

# BIGGER FASTER STRONGER'S

## HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

# NOAH WILBANKS

**By Dr. Greg Shepard**

Noah Wilbanks from South Dade High School in Homestead, Florida is our 1993 Bigger Faster Stronger Athlete of the Year. Noah becomes the 14th recipient of our most prestigious annual award. Selections are based on athletic achievement in sports, the ability to overcome obstacles, scholarship, leadership, general character and the ability to put things into their proper perspective. You will see that Noah is indeed a true Upper Limit athlete.

Noah's story began when his mother called our BFS offices. She had just received news that Noah had been selected to our BFS Football All-American 3rd Team. Mrs. Wilbanks was elated, "Coach Shepard, you don't know what you have just done for my son. You made his dreams come true. He's gone through so much." I politely thanked her, but I was somewhat puzzled at her remarks. I then found out that Noah's team from Homestead, Florida had been through the worst of Hurricane Andrew.

It just so happened that I was scheduled to do a BFS clinic in the Miami area the following week. I invited Noah, through his mother, to attend the 3-day BFS clinic. She thanked me over and over, but said they didn't have any way or any money to get there. I still don't know what possessed me to do what I did, but I responded, "Don't worry about it. I'll pick him up." It turned out to be an inspired decision.

As I drove to South Dade High School, I saw a community still in the throes of devastation. I thought Hurricane Andrew, which blasted through Homestead seven months earlier, was yesterday's news. Boy, was I wrong. Crews were working everywhere to clean up debris. Football Coach Don Drinkhahn had to leave school early to take care of a problem in his home caused by the hurricane. I met Noah, Strength Coach Dan Kirkpatrick, and Coach Drinkhahn, in the weight room. I helped them with some Power Clean techniques and Noah got a new person-



**Noah Wilbanks  
#44 Florida All-State Linebacker**

al record.

Noah turned out to be a delight at the clinic. He was like a big brother to the other kids and took a great leadership role. After the clinic, I drove Noah back 40 miles to his trailer home and met his parents and two sisters. With the combination of talking with his coaches, parents and meeting Noah personally, I came away inspired and knew that Noah Wilbanks had to be a leading candidate for our BFS Athlete of the Year.

Noah grew up in Palm Beach County in Florida, where he participated in all kinds of sports. Noah and his two sisters were part of a hardworking All-American family. Bill Wilbanks, Noah's father, coached his son's teams while Tanna, Noah's mother, participated as a team mother. He even started lifting weights in the 7th grade in a special junior weight training program. Mrs. Wilbanks remembered, "the lifting really fired him up."

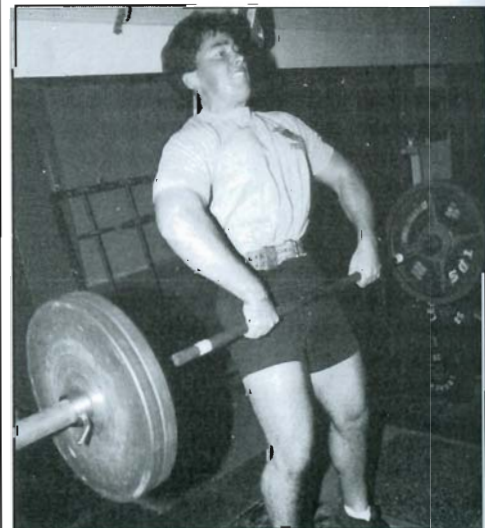
Then tragedy reared its

ugly head and changed the Wilbanks' life forever. Noah's dad got cancer and the family had no insurance. They lost everything trying to pay all the bills. These losses included their home and cars. A brother rented them a pre-fab house in Homestead and fortunately it was by a hospital which took in people who could not pay.

To pay other bills, Mrs. Wilbanks started a tree nursery business. Noah was required to work and begin a home-school program. All sports were out.

Mrs. Wilbanks, one of the great positive thinkers in history, looked back at those days, "It was a great experience. We had fun. We'd get up at 6:00 a.m. and I'd leave Noah's school work on the kitchen table. He would study until noon and then work in the nursery until late that night. I told Noah, when he was 15, that the only way he could ever go to college was to earn a scholarship. So after work, he would run sprints and workout on his own."

