

FELTON SPENCER



THE "CHIEF"

By Dr Greg Shepard

The stage was set. The 1994 NBA season was winding down. The Utah Jazz were headed to the playoffs again and they were playing at the San Antonio Spurs for the last season game in their 5-game series. David Robinson at that time seemed to be the pick for the NBA's Most Valuable Player. Felton Spencer, a reject center from possibly the NBA's worst team (Minnesota), was going to go against Robinson. "I was in the best shape of

my life at the last of the season," beamed Felton. "It was fun to play. My teammates said to take it to him and kept giving me the ball." When the dust had settled, Felton had 23 points and smashed the boards for 17 rebounds in a Jazz victory.

How does a reject player dominate an All-Star player? To answer that question, we must start at the beginning. Felton grew up in Louisville. His parents were divorced when he was two. It was Felton and his 6-5 mother along with three sisters and

one younger brother who is now just 13 years old. Felton has always been a good student even from an early age. He graduated 8th in his class at Eastern High School and was an Academic All-American at Louisville. "Mom was always tough on my academics," Felton remembered. "It was do your homework first and then play." When asked if he ever resisted his mom's authority, Felton burst out laughing, "When your mom's 6-5, you don't rebel. She was very supportive but when she said jump, you said, 'how high'."

Felton was always big growing up but had some difficult times. "I got cut in my 6th and 7th grade years," said Felton. "I was 6-10 as an 8th grader and finally made the cut, but I sat on the end of the bench." The next year Felton was 7-0 and 215 pounds. He made the JV team as a 9th grader, but he never played. "If you would have ever asked my middle school coach that if someday I'd ever make it in the NBA, he would have said that idea would be crazy."

Felton's mother always encouraged him. She told her son to keep practicing and that things would work out. She said, "If you like basketball, go for it." Felton even went out for football in his 9th grade year. Felton laughed, "The basketball coach asked me if I'd lost my mind."

Bill Kercher was hired as the new basketball coach at Eastern for Felton's sophomore year. Coach Kercher provided extra work for his future star by doing agility drills, sprinting, Leaper and skill work. Felton started on both the JV and varsity teams as a 7-0 220 center. He averaged 8 points and 7 rebounds per game as he led his team to an 16-8 season. Unfortunately, Felton got pneumonia during regionals and the team did go to the playoffs. Coach Kercher made cross country and track mandatory. The track team won state almost every year and it was here that Felton was taught the mechanics of

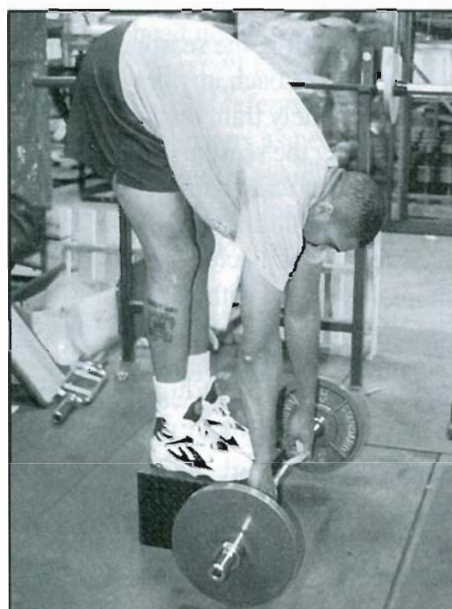
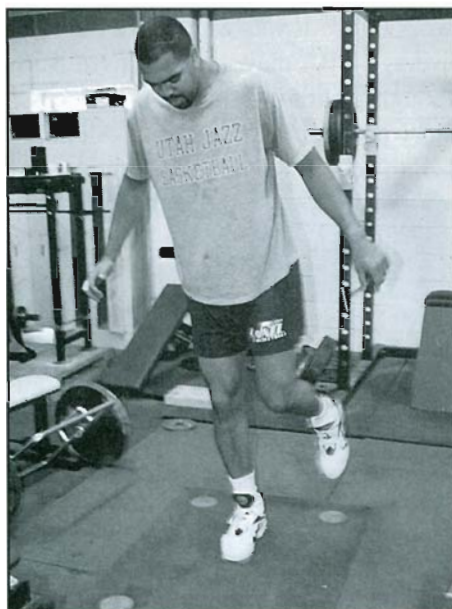


running. "They told me Wilt Chamberlain was a great runner," stated Felton. Chamberlain also threw the shot 42-6 and the discus 160 feet by the time he was a senior.

