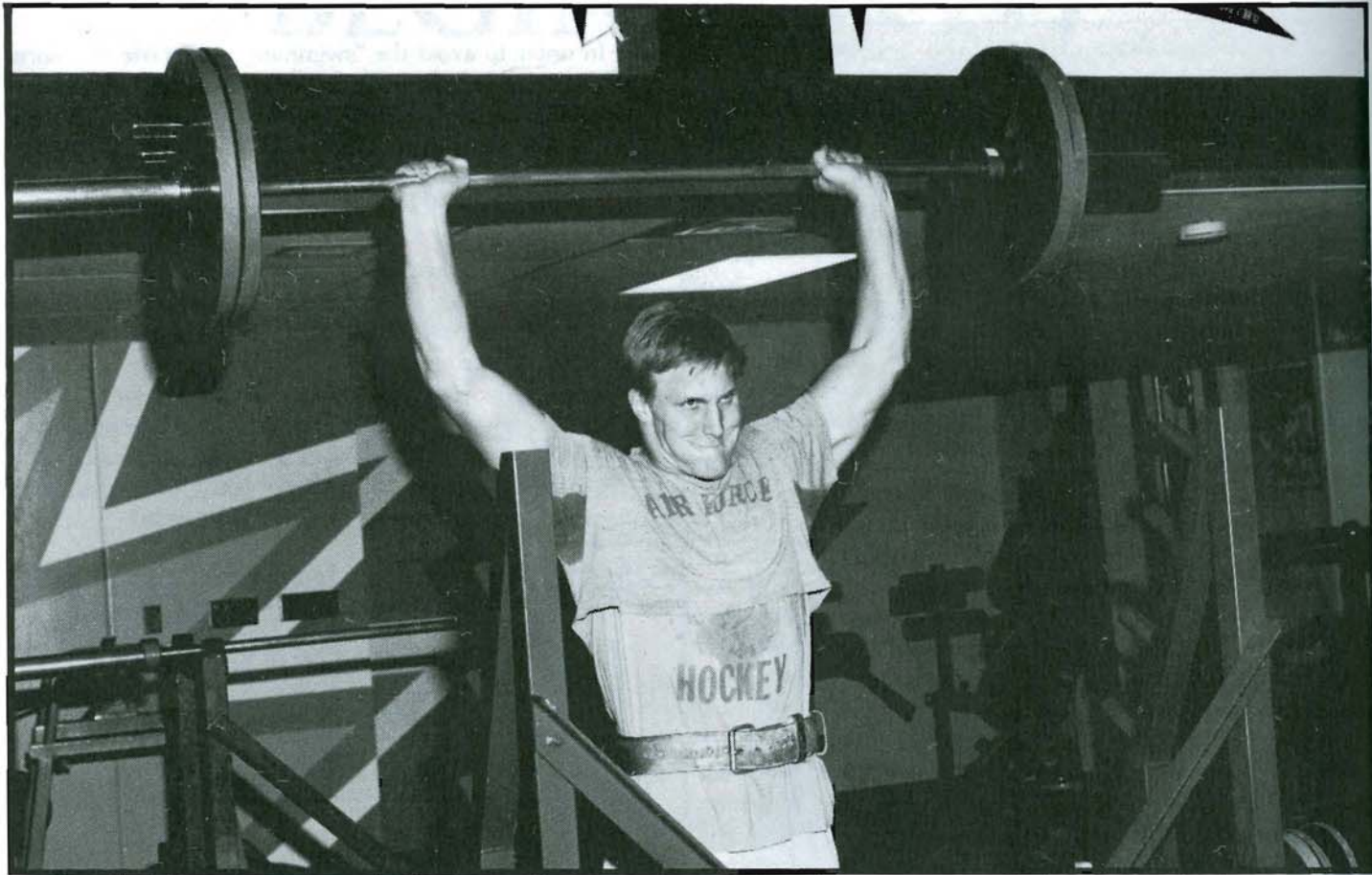


# OUTLAND TROPHY WINNER



Chad holds Air Force record in the Behind-The-Neck-Press Core Lift at 335 pounds. (Photo by Charlie Elam)

**By Kim Goss, C.S.C.S.  
Assistant Strength Coach  
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America — the land of opportunity, where success awaits any man or woman who has the ambition and dedication to realize their dreams. America — where every kid on the block has a chance to grow up to be a movie star, a sports hero, or even the President of the United States. And Chad Hennings is living out his American dream. The 6-foot-6, 260-pound defensive tackle for the United States Air Force Academy has taken God-given athletic talent and combined it with a rigorous, scientific conditioning program. Success, along with national acclaim, have been the payoffs thus far.

