

South Carolina
Lineman Tommy Chaikin
used body building drugs for three years. they
drove him to violence, and nearly to suicide.

The Nightmare of Steroids

by Tommy Chaikin with Rick Telander

I was sitting in my room at the roost. the athletic dorm at the University of south Carolina, with the barrel of a loaded 357 Magnum pressed under my chin. A 357 is a man's gun. and I knew what it would do to me. My finger twitched on the trigger.

I was in bad shape, very bad shape from the steroids. It had all come down from the steroids. The crap I'd taken to get big and strong and aggressive so I could play this game that I love.

I felt as though I were sitting next to my body. Watching myself, and yet I was in my body, too. I was trying to get up that final bit of courage to end it all. Every nerve inside me was on fire. My mind was racing I couldn't get a grip on anything. The anxiety attacks I'd been having for the last five months had become so intense that I couldn't stand them any more. I'd lost control of everything - it's impossible to describe.

I could hear my teammates outside my room. they were walking back and forth, listening at the door. They talked in low voices, and they sounded very concerned. Every now and then someone would try opening the door, but I'd locked it. "Tommy," someone would say quietly. "you O.K.". "Yeah." "you sure?" "Yeah." I was definitely going crazy, but not in a wild way. I answered in very calm voice. I knew I was history - it was just a matter of time. I thought about the explosion and the bullet, about how it could take away this pain. And then I heard my father's voice. he was banging on the door. "Tommy, open up!" he said.

It was a Friday morning, the day before our game against Clemson last November, and my dad and my older brother had arrived from our home in Bethesda Md. There were ahead of schedule because I'd called my sister Dawn early that week and told her I was sick and needed help. My father flew down on Wednesday, but he really had no idea what kind of bad shape I was in . On Thursday night I went to see my girlfriend, and mentally I was already gone. I'd lost it. I started crying and I hadn't cried since way back when I was a kid. "please don't think of me as a coward if I do some thing wrong. "I sobbed to her." What are you talking about?"

I was a 23 year old football player at a big-time school. I weighed 250 pounds, a senior defensive lineman who could bench-press 500 pounds. I was ready to kill myself, but I couldn't stand the thought of being seen as a coward. That's all I cared about. Even then I was a football player, not a coward. Somehow I got back to the roost that night and fell asleep. I don't know how that happened, since I hadn't been able to sleep a night for months. But when I woke up Friday morning I felt O.K.. and the first thing I said to myself was. "I'm going to play against Clemson. I'll play, god damn it" We were 7-2 having a great season. I wanted to continue to be a part of it. But then I started feeling bad again. The waves of anxiety rushed over me. I started to tremble, and then I got my gun. And now my dad was pounding on the door. On reflex, like a pitiful son I hid the gun and let him in . He looked at me and said "Tommy, let's go home." He took me to the airport and we flew

to Washington. I tried to compose myself on the flight. It was horrible. I felt I was suffocating. My mom was waiting at the airport. "We're taking you to the hospital." she said. All I said was "I hope it isn't the psyche ward, because I'm not going to the psyche ward." Im in the waiting room at Sibley Memorial Hospital in Washington. I started to have spasms.

My body was having a reaction to Stelazine. The drug that a psychiatrist had prescribed to me a few weeks earlier when I'd first come home from South Carolina to get some professional help. That was right before our game against North Carolina State. Which we won. I played well, too. I had six tackles. But off the field I was loosing it. Suicide was always on my mind. Suicide and football. The fact that I could play at all in my condition seems unbelievable to me now. The Stelazine was supposed to reduce my anxiety attacks, but it just seem to intensify them. Finally my psychiatrist arrived at Sibley. He tried to explain what was happening to me, and I didn't care.

All of a sudden two guys in white jackets appeared. "We're just going to get you to the top floor of the hospital one of them said. "You'll be fine." We all got into the elevator, and I thought: One flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. I was in a movie. I was Jack Nicholson. I was Randle McMurpy. But nothing was funny. I couldn't believe any of this. My mind was on fire.

We got off on the seventh floor, and there in front of us was a big door with a lock on it. I freaked. I turned to my dad and screamed. "What the hell are you doing, man . I told you I'm not going to this place! I'm not crazy! "I don't belong here!"