Felton began lifting weights a little bit in his sophomore year. "All we did was universal gym type stuff," related Felton. "We did no Squats or Cleans." Felton put on another 20 pounds by his junior year and in the off-season went to many basketball camps. It paid off. Felton averaged 24 points and 16 rebounds per game and garnered All-State honors. Eastern High School went to the playoffs for the first time in 50 years. Felton received letters from colleges all over the country wanting him to play.

"I decided to sign early," said Felton. I'd always followed Louisville basketball and they had just won the national championship plus I wanted to stay close to my family. It took the pressure off so I didn't have to take the trips to schools or get the phone calls. After I signed, I just concentrated on school and basketball." However, some problems developed with Felton's weight. He ballooned up to 280 pounds. "I was very high in bodyfat," Felton confessed, "My coach called it baby fat. I was a fast food junkie. My mom worked long hours so I was on my own as far as eating." In spite of the weight, Felton led Eastern to the semis and averaged 20 points and 18 rebounds per game with 6 blocked shots. He again made All-State and this time Felton was also an Honorable Mention High School All-American and an Academic All-American.

Felton never smoked or did drugs in high school. "I was afraid to," said Felton seriously. "I had asthma as a kid. Also, Len Bias had just died. I thought about it. It scared me. I just never wanted to ever get involved with drugs. During my senior year, I

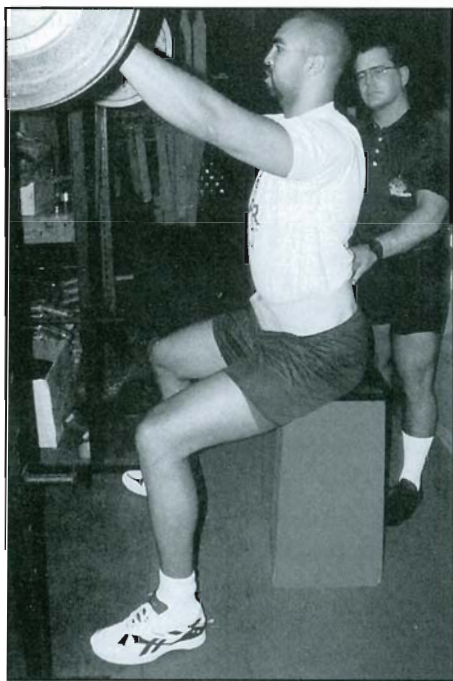


knew guys that were involved with drugs but my mom always taught me to make my own decisions. That really helped me with peer pressure."

Felton continued to battle his weight as an incoming freshman at Louisville. "When I reported in at 7-1 315 pounds," said Felton, "Coach Crum told me that I'd lost my mind." Coach Crum asked, "Son, can I see you in my office for a minute." Felton was told in no uncertain terms that there was no way he could play at that weight. "Son, you got to get in shape." Felton was put on a good diet and he started working out with free weights. He did Squats, benches and some Leaper work but no Cleans. Felton also did some Plyometrics. By October of his freshman year, Felton had lost 75 pounds! "I lost the weight way too fast," ascertained Felton. "I was real weak." Even Coach Crum exclaimed, "I didn't mean to starve yourself." Felton then began to eat more food but also learned how to choose better foods.

Felton didn't play a lot his freshman year. He averaged 2-3 points per game along with two rebounds. "But I did learn a lot from Pervis Ellison and I got my weight back up to 260 pounds," said Felton. "My strength also came back." Felton did not start as a sophomore but did average 6 points and 5 rebounds per game. His weight leveled out at 265 pounds for both sophomore and junior years. Felton was getting stronger and his Bench was about 250 and he was able to do an above parallel squat of 300 pounds. Felton averaged 8 points and 7 rebounds in his junior year.

Felton finally started in his senior year and averaged 15 points and 9 rebounds per game still weighing 265 pounds. Louisville went to the second round of the NCAA playoffs and was upset by Ball State. Felton graduated in four years and had a sparkling 3.4 GPA with a major in communications-radio and TV broad-



Coach Anderson Making Sure Felton's Back Is Locked-In.

casting. He was an All-Metro center and was the runner-up player of the year in the conference. Felton was also a Honorable Mention All-American and an Honorable Mention Academic All-American.