On December 9, 1987 Hennings won the prestigious Outland Trophy, awarded annually to the most outstanding interior lineman in college football. Only 22 years old, this Iowa native has earned a place in football history and is guaranteed a promising career as an Air Force officer.

With his blond hair, blue eyes and All-American looks, it's easy to imagine Hennings' success to have come quite

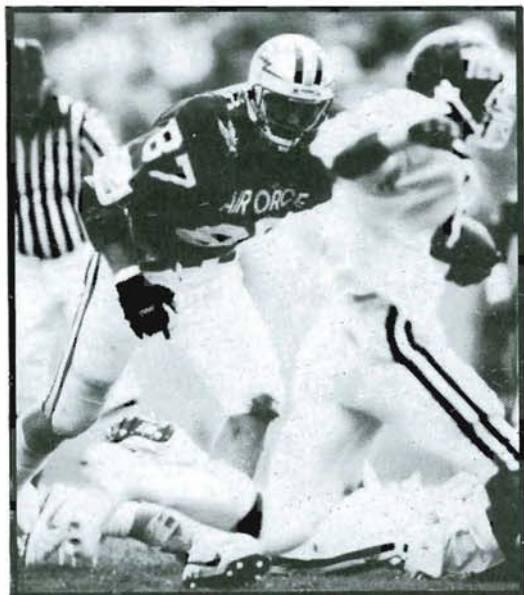
naturally. But Hennings did not truly begin to realize his potential until he started training under the guidance of the Air Force Academy's Strength Coach, Jack Braley. Genetics may have been in Hennings' favor, but it took endless hours of intense pulling, pushing and squatting in the weight room to enable this outstanding young man to reap his rewards.

## **Humble Beginnings**

Hennings was born and raised in Elberon, Iowa, approximately 25 miles west of Cedar Rapids. Don't bother looking for Elberon on the map — with a population of about 150, map makers figured that Elberon just wasn't worth the ink. But the struggle against the forces of nature to grow crops and raise cattle in that small town gave Hennings the inspiration, confidence and discipline he needed to become one of the celebrated student-athletes in the country.

In his early years Hennings would arise before dawn, do chores, attend school, then head back to the farm for more chores. Day in, day out, year after year. He learned how to use tools, operate and repair machinery, handle finances and work with people. He took pride in every accomplishment, but maintained a sense of humbleness that makes

# CHAD HENNINGS 1987



Chad created fear in many a running back.



An Academic All-American, Chad Hennings accepted a rigorous Air Force curriculum.



Chad with his strength coach Jack Braley. (Photo by Charlie Elms)

Chad Hennings "good people".

The demands of farm life put strict limits on Hennings' free time, and the energetic youth used every opportunity to challenge himself in sports. In high school he divided his time between wrestling and football, sports that he believes "are very compatible." And in his senior year he was named All-State in football and captured the State Championship in wrestling. But athletics never took a back seat to academics — Hennings studied hard, and set himself the goal of earning a scholarship to a college that would match his commitment to excellence. The school he eventually set his mind on was the Air Force Academy. "After my visit I was convinced that the Air Force Academy was second to none in academics, coaching and facilities. And now that I've spent four years of my life here, I've honestly found it to be 'a great way of life.'"

Because it has such stringent requirements, simply getting accepted into the Academy is considered quite an accomplishment. Just how tough is the Air Force Academy? Each year over 14,000 individuals apply to the Academy but only 1,400 become cadets, and of those only 60-70 percent will graduate. And it's not any easier if you're an athlete, because even during the season every football player must still carry at least 21 semester hours. Hennings could have attended any college in the country, but he would settle for nothing less than the Air Force Academy.