"Do not touch." I said "I'll walk in myself." I looked straight ahead. They opened the door, and I walked in. The door closed and my parents and the rest of my life were locked out. In front of me I saw people milling around. Some of them blank and silent. Suddenly, everything caved in. This was how far I had fallen. This was how far I'd gone since I'd enrolled at South Carolina four and a half years earlier to chase the American dream.

I often sit and wonder how it all happened how I let a anabolic steroids lead me into this mess. I feel there's something in me - a flaw maybe, a personality trait- that brought me down. Oh, yeah I take responsibility for my actions. I'm head strong, and I've got a temper. I can't blame others for my mistakes, certainly not for making me take dangerous drugs. But I still think of myself as someone who started out as just a normal guy, a hard worker, a studier, a kid who loved sports. And pressures of college football, the attitudes, over-zealous coaches and our just-take -a-pill society.

As I recover from my steroid use. I find myself sort of acting as my own shrink. I wish I could have amnesia, to tell you the truth. It's very painful for me to reflect on what happened. It's like having to watch game films of yourself where you get chop-blocked over and over. But it's how you learn too.

I had a normal childhood grew up in Bethesda, the youngest of three kids in an upper-middle-class family. My dad runs his own window-replacement business, and my mom is a housewife. My dad always wanted us kids to be successful, but he didn't put pressure on us to excel in sports. All my drive was self-motivated.

I started playing soccer when I was seven, but I got bored with it and picked up tennis a few years later. I was pretty quick and I worked hard and before long I was ranked fairly high in local junior tennis. I had always wanted to play football, and in my junior year at Walt Whitman High, I decided I was going to. But my dad wasn't big on contact sports-

Mark had blown his knee out playing high school football so it was battle for me to get permission to play.

Finally my mom signed my release without telling my father, and I joined the team as a split end.

I wanted to play because all the popular guys played football. And I wanted to excel. During that first year of high school ball. I was about 6 feet, 185 pounds, and I did all right as an end. But then our noseguard got hurt, and I switched to that position. I started spending a lot of time lifting weights, and I came back for my senior season weighting about 220. My teammates were amazed at how much I'd progressed. But the reason was simple-I'd worked real hard. I was named all-area, all-county and all metro, and I knew I wanted to play big-time college ball. But I also knew I was no blue-chipper. Not at my size.

A few schools recruited me, but the coaches at South Carolina showed the most interest. They sent up the defensive line coach, Jim Washburn, and he came to see me in the hospital in the spring of "83", my senior year. I was recovering from having a collapsed rectum wall repaired, fairly serious work. I was in a lot of pain, but I remember he told me that my bench press of 350 pounds would make me one of the strongest guys on the S. C. team. And he said that after the Gamecock's annual spring game, the winners always ate lobster and the losers got steak. He was a good salesman.

All the time he was talking, he was checking me out, walking up and down the side of the bed to see how tall I was. I'd said I was 6'2", but I'm more like 6'1". he saw the tattoo of a star on my arm and the stretch marks around my pecs from lifting, and I guess he liked those things. Anyway, I wanted to play college ball so bad that I would've played anywhere at all. I'd never been to Columbia S.C., but I didn't care where the school was. When they offered me a ride I snapped it up.

So I showed up in Columbia in the fall of 1983 a naive easygoing but ambitious 19 year-old, ready to make his mark. The first thing I found out was that Washburn had fed me a line. I wasn't even close to being one of the strongest players on the team. There were a lot of monstrous guys in the weight room. And I found out later that the spring game winners didn't get lobster either. They got little steaks, and the losers ate hot dogs. Basically, what I discovered was that I couldn't trust this man, my position coach.

I also discovered that Columbia was one of the hottest places on earth. For the first few days of double sessions Washburn ran me and the two other freshman defensive linemen to death. Then one of the linemen, Ray Bingham went to offense, and the other, Ricky Daniel's, blew out his knee. That left me and Washburn, one-on-one in the heat until the upperclassmen reported a few days later.

Washburn never stopped screaming at me. I was dehydrated, my electrolytes were screwed up, and my legs cramped all night. I actually prayed for a serious injury. One day I was standing in the middle, and my eyes rolled up and I just keeled over. I'd stopped sweating, my skin was cold. I was delirious. They packed me in ice and gave me fluids, and the next day I was back at practice. All this-and I was sure they'd red shirt me anyway. I wouldn't even play for a year.

