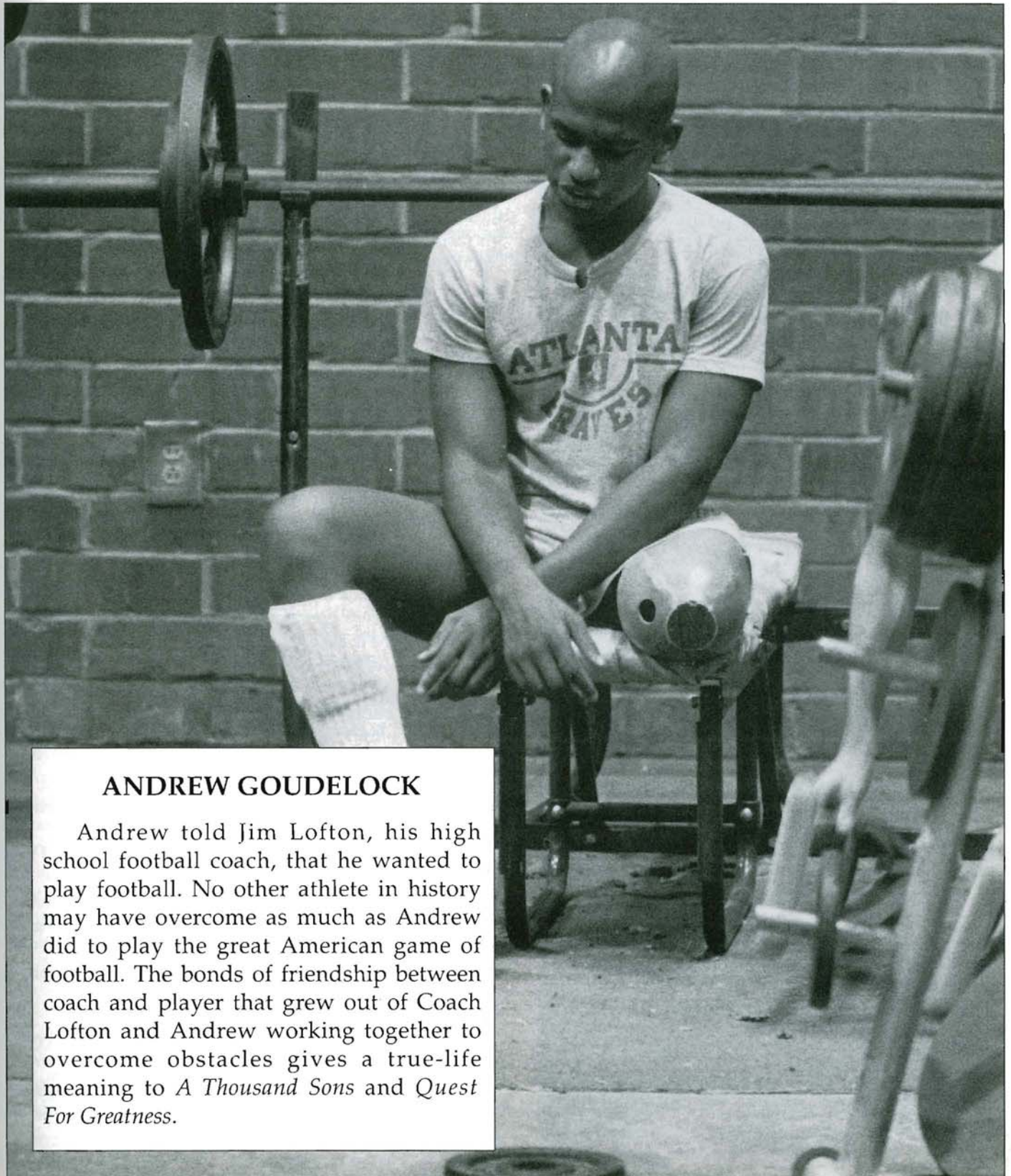


I WANT TO PLAY



ANDREW GOUDELOCK

Andrew told Jim Lofton, his high school football coach, that he wanted to play football. No other athlete in history may have overcome as much as Andrew did to play the great American game of football. The bonds of friendship between coach and player that grew out of Coach Lofton and Andrew working together to overcome obstacles gives a true-life meaning to *A Thousand Sons* and *Quest For Greatness*.

