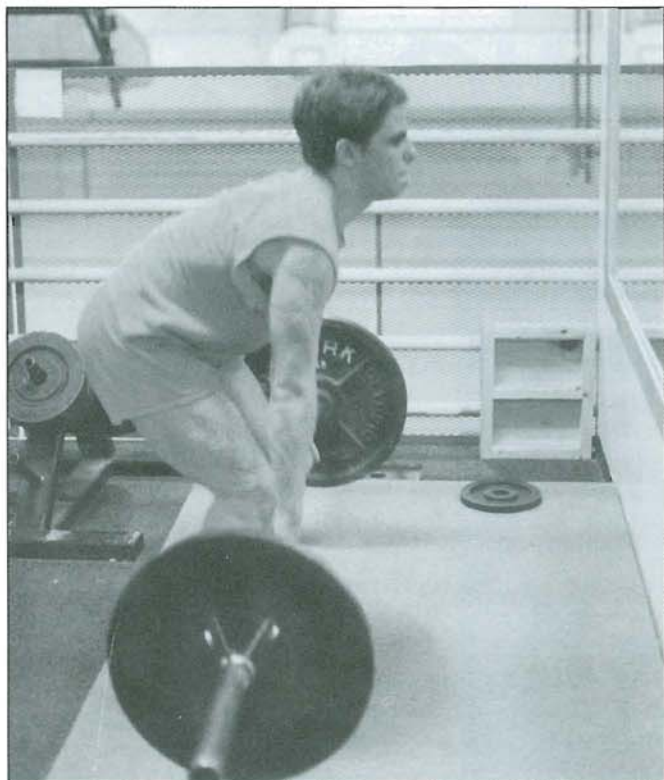


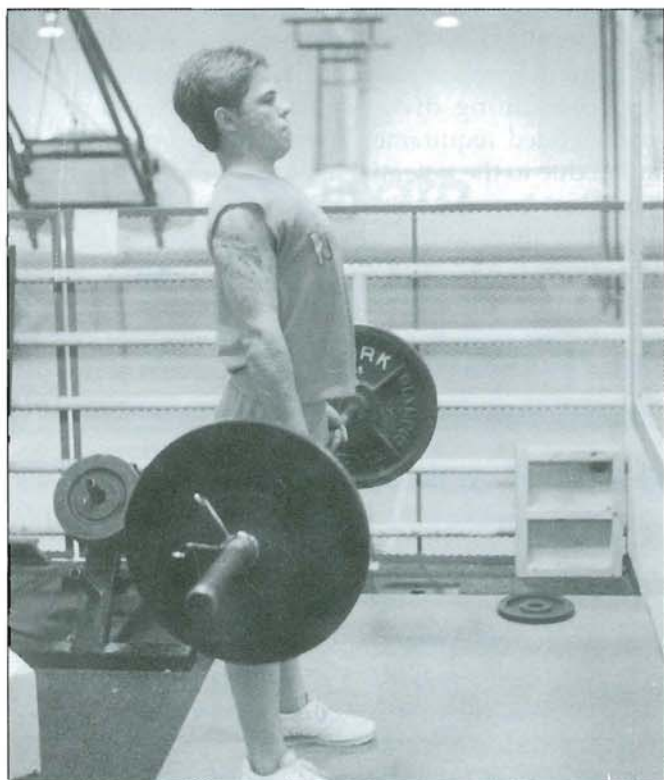
JOHN CREEK

BURN VICTIM WINS

By Glen Fairclough



The fingers on John's right hand were burned to the bone...



...in spite of that he Dead Lifts 365 and Power Cleans 185.

Life is filled with obstacles. Winners accept that challenge and set out to overcome whatever gets in their way.

John Creek is a winner.

Ten years ago, John Creek nearly died in a house fire that claimed the life of an older brother. Despite severe burns over 50 percent of his body, he is today a champion wrestler and an all-conference football player at his high school in Nebraska.

Tragedy struck the Creek family home in Wymore, Nebraska, early on the morning of March 2, 1978. It was cold and snow still lay on the ground outside. John's mother, Patricia Creek, awoke at 3:45 a.m. to find their two-story frame house on fire. Mrs. Creek, her husband Cecil, and three older children were on the ground floor and easily escaped the burning house. However, the three youngest of the Creek children, who were asleep on the second floor, remained trapped inside the house because the stairway was engulfed in flames.

Fortunately, Mrs. Creek had taught her family about fire safety. The family didn't panic. Recalling her mother's instructions, 11-year-old Cora used a blanket to smother the flames on her two younger brothers' clothing, then dropped them out of a window into the arms of 14-year-old brother Jim, waiting below.

Both boys were critically injured. Seven-year-old John suffered deep burns over 50 percent of his body while eight-year-old Clifford's burns were even more extensive, covering 75 percent of his body. After emergency treatment at a local hospital in Beatrice, the boys were transferred to the burn/trauma unit at St. Elizabeth Community Health Center, where they underwent surgery for debridement (removal of dead skin tissue) and skin grafts, fought infection, and suffered the excruciating pain that is part of every burn injury.

Cliff battled bravely for six weeks before he died, while John began a slow, steady recovery.