So I held a dummy for the scout team and got knocked around all fall. I didn't like it, but it was no big deal. Already guys asked me if I wanted to take steroids-they called the stuff "juice"- so I could beef up and fight back.

They were big guys, on steroids themselves, and they were trying to help me, but I always said no. I'd smoked pot a couple of times in high school, but I didn't like drugs. And I'd heard stories about the side effects of steroids, which can include cancer, liver damage, heart disease and sex problems. No way was I going to mess with something as risky as steroids. I was going to build myself up naturally.

In fact, I'd decided that I wanted to be a defensive end, and I figured I wouldn't have to build myself up at all. Over Christmas break I ran and ran and ran, and actually dropped my weight down to 205. I wanted to be lean and quick as a cat for spring practice. I get obsessed when I put my mind to something, and I was obsessed with being a fast defensive end.

That spring I got the crap knocked out of me. I got pushed all over the field. I also got a lot of muscle pulls in my legs, and Tom Gadd, the defensive coordinator at the time, reacted to that by saying. "Dianabol abuse! Dianabol abuse!" to me. He was referring to a type of steroid, but I hadn't taken any yet, so he didn't know what he was talking about. But neither did I at least as far as being a defensive lineman was concerned. It turned out that being light and quick meant nothing. I found out the hard way that you've got to be big and quick. It was bad. Real bad. I finally said to myself. I've had enough of this, and I started looking hard at those guys who were using steroids. They were going out drinking, they seemed to have normal sex lives, and they were a hell of a lot bigger than I was. Maybe it was time for me to join the crowd

At that point I was so laid-back that guys on the team were calling me the mild-mannered man from Maryland. I thought I was fairly intense, but I was nothing compared with some of the others. In fact, the aggression level and the intensity of the players were the things that shocked me the most about college ball. There were fights all the time in practice, a lot of them instigated by coaches. They would always let the fights go, too, let guys beat the hell out of each other. If you showed a violent nature, regardless of your athletic ability, it definitely swayed the coaches' opinions in your favor.

Coach Gadd was big on drills that promoted fighting. Gadd was a dictatorial type, a little man with a little mustache, who had never played major collegiate ball. We called him Little Hitler. One of his favorite drills was called Escape from Saigon. It involved three blockers, a ball carrier and a defender. The defender would get his helmet knocked off and the three guys would keep hitting him. He'd be on his knees, dazed, and they'd keep hitting him with their helmets. A lot of guys took a beating in that drill. Gadd did it to get our aggression level up. We did it because if you didn't you were a pussy, and if you were a pussy, you didn't play. You always hit the guy when he was down. Definitely. Your instinct as a human being was to have compassion. But then you just said, "Oh well, this is football." You suppressed your humanity to succeed.

In another drill one of my friends, George Hyder, was going one-on-one with a player who was very passive, and George ripped the guy's helmet off and smashed him in the face with it, chipping some of his teeth. It was uncalled for, but the coaches didn't mind they liked it.

Joe Morrison, our head coach, might have been the one guy who didn't like it. In fact, he was against fighting. But he thought we were pussies if we couldn't handle the August heat. One practice it was close to 120 degrees on the field and unbelievably humid, and guys were passing out left and right. Players were ripping off all their pads and running to get in the little bit of shade under this old dead tree. Morrison went nuts. He said we were

mentally weak for letting the heat get to us. "If I had a chain saw, I'd cut that damn tree down!" he yelled.

He would just stand there in the heat in black pants, a black vinyl wind breaker and a baseball cap, smoking cigarettes like crazy, and he'd never sweat a head. He was unbelievable. He had heart problems in the spring of '85, after my first varsity season, but he still smoked like a chimney all during practices and games. Looking back, I think his smoking habit was kind of a poor example for us, as far as drugs are concerned.

As a team, we must have run and hit in practice more than any other team in college football. Gadd was a Lombardi disciple. We had what he called Packer Days, even in the 100 degree heat, when we'd do conditioning drills that seemed like they'd never end. Guys would just drop from exhaustion. Washburn liked contact drills, including one where two linemen would grab each other's shoulder pads and butt heads until one of them dropped. Washburn would watch us and yell encouragement. He loved it.