Photo by Beverly Crawford,
courtesy of the Atlanta Constitution.

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ANDREW GOUDELOCK:

By Greg Shepard



Andrew cried on the sideline because he couldn't play in his sophomore year. Then, he had an idea...

"Ruby Jean, Ruby Jean," Coach Jim Lofton called fondly to his wife. "There's a real special kid named Andrew working for me at school this summer. I think we're gonna get him out for football. He's only going to be a Sophomore, but he could be a great one," beamed Lofton.

Katherine Goudelock, Andrew's mother, remembered telling him: "Andrew, you can't play football. You have to be in the band." But Coach Lofton had insisted, "Andrew, you have to play football." Andrew put aside his saxophone. Mrs. Goudelock reluctantly agreed and told Andrew: "But promise me this day that you'll bring home the Heisman Trophy. If you're going to play, I want you to be the best."

"Wow, you don't want much, do you?" Andrew replied. Since there was a divorce in the family, Coach Lofton became a father figure to Andrew. They both looked forward to a great year of football at East Hall High School in Gainesville, Georgia.

Football physicals are supposed to be routine—just have 'em turn their heads, cough, and run them through. Unfortunately, Andrew's physical didn't produce the usual result. The doctor found a lump behind Andrew's left knee and recommended that specialists take a closer look. It was bone cancer. One week later, Andrew's leg was amputated at mid-thigh.

Mrs. Goudelock fought back tears as she said, "If it had not been for Andrew's courage in facing what he faced, I never could have done it. He gave me courage."

Andrew wanted to be with the team so Coach Lofton agreed to let Andrew be on the sideline. From his crutches, he watched his teammates play. It was more than he could bear. Tears came often. Then, in October, Andrew had an idea. "Coach" he said, "I want to play next year."

A big optimist himself, Coach Lofton thought aloud, "Yes, Andrew, maybe you could wear an artificial leg and snap the ball on punts."

"No, Coach, you don't understand. I want to play. I mean really play."

Andrew worked very hard in the off-season. He lifted weights and stretched. He practiced hopping and learning how to maneuver. Finally, he began his Junior year of football.

Coach Lofton had a running requirement to get a uniform. The players had to run 1.5 miles in twelve minutes.

"What about me?" asked Andrew.

"You gotta run one lap in three minutes," replied Coach Lofton.

Andrew immediately began hopping around the track on that hot, humid, August day. At the halfway point, he was gasping for air—trying to find some unknown inner strength to keep going. His teammates stopped everything and rushed over to encourage Andrew. Somehow he painfully rounded the last corner and crossed the finish line.

COACH, I WANT TO PLAY

"You made it! You made it!" exclaimed Coach Lofton.

Andrew eventually even won the starting Nose Guard position! The team was never again the same. Andrew's teammates now had a real-life hero. But Andrew said, "I don't want to be a hero, I just want to set an example."

The next February, Andrew was involved in spring football drills and was seeing his doctors on a regular basis.

"Hey, Coach, I need to talk," Andrew said.

Sensing something was wrong, Coach Lofton invited Andrew to his office.

The cancer was back. One operation was required to remove a lung, another to repair Andrew's ribs from damage caused by tumors.

"I couldn't believe it," said Coach Lofton, shaking his head slowly. Andrew came back a short while later and declared, "Coach, I want to play my Senior year. I want to play."

Andrew prepared even harder and played even better than he had his Junior year.

"He could really hit you," remembered Coach Lofton. "I couldn't practice him much because he hurt people. He was always diving at people's legs."

Andrew was once asked about his opponents and whether he thought they would play as hard as usual when they saw that he was missing a leg. His eyes flashed when he responded, "If they don't hit me. I'm going to hit them." Andrew's motto was "Seek and Destroy."

Andrew played so well that he made the North Georgia All-Star team, which plays the South Georgia All-Star team in the summer. "I don't want this to be just an honorary or token thing. If I go, I want to play," he told Coach Lofton. He did play and his North team won. But, in spite of radiation and chemotherapy treatments, cancer was winning its determined battle. Andrew had his fourth surgery immediately following the game.