Big men are in high demand in the NBA, especially those over seven feet. Felton was drafted #1 by Minnesota and was the 6th overall pick. For three years Felton was an on and off starter weighing between 270 and 275 pounds. The third year of his Timberwolf career was discouraging. He didn't play much at all averaging 6 points and 5 rebounds. Felton worked with weights by doing Benches, Inclines, some Cleans and Squats which were above parallel. Felton admitted, "When I left Minnesota to come to the Jazz my confidence was down." Felton was a reject center from a poor team. However, our center Mark Eaton was 38 years old and was nursing some injuries. The Jazz needed a big man desperately. Felton Spencer was a possibility to temporarily fill in the center gap.

Everyone in the Jazz organization fell in love with Felton because of his

work ethic. It was way above the average NBA player. All of us at BFS thought Felton was a sure-fire success story just waiting to happen. All he had to do is show up and do the program with great intensity. We immediately got him to do Parallel Squats which are difficult for tall athletes but when you combine Parallels with our Box Squats, it really isn't all that difficult. Felton remarked, "I worked a lot harder with the Jazz and more regular on the weights. Now, I'm finally consistent. I found out that In-season training is extremely important. I believe it will prevent injuries and if you do get hurt, you will recover faster. In-season training helps you physically during the season. If I were a high school coach, my players would definitely train on the BFS program during the season. I don't want to get weaker and you'll get weaker if you don't lift during the season."

"Last season I actually gained strength and size with the Jazz. My endurance was great going into the playoffs. I was playing over 30-minutes per game. Lifting weights the way we do it at the Jazz has no adverse effect on my touch at all. However, it is important to stretch after you lift. Anyway, it helps me."

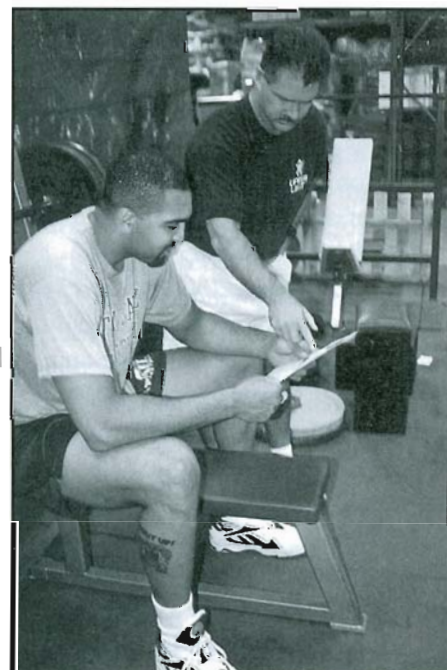
"We always lift the day before the game because of the number of games we play per week. I think of it as a tune-up before the game. After Box Squats I feel lighter and seem to play better. Box Squats are a definite plus. They have helped me a lot since I had surgery on my knee during my rookie year with Minnesota. The Box Squats really helped me come back."

Felton Spencer immediately stepped into the starting center position for the Jazz at 270 pounds and 12.5% bodyfat and just kept on improving by leaps and bounds as the season progressed. By the playoffs, Felton was indeed at his peak. He weighed 301 pounds and was able to Bench 300 pounds for reps, Parallel

Squat 350 and Power Clean 250 for reps. There was no baby fat. There was no fat, period. We watch bodyfat very carefully with all the Jazz players and they are continually tested hydrostatically. Felton was an extremely lean 8.5% bodyfat. He was a force to be reckoned with and still doesn't really know his potential. David Robinson had his hands full as did every other center in the league. I think its safe to say that Felton went from a reject to perhaps something like being among the top 12 centers in the NBA.

Felton, who is a joy to be around, says; "Go out everyday and give 110 percent. Just give your best, then you can hold your head up high; win or lose. Set your own goals high and don't let people tell you that you can't. Put forth your best effort."

Felton has a wonderful Upper Limit philosophy of life. "I enjoy every day as it is given to me. I always try to be a good person and be respectful and courteous. That means treating people like you would want to be treated. If you do that, God will bless you.".....□



Coach Anderson & Felton Discussing Breaking Records In-Season.