



Searching With Searcy

By Jay Searcy

Phil Bode: A Real Champion

KNOXVILLE — Phil Bode was a drug addict. People who knew him then remember how he would scream and cry and beg for a fix. They counted 127 needle marks in his two arms once. And Phil Bode was only 11 years old at the time.

Now, 11-year-old drug addicts in New York City may not be so unusual, but in Algona, Iowa, they are, and that's where Phil grew up. Everybody in Algona and for miles around knew about Phil's problem.

Phil was telling his story this weekend at the Stokeley Athletics Center on the Tennessee campus.

"I used to lay in my bed and writhe and moan and cry and scream until the nurses would give me a shot. The young nurses would feel sorry for me and call the doctor and pretty soon I had my shot.

"Then I'd dream or fall off to sleep. It made me forget about all the unpleasant things. When I had a shot I didn't care about anything — my leg or anything."

Leg Is Crushed

Phil's left leg, when he was 11, was crushed and twisted in a tractor accident. It was so bad the doctors talked about amputation for two weeks. If they saved the leg, they thought, it would be useless to the boy.

"The first thing I thought when it happened," Phil said, "was, 'boy, I've really messed things up now. This is going to cost a lot of money.' Then I started thinking about being without a leg and how it would be to spend the rest of my life on crutches."

But an 11-year-old boy lying in a hospital bed, like a troubled teen-ager in the streets, can soon learn that drugs have a way of making you escape it all in dreams — the bad thoughts, the pain, reality, and 11-year-old boys, like the street people, aren't aware that sooner or later, life has to be faced head on.

Just as it is.

"I know how easily you can get hooked," Phil said. "In just that short time when I had to have drugs to kill the pain, I became an addict. When a shot started wearing off I'd ask for another, even after the pain was gone, and I soon learned how to get one. I'd trick the nurses. It got to be really dramatic sometimes. That went on for about a month. Then one day the doctor came in and said they were going to start taking me off the drugs gradually."

The Nurses Cried

In a lot of ways, the withdrawal was worse than the accident. Phil's body quivered and screamed out for a shot. Phil screamed and cried. The nurses cried in sympathy.

But one day when Phil was begging his doctor settled him down.

"Do you really think you need another shot, Phil? Really?" he asked.

Phil thought about it for a moment and remembered the euphoric sensation, the dreamland. Then he remembered how it would be waiting for the next shot, if there would be a next one. "No," he answered finally. "I guess not."

There had to be other shots, because



LOUISIANA STATE'S PHIL BODE

there were 11 operations in all over a three-year period. And each shot brought back the memories. "It wouldn't take much to get me back right where I was," he said. "And I knew it."

Phil's misery started one October Saturday on his daddy's 1,000 acre farm outside of Algona. He was pulling a disc behind a tractor when he was jerked off the back between the jack-knifing disc and the spinning wheels of the tractor. His leg was shredded. The fibula was in splinters. The femur was snapped, the hip dislocated and the flesh was in shreds.

New Nicknames

If his father hadn't heard his screams from a nearby field he would have died right there. Even after they got him to the hospital there was some doubt. And there wasn't much hope that the leg could be saved. Certainly it would be useless.

But the doctors began piecing the splintered bone together hoping it would fuse. They grafted skin from here and there. Rebuilt the leg and released him for a life on crutches.

So Phil went back to school a year behind and laughed at his new nicknames — Gimpy, Crip, Waffle Leg.

Last night at the Stokeley Athletics Center, Phil a junior at Louisiana State University, walked to the mat without a crutch, without a trace of a limp and won his second straight Southeastern Conference wrestling championship.

His mom and dad and sister flew in from Algona for the occasion.

"Sure, I guess I'm proud," said Phil. "But the thing I'm proudest of is making the all-state football team at Algona High. I played center."