## Basic Training for Football

After basic training, Hennings reported in at a body-weight of 210 pounds and plunged right into his first college football season as a tight end. He played well enough to letter, a rare feat for a freshman, but to really make an impact on the game he knew he needed more size, speed and strength — that's when Coach Braley went to work. Braley put Hennings on a basic program with emphasis on the Olympic lifting exercises. Braley emphasized low reps and heavy weights, but with enough variety to prevent staleness.

Slowly Hennings began to bulk up — a pound here and a pound there — and by his senior year he reached a body-weight of 260 pounds with only 12 percent bodyfat. In the process, he became tremendously strong, increasing his clean from 250 pounds to a school record of 370. Although Hennings has a respectable bench press max of 455, he believes the lift is overrated. "Upper body strength is important, but success in football lies primarily in the power you get from the legs and hips, and the best way to develop that type of power is with cleans and squats."

Just as Hennings' muscles had developed, so had the Academy weight room and the emphasis on weight training for all sports. In his freshman year, he had to fight for a bench or a barbell in a well-equipped, yet overcrowded weightroom. But by his junior year, the weight room had expanded into a 4,200 square foot facility so well equipped



Most recently Chad was the MVP in the Freedom Bowl.

that more athletes from other sports could derive the benefits of weight training. Also, the weight training program evolved from simple pyramids (like descending sets of 10, 8, 6, 4, 3 for each exercise) into complex periodization cycles based on research from Eastern Bloc countries. And with the help of a revolutionary computer program, Braley can now provide each of the approximately 700+ varsity athletes who use the facility with personalized workouts tailored toward their specific sport.

Another important aspect of Hennings' training for the Outland Trophy was plyometrics — jumps, hops, bounds and medicine ball drills helped him improve his overall speed and reaction time. Hennings also gives much credit to the football team's form running program for bringing his 40-yard dash time from 4.98 as a freshman to his current best of 4.65. Cal McCombs, Defensive Secondary Coach, supervises this pre-season program. "Coach McCombs has been very patient with me in this area — he taught me what proper technique was all about."

In his sophomore year, Hennings was moved to defensive tackle, and he did well by being selected to the All-WAC (Western Athletic Conference) Second Team. In his junior year, he really began to make his presence felt on the gridiron and was named to the All-WAC First Team.

While his junior year was impressive, his senior year was spectacular. In addition to winning the Outland Trophy, he was selected to the first team of every All-American team (Associated Press, Walter Camp, Football Writers Association, etc.) and was named WAC Defensive Player of the Year. He also led the nation with 24 quarter sacks, which resulted in 182 total lost yards. "The biggest difference between my junior and senior year was conditioning — I was faster and stronger," says Hennings.

Medicine ball work is an integral part of conditioning for football at the Academy. In the photo Chad performs a drill specifically designed for linemen. He starts by picking up a ball and throwing it straight ahead using the technique shown, then he shuffles laterally to the next ball and throws it in the same manner. He continues throwing and shuffling, performing the exercise as quickly as possible, until he has thrown all the balls. (Photo by Charlie Elms)



**Brains and Brawn**

Off the field, Hennings has served as the Athletic and Academic Noncommissioned Officer on Wing staff, which is the highest organization level in the cadet wing. An Academic All-American in his junior and senior years, Hennings is a Management major who maintains a 3.22 grade point average. His curriculum includes courses in such complex areas as electrical engineering, law, physics and aeronautical engineering.

Hennings, who has won a postgraduate scholarship from the NCAA, plans to work towards a master's degree in business administration. He has also developed a fascination with flying, an interest instigated by solo flights in a sailplane and a light aircraft while attending the Academy. And after fulfilling his military commitment, he would like to play professional football.

Although he has achieved national recognition, Hennings is a team player, a fact recognized by his teammates and coaches. Says Defensive Line Coach Tom Miller, "As a player, Hennings is terrific. But as a leader, he's just as important." And it's the strong leadership from seniors like Hennings that helped spark the young Air Force team of 1987 to achieve a 9-3 record and an invitation to the Freedom Bowl.

When asked what advice he would give to an aspiring football player, Hennings replied, "Don't expect success to happen overnight. Work hard, be committed to your training, and strive for perfect technique in everything you do."

Yes, Chad Hennings is living out his American Dream. For now, it's being a sports hero. For tomorrow, he and his Air Force Academy classmates know that the sky's the limit.