Andrew's story had become well known throughout Georgia. Bill Curry, who was then still football coach at Georgia Tech, made Andrew an honorary member of the team and gave him a Letterman's Jacket. Curry used Andrew's game films. "It's the most incredible football footage I have seen in my life," said Curry. "They couldn't block him. They had to double team him. He had such great upper-body strength. He'd just shed the blocker, hop over, and make the tackle."

University of Georgia football coach Vince Dooley invited Andrew to the Bulldog Christmas party. "If I had a whole team made up of Andrews, I'd never have to coach and we'd win," remarked Coach Dooley. "I enjoyed the happiness on his face."

Another tumor was found on his lung. It was so large, it couldn't be operated on. A fund was established to aid the Goudelocks. Money came in from all over the state. The money was to be used to send Andrew to New York to try a new drug that might help shrink the tumor.

Andrew's classmates once presented him with some funds. His first thoughts were to look after his Mom. Andrew bought his

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Respect, admiration, and love came from the entire student body and town of Gainesville, Georgia. Andrew was a humble hero.

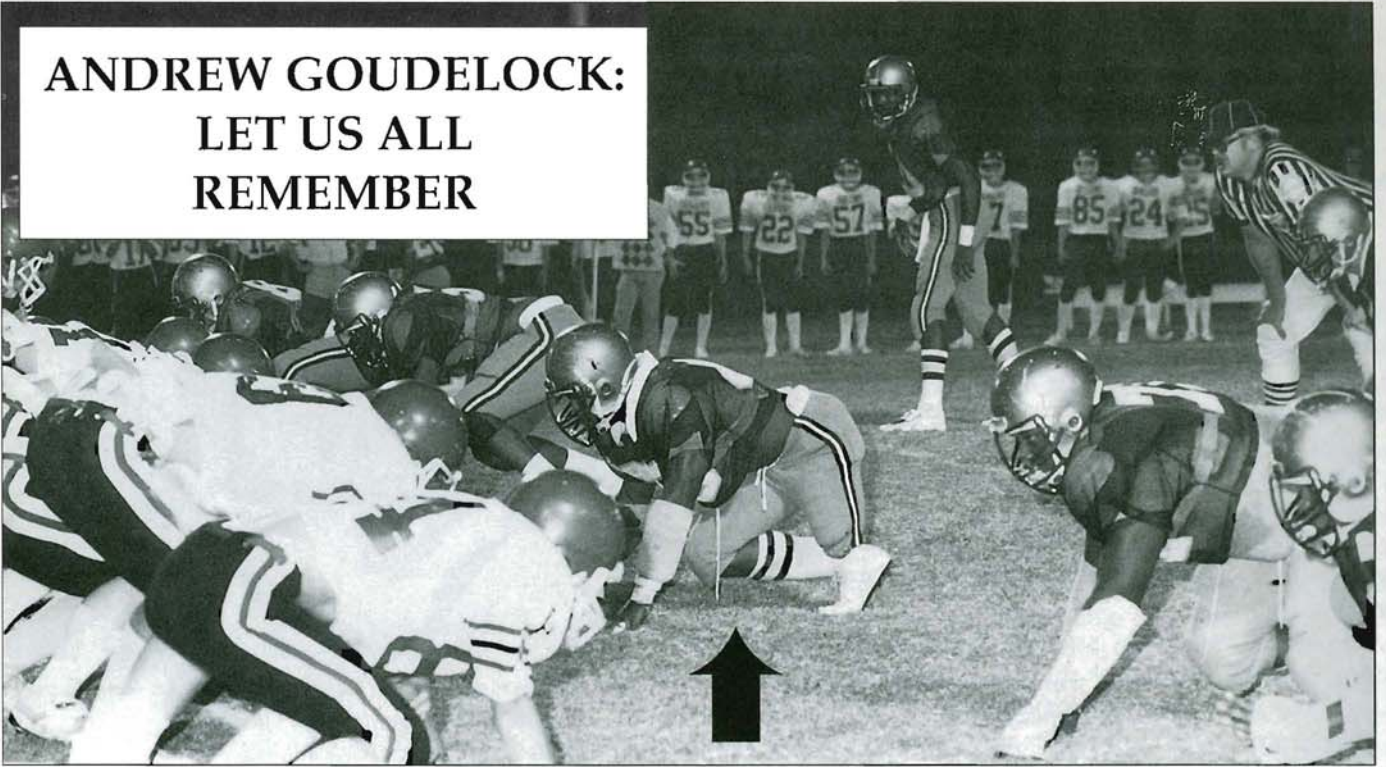


Andrew stretched, lifted, and ran to prepare to play the game he loved



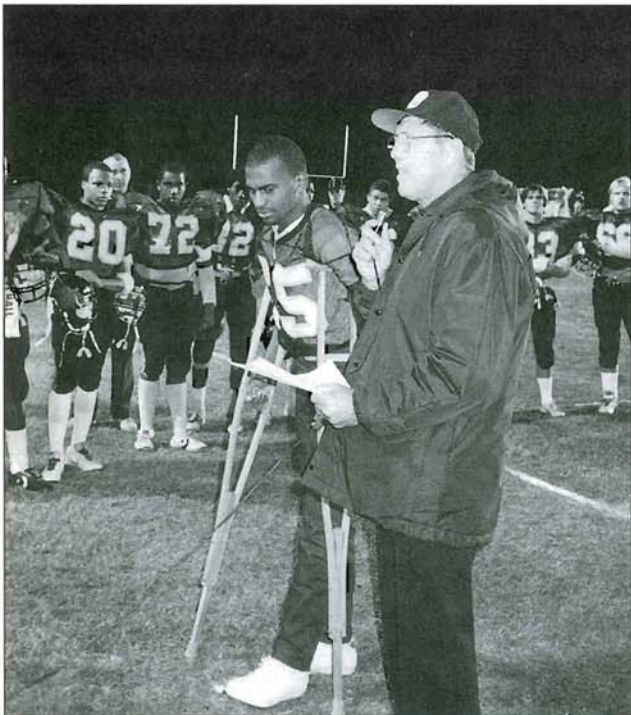
Showing the effects of treatment, Andrew is pictured with his principal, Jack Pirkle, receiving an invitation to play in the Georgia North-South All-Star game.

ANDREW GOUDELOCK: LET US ALL REMEMBER



Let us all keep the spirit of Andrew Goudelock alive:

"Be Totally Committed to Being the Best You Can Be—No Matter What. Never Give Up. Honor Your Family and Care About Others."



*Coach Jim Lofton—"No one will ever wear No. 65 again."
Andrew hung his head and wiped away the tears.*

mother some pearl earrings. Mrs. Goudelock had never even had a birthday cake before, but not this time. Andrew made sure of that.

