only possible place I can think of right now is underneath the football stadium. We might have to rearrange some things. However, I can't put any district custodial people on that project this week, Coach."

"No problem. I'll take care of it," said Coach Drake. Travis paused a few moments and looked squarely at Dr. Kowalski. "Now, what about the weight equipment? You promised to match what we raise on the fundraiser."

"I sure did, but what about it, Coach?"

"Well, sir, I need to order the equipment now," said Coach Drake anxiously.

Dr. Kowalski's eyes narrowed as he said, "Coach, we can't do that until we have the money in hand. That is the way we do it."

Coach Drake looked at the floor, "Sir, if we don't order now, our program will be delayed. I want to start right after Christmas vacation. Look, I know I can order now and get at least 30 days to pay. We'll have the money from the fundraiser before Christmas."

"How much do you plan on ordering?" questioned Dr. Kowalski.

"About twenty-thousand dollars worth," Coach Drake answered still looking at the floor.

"Twenty thousand!" choked Dr. Kowalski. "What if your damn fundraiser doesn't work? Have you thought of that?"

"Yes sir, but I feel strongly enough about it that you can take it out of my salary if it doesn't work. I've got to have the equipment. We'll just make it work," said Coach Drake, again looking his superintendent in the eyes.

"OK, Coach, you go ahead and order your equipment, but I'm going to hold you to that salary thing. You may be crazy. Hell, I may be crazy for letting you do it! Well, what are you standing here for? You better get going if you are going to make this thing work!" Dr. Kowalski said half-threatening.

"Thank you, sir. You won't regret it." Coach Drake turned and quickly made his way out of the office. He only had twenty minutes before this meeting. On his way, he checked off still another task. He couldn't help but feel a sense of accomplishment as he quickly analyzed his "Do It" list.

Dr. Kowalski got up from his desk and looked out the window. He smiled as he saw Travis jogging back to the high school. "He's going to be all right. Reminds me of myself back in the old days," he said.

"Did you say something, Dr. Kowalski?"

"No, Mrs. Wade, must thinking outloud."