He was a pretty big guy-6'3", 245 pounds-with red hair. He'd played offensive linemen at a small college, and he used to tell us. "I would've loved to play defense, but I wasn't good enough". So our drills were a reflection of what he couldn't do himself.

Washburn was hung up on being macho, and he'd say bizarre things to us about manhood and being tough and big and mean. "Ever think about just ripping someone's head off?" he'd ask us. And, I swear, he was serious.

The coaches definitely had the ability to draw out the viciousness in players. On defense, for instance, most of the guys were black. My sophomore year, there were only two or three white starters-and before we'd go up against the offensive line. Washburn would get the black guys together and say racial things, guys knew he was just trying to get them riled, but they also knew there were some offensive linemen who were very Southern and antiblack.

Anyway, the coaches wanted us to be as aggressive as possible, and it didn't matter where that aggression came from. That's the thing about football-once you whip up anger, you can twist it channel it, aim it, just like a water hose. Coaches got me to respond by going after my ego, my pride. If they said I was a bum, I had to prove I wasn't.

So that spring of my freshman year I decided I was going to take steroids to get big and aggressive. I finally broke down. There was no one thing, really, that led to the decision. It was a combination of things. Gadd always preached about the big, violent guys he'd seen in the Western Athletic Conference when he coached at the University of Utah. He made those guys sound like animals, killers, and it made us feel we didn't measure up.

That affected me. I took it as a challenge to my manhood, and I'm sure that's exactly how Gadd wanted me to take it. Then, too I saw how well the guys already on steroids were doing-maybe 30 of them at that time. I was young and felt nothing bad could happen to me, combined with the fact that I was part of a drug-oriented society. In addition to all of that, I felt I had the coaches encouragement. I'm told that Washburn says he opposes steroid use, but he told me, "Do what you have to do, take what you have to take.

Another thing that had gotten to me was trying to compete with black guys. I hadn't played against many blacks, and they intimidated me with their strength and speed. I'd say that all but a couple of the guys on my team who used steroids were white, and the reason they did was to keep up with other guys on steroids and with black athletes. There's no question in my mind that there's a difference in black and white body types. I don't know why, but I

could see the difference in the locker room. and I knew it when I played against blacks. so a lot of white guys take steroids to even things out.

I made my decision, and the funny thing is, I felt good about it. I was looking forward to the adventure of it and the chance to perform at my best. The thing people often don't understand is that college athletes feel tremendous pressure to succeed. some guys have parents who are pushing them real hard. Other guys are just very competitive and have great pride. Nobody wants to sit on the bench and be a failure.

After I'd made my decision, getting the stuff was no big deal. I had spent a lot of time back home at a gym where serious lifters worked out, and I think by now everybody knows that the majority of bodybuilders and power lifter use steroids. I had a friend there, and I knew he could get me what I wanted or tell me where to get it. He got me some steroids, and I told him I also wanted HGH, human growth hormone. He told me where I could get it. I knew HGH was expensive, but I'd read in a muscle magazine that it was safer than steroids, and I wanted to believe that. I also knew that HGH could cause agromeglia. The side effects are enlargement of the brow, hands and feet that's sometimes called "Frankenstein's syndrome"- but that you'd have to take megadoses for it to happen. some body builders take \$10,000 worth of HGH per cycle-that's a body building term for series of drugs in varying doses-but I only got \$800 worth, enough for 10 injections over eight weeks. Tunnel vision had set in. My attitude was: Just give me what it takes to get big. Still, I was pretty scared because I'd heard all the horror stories about the drugs. My supplier told me that if I didn't get too Crazy with this stuff, If I didn't abuse it, I'd be okay. Then we went down into his basement at home, and he gave me my first injection, in the top of my butt. I went right to the weight room and had a great workout. I was pumped but , of course it was all psychological.