Mrs. Goudelock once said, "This cancer thing created a special bond. When he was well, he was on his own, but when he didn't feel well, he turned to me. He'd say, 'Mom, will you massage my back?' or 'Will you rub my leg?' I just did what every mother would do for her child."

Andrew's medical bills totaled more than \$100,000, but the family never had to worry because of the many generous contributions.

Andrew did not make the trip to New York. He was too weak and had to go back into the hospital.

Andrew asked to see Coach Lofton. "Coach," he said, "There are four guys on the team that I'm worried about. Could you send them to me? I want to talk to them."

Andrew spoke to them plainly. "You aren't going to be anything if you don't lift weights and listen to the coaches. You know what's right. All you gotta do is just do the right thing."

Four days later, at age 19, Andrew Goudelock died.

"It was a long, hard struggle," said Coach Lofton. "But his life certainly had meaning for a lot of people."

East Hall Quarterback Jimmy Whelchel commented, "You look at Andrew and you see a guy who'd been through it all but just never gave up."

Coach Lofton grew close to Andrew and his family. Andrew was like a son to Coach Lofton, and the two spent a lot of time together. Andrew even attended the Church of Christ with Coach Lofton. Mrs. Goudelock felt that Andrew would have wanted his coach to conduct the funeral.

It was the biggest funeral in the history of Gainesville. The church was packed. Hundreds more just sat in their cars to reflect on the poignancy of this special life. Coach Lofton was the speaker. His staff conducted while the entire East Hall football team acted as pallbearers.

My thanks to Coach Lofton and his wife Ruby Jean for sharing this story with me at his home in Gainesville. I came to inspire Coach Lofton with a clinic. Instead, I was deeply affected. The story of Andrew Goudelock will remain precious to me forever.