During the three and one-half months John spent in the BTU, he underwent four operations. Physical therapy helped him to regain mobility in his arms and fingers while dieticians provided the extra nutrition essential for burn recovery. In addition, a tutor helped him keep up with his school work. Sig Bergman, the director of Social Services, said "[John's] courage and positive attitude made him a source of inspiration to the other patients in the burn unit."

Even after being released from the burn unit, John continued painful physical therapy treatments on a daily basis (requiring a 102-mile round trip from Wymore to Lincoln and back), and later in nearby Beatrice. He also had to wear Jobst dressings — an elasticized garment which prevents scarring by applying pressure to scar tissue — 24 hours per day for several

JOHN CREEK

months.

At first, John was self-conscious when people stared at his Jobsts and scars but he has learned to cope with that. "Some of the kids in grade school made fun of me," John said, "but that stopped about the sixth grade. They weren't used to it and couldn't handle it, I guess. They don't look just at the outside anymore. It hurt me inside when I was younger. Sometimes younger kids still do or say things [about the scars]."

Today, 17-year-old John is socially well adjusted. We asked him if he had a girlfriend yet and then suggested that he was probably still too young to date. John laughed, "No! No! I've got a girlfriend. In fact, she's going to college. You're never too young for that!"

Despite the stress of his own injuries and his brother's death, John has managed to take things in stride. "I did the best I could," he said. "I didn't have any counseling, but my parents and teachers helped."

John started wrestling in the fourth grade. As a junior at Wymore Southern High School last year he compiled a 31-3-1 record competing at 130 pounds, and was the team leader in takedowns (49) and pins (12). John was champion of the Southern Nebraska Conference and Class C District Tournament, and placed fifth in the state tournament.

Larry Anderson, head wrestling coach at Wymore Southern, said that "John is one of our hardest working wrestlers. He has worked on improving his technique. Through the Bigger Faster Stronger program, he is showing a big improvement in his strength. He will be one of our great team leaders this season."

Although he has a hard time gripping with his right hand — a consequence of being burned to the bone — John says he has no other problems associated with wrestling and weight training.

John's past injuries and slim build (5 foot 6 inches, 145 pounds) haven't hindered his success in football either. He lettered his freshman year, was selected honorable mention all-conference defensive nose guard his sophomore year, and chosen all-conference nose guard as a junior. He is also the Raiders' starting offensive guard.

Larry J. Vetrosky, head football coach at Wymore Southern, has high praise for John. "John is an exceptional influence to our football team. I've never heard an adverse comment from John in the three seasons I've coached him. He is a superlative model for us."

"John has a heart double his height and weight. He practices like he plays — and his playing intensity is tremendous. There have been times when he has put defensive players nearly twice his size on their backs. I'm looking forward to having John back his senior year."

Even more important, John is a good student. He has compiled a grade point average in the 87-88 range (on a 100-point scale), and he plans to attend college and

study physical education.

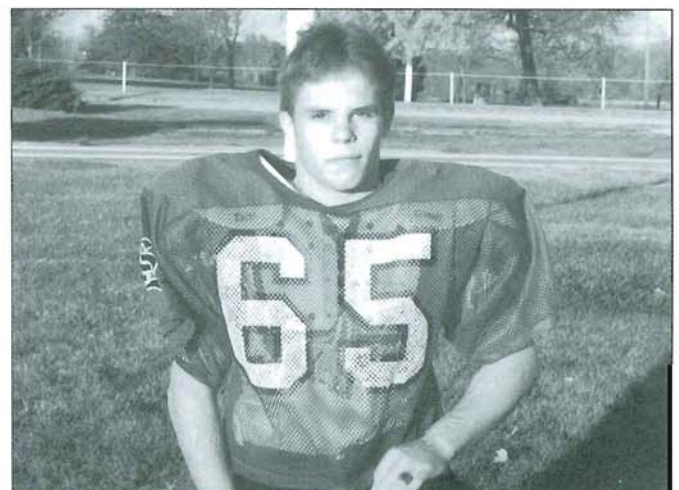
John attributes part of his success to the teachings of his parents. "They just say 'do it — go out and try.'" John advises others to "Do your best. Don't let things bother you. As long as you know you're succeeding, that's all that counts."



John took fifth in state as a junior with a 31-3-1 record in the 130-pound class.



John benches 225 at a body weight of only 145.



John received All-Conference honors as a nose guard.

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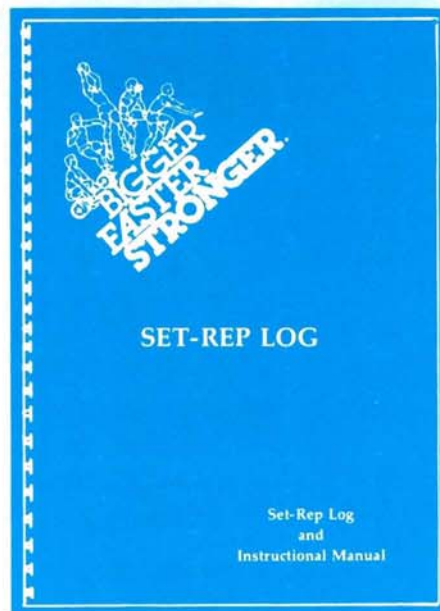
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