I had a lot of injections that summer, and after a while the spots I had to hit on my rear end got so callused from shots that at times I couldn't even get a needle in. You don't inject steroids into a vein. It's not like heroin or something. You shoot it deep into a muscle and it gradually disperses through the body from there . It's very hard to shoot yourself up in the butt, and sometimes when I did, I hit spots that hurt so bad I could barely sit down the next day. Other times I'd shoot myself in the quad, the front of my thigh. It's dangerous because you have to go in an inch or so, and you can cause nerve damage if you're not careful. But if nobody's around to inject you, you have to do it.

You can take most steroids in pill form, too: but you have to take them every day, and certain pills can be harder on the liver. With shots you don't need to do it as often-12 times a month, in my case - and the drug stays in your system longer. At first I was very worried about needles, but after a while my concern went away-mainly because my body was changing so fast.

People who say steroids don't work don't know what there're talking about. You've got to experience it to know what I mean. Your muscles swell: they retain water and they just grow. You can work out much harder than before, and your muscles don't get as sore. You're more motivated in the weight room and you've got more energy because of the psychological effects of the drug.

I went from 210 pounds to a lean 235 in eight weeks. My bench press went from the upper 300's to 420, and my squat from 400 to 520. I watched my diet and I was really cut-big arms, chest and legs, great definition. I went back to Columbia in the summer of 84, before my first varsity season, for the Iron Cocks meet, a lifting competition for football players.

A bunch of guys who were already on steroids saw me and said, "Aha, so you bent to the pressure."

I SAID, "Yeah, I've begun the chemical warfare." and we laughed. Washburn saw me and said, "You look great!" He must have known I was using juice.

Besides the muscle growth, there were other things happening to me. I got real bad acne on my back, my hair started to come out. I was having trouble sleeping, and my testicles began to shrink- all the side effects you hear about. But my mind was set. I didn't care about that other stuff.

In fact my sex drive during the cycles was phenomenal, especially when I was charged up from all the testosterone I was taking. I also had this strange, edgy feeling-I could drink all night, sleep two hours and go work out. In certain ways I was becoming like an animal. And I was developing an aggressiveness that was scary. That summer I was working as a bouncer at this bar in D.C. and one night a Marine bumped into a girl I was dancing with. Words were exchanged, then I followed him to where he was sitting and said. "Didn't appreciate that" he put his beer down and came up hard under my chin with his hands, and a slice of my tongue about an inch went flying out of my mouth. I didn't even notice it. I saw red. I felt an aggression I'd never felt before. I hit him so hard that he went right to the floor. He was semiconscious, and I had him in a headlock and started hitting him in the ribs and kneeling him in the back. I wanted to hurt him real bad. I could literally feel the hair standing up on the back of my neck, like I was a wolf or something. If I hadn't been on steroids. I would've walked away in the first place. But I had that cocky attitude. I wanted to try out my new size. I was beginning to feel like a killer. It was like football: a test of manhood between two people - you or me, all the way.

Back at school that fall, when I took the football physical, a doctor said "Have you ever had high blood pressure and a heart murmur?" I said no. He said. "Well, you do now." I brushed it off. No big deal. I never heard a word about it from the coaches. Nobody seemed to care. I certainly didn't. A lot of guys were using more steroids than I was, and they were fine. Besides. I was in great shape. I ran the mile in 5:45, faster than a lot of linebackers.

I brought a bag full of stuff I'd gotten from my connection to school-bottles of Deca-Durabolin, 100 syringes, some vials of vitamin b-12 and started selling it to teammates. We thought the B-12 would help us get through two-a-days. We wanted it for the energy, the placebo effect, whatever. Our team doctor, Paul Akers, injected B-12 into anybody who wanted it before games. And our orthopedic surgeon, Robert Peele, would shoot up guys who had injured ankles or whatever with Xylocaine, a local anesthetic. So what we were doing wasn't much different from what the doctors were doing; it was all done to enhance our performance.

Back in the spring I'd used some other drugs, too. I snorted cocaine with a couple of other players one night, but it was a bad experience for me. Coke was sort of circulating through the team then. I'd say about a third of the players had used it occasionally. Before games, and a few drank before we played. That's just how it was.

Then one night some of the guys on the team took microdots of LSD. That was interesting but intense. I don't know how anybody could take it very often. But some of my teammates had done it a lot. My buddy George Hyder said he had taken acid about 300 times. He could ingest anything. He was a very hyper person, and other guys on the team were, too. The word was that one of them got into a fit on a recruiting trip and bit somebody's ear off.