Soon after that, the family was told that Bill would die from the cancer. One day the ambulance came for Mr. Wilbanks who was bleeding from the ears and nose. They all thought that this was it. Noah was so affected that he lost big patches of



**Noah Has Power Cleaned  
Nearly 300 Pounds!**





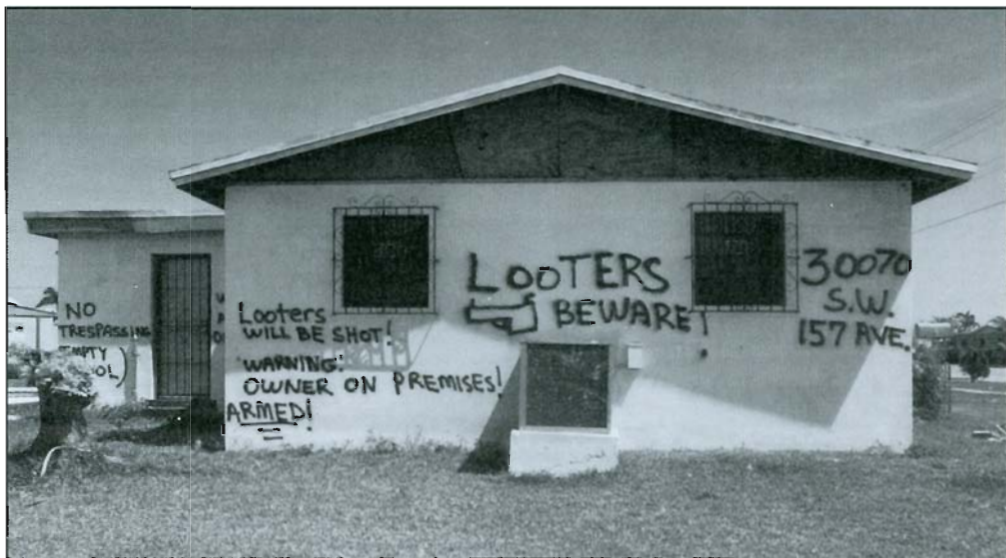
his hair but he became even more determined. Noah became so relentless it even concerned his mother. "I don't care," said young Noah, "I'll do whatever it takes."

Noah lifted weights three times per week at a public gym and ran everyday. It didn't matter how tired he was, Noah never missed. "There were many times he'd fall asleep on the way to the gym," said Mrs. Wilbanks proudly. The family had no transportation, which meant Noah could not participate in any sport including football. Elizabeth, Noah's older sister, followed the same school and work schedule. Mrs. Wilbanks continued, "It built character in my kids. Elizabeth had to get a G.E.D."

The reader should understand that Noah continued his home-study program for nearly three years. He could not play football during what would have been his 8th, 9th and 10th grade year. He never went to a public school or had much interaction with any other kids. Noah, in a very real sense, was like a hermit. One day, at age 16, he began crying his heart out, "Mom, I just don't have a life."

Noah and his mother went to the bedroom and prayed. The answer came. Three days later Mrs. Wilbanks enrolled her son at South Dade High School and decided she would work extra hard so Noah could go to school. They were introduced to Head Football Coach Don Drinkhahn, who quickly got Noah signed up for weight training and football. About this same time, Noah's father's health improved. The once deadly cancer went into remission. Noah began to blossom. Weights were his inspiration. He just came to life. The sun was shining again.

As Noah's junior year was about to begin, he was finally able to again play football. It was like unleashing a bomb as he exploded into a starting position and established himself as a key player. Then, he began preparing for his final senior year. The echo of his mother's words about earning a scholarship rang in his ears with every set and every rep. Noah trained like a man possessed. He could almost taste his goal. Noah happily dreamed of success and thanked the Lord continually for finally being



Noah's Neighborhood Nearly One Year After Hurricane Andrew

given a chance. He wondered, "Would the winds of chance continue to be kind?"

On August 24, 1992, Noah got an answer so horrible no one could have imagined. It came in the form of Hurricane Andrew, one of history's most devastating natural disasters. The violent winds tore through the Wilbanks' apartment causing the roof to fall. They walked out with only the shirts on their back. Their landlady kindly let them use another apartment which had two rooms still standing. Mr. Wilbanks drilled a hole in the floor to drain out the water.

The next night, Mrs. Wilbanks was looking for Noah. Noah had spent hours clearing debris so he could run sprints. He even made weights out of the debris. Noah's little sister held a

flashlight so he could run up stairs. Noah was living his motto, no matter what, "If you're not in shape, you're not smart." After a while, it looked like there would be no football. Army tents occupied the practice field. It was a tent city for relief volunteers. Even the goalposts had been blown away. Players were beginning to leave including South Dade's returning quarterback. Coach Drinkhahn shook his head, "You know some of these kids don't have anything left, just some walls." Dale Hardy, football coach at neighboring Homestead High School lamented, "We have to look at things realistically, and what's realistic is that we don't have the ball players - that's in addition to other things we don't have, like houses and water and food and...."

South Dade High School had no phones and only 30% of the classrooms remained. Noah tried to help anyone he could. "With so many collapsed walls and no electricity," Mrs. Wilbanks remarked, "You could hear everything. Couples arguing and children crying. You went to sleep with pillows over your ears." Yet Noah remained positive. He got all the little kids together, about 20 that were left. Noah organized games and ran relays with them. He never stopped smiling and helped pull them through those first days.