These guys were my friends, and they were remarkably aggressive. I admired them because they had a mean streak I didn't have. They got on steroids about the same time I did, which heightened their aggression. One of my teammates hit a guy in a bar one time, and after the guy fell to the floor with his jaw collapsed and some teeth knocked out, the player kicked him in the head. Blood was everywhere. I'd say steroids had something to do with it.

I really feel that under certain conditions some of the guys who were on steroids would have been perfectly willing to beat someone to death. One time during the middle of a cycle George and another guy punched out the windshield of George's car, an old Toyota Tercel, and head-butted the windshields of some others. Then they came and got me and said, "Let's go kill somebody." I knew this was trouble, but I went anyway, for the hell of it. We drove for a while in George's Toyota, then they got out and started head-butting cars, breaking some more windshields. If anybody looked at them funny, they'd intimidate the guy until he ran away.

During two-a-days in August. I started a new cycle, taking Deca-Durabolin to help keep pumped up. The coaches liked my new size and aggressiveness, and they moved me up to second-string defensive end, where I knew I'd play a lot. This was in 1984, and we didn't have to take drug tests yet, so there was nothing to worry about. Even after the NCAA instituted tests in '86, they were a sham. A lot of guys would pour salt or vinegar into the cup, which was supposed to mask any traces of drugs. Even when guys tested positive, nothing happened to them.

The trouble for some of us was that we couldn't sleep - that's one of the things steroids did to me so we drank a lot a night because there wasn't anything better to do. I could drink a dozen beers and maybe eight or nine shots of vodka or bourbon in a few hours, easy. And because of the steroids and the booze, I'd get into fights.

Five nights before our first game of the season, against The Citade, I was in a bar, and I got into an argument with this guy. I told him if he wanted to fight, to come out into the alley, which he did, and when he pulled his arm from behind his back, he was holding a 12 inch deer knife. He swung at me and I blocked it. Then he swung lower, and I couldn't tell if he got me or not. Just then one of my teammates, Woody Myers, came into the alley, and the guy tried to stab him. Woody and I jumped behind a car, but when I looked over my shoulder, I saw that the whole back of my shirt was soaked with blood. I put my finger in a hole under my right arm. The guy ran away and, before too long, the paramedics came. They were shocked at how high my blood pressure was, particularly after I'd lost so much blood. They asked if I was on steroids, and I said yes. At the hospital I told the doctor to stitch me up tight because I had a game that week.

The coaches were very upset when they found out what had happened, but they told me not to discuss it with anybody, "it's not what we want to talk to the press about," Morrison said. So nobody found out, and I played against The Citadel, my first college game, with a stab wound under my pads.

After a few games our nosetackle got hurt, and I moved from defensive end to nose and played a lot. I did pretty well, but I was still going against guys who weighted 280 or 290 pounds. I ordered some rhesus monkey hormones from back home-two bottles, 20 injections, for \$800-and it came Federal Express. It was supposed to be great stuff, able to build muscle without a lot of the water retention steroids cause. but I didn't get any size off of it, so I think it was fake.

I was getting steroids for a lot of guys now through my source. he had a close friend who was a doctor, and he could get anything we wanted. I'd sell the stuff, but I didn't make a profit from it. I knew it was wrong, but I rationalized that they wanted the steroids and I could get high quality juice instead of the junk some guys were getting from Mexico and other places, stuff with no labels or anything on it.

By my junior year I'd say about 50 guys out of the 100 on the team were using steroids- almost all the offensive linemen and a lot of other players. And I'm convinced that we weren't much different from other major college teams. Believe me, players can tell. I'd say the majority of recent All-American offensive linemen have used steroids. You can tell what steroid users look like-pink and puffy skin, swollen faces and necks, but very tight skin wherever there's muscle. I'd play against these guys and they would be huffing and puffing, and we'd look at each other and one of us would say, "How's that blood pressure?" and there's eye contact that says . "Yeah, I know, It's rough out here playing on drugs." Before the North Carolina State game in "84", I tore ligaments in my right big toe in a pileup in practice. We were undefeated at the time, 7-0 and Washburn said he needed me. I couldn't push off on the foot and it hurt tremendously, but I