Since the football situation looked so bleak, Noah and his parents sneaked through guards which surrounded the county to keep out looters. Their purpose was to enroll Noah into



Pictured From Left to Right: Coach Dan Kirkpatrick, BFS President Greg Shepard, Noah Wilbanks and Head Football Coach Don Drinkhahn





**Piles Of Debris Still Stacked Up Seven Months After Hurricane Andrew**

another school and play football. It looked like a done deal, but just before they were to leave, Coach Drinkhahn found them. He exclaimed, "You're not leaving. Not on your life! Maybe we can't play twelve games, but we can play seven."

Noah turned to his mother, "Coach believes in me. I don't want to leave." The whole family stayed and got a small mobile home which they parked on a friend's yard. It would have been a lot easier to have moved, but they believed things would work out.

The players finally got together and exchanged horror stories but they managed to joke and laugh about who had it the worst. They began by going into the weight room. Don Drinkhahn would show up unshaven and clearly tired. The first 2 1/2 weeks were spent driving all over the area searching for players. His first words to the players who were left were, "Don't despair. We need to try to do the best job we can. There's one thing that's going to come out of it: We're going to be better men."

Noah stood up and proclaimed, "I love the coaches and this team. This is my senior year and I'm going out in style." One month later, they played a game against Coral Gables, a bigger school, and a school not ravaged by Andrew. They weren't supposed to have a chance, but Noah played both ways and led the defense which held Coral Gables to less than a 100 yards and a shutout.

Dwayne Jenkins had to learn how to play quarterback in just 12 days and Alex Madriz, a spunky kid from Costa Rica, was called to kick a 49-yard field goal with only 2:20 left. There was no scoreboard because it too had been blown away. South Dade hadn't been able to score either and Madriz had to do something he'd never done before. No, not kick a 49-yard field goal, but just kick anything. Madriz said he was praying before the kick and the unbelievable happened. The kick was good and South Dade came away with a 3-0 victory. With flashes of smiles and tears flowing, Noah Wilbanks cried out, "This is the best moment of my life."

Noah, at only 6-0 210 pounds, was the first South Dade player to ever be named to both the All-Dade and All-State teams. In addition, he made All-District, All-Area, All-City and All-League. This happiness was short lived. Noah's mother had a stroke. Perhaps it was too many 18 hour days coupled with the hurricane. She nearly died. "They thought I was dead," said Mrs. Wilbanks, "they had to put the paddles to me." Since then, she has recovered but still has numbness and gets over tired easily. You can tell where Noah gets his spirit when she says, "It's nothing I can't handle."

Bill Wilbanks has also left his mark. He taught his children about the street and their enticing and dangers.

He also taught them about God and values. They chose the right and have accepted righteous ways. After graduation Noah started in the North-South All-Star game which was played in the Gator Bowl. He called the defensive plays and had 8 tackles along with one fumble recovery. At practice he ran a 4.6 forty. This and his play caught the eye of Ken Sparks, the football coach at Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tennessee.

Noah's dream was finally realized as Coach Sparks offered him a full scholarship. Then, as school officials got to know the family, they also realized the talents of Elizabeth Wilbanks. At 22, she never thought she'd have a chance, but she too was offered a full scholarship at Carson-Newman. Tanna Wilbanks softly said, "Carson-Newman went way beyond their means. We are so very happy to have two kids in college. It's something I thought was beyond our reach. We thank God everyday."

We thank the Wilbanks family, Noah's coaches and especially Noah. He has taught us much about being a true Upper Limit person and athlete. He is most deserving of being our 1993 BFS High School Athlete of the Year.....□

Dear Coach Shepard,

Thank you so much for all you have done for Noah and I. We just got the Power Clean video and looked at it the same day. It was awesome. The program is going super. We both are breaking records at a fantastic rate and it's only our first week. We both can't wait 'till Monday to start again.

Dan Kirkpatrick, Strength Coach

Dear Coach Shepard,

I can't thank you enough for the time and effort you extended to Noah. He is so thrilled over your program and is already showing signs of improvement. He talks about you all the time, repeating everything you said. Since you left, I notice he got that old zeal back. It's a joy to see him so happy.

Tanna Wilbanks, Noah's Mother

To Coach Shepard and BFS,

Your training has brought me to a great sense of belonging. I feel like I am part of your family growing with happiness and joy. I am breaking records left and right and I feel like an eagle soaring through those mountains, with great focus and determination. I am a person who is thankful for all the gifts I have received. Your program has helped me concentrate and grow spiritually, mentally and, of course, physically.

God bless,  
Noah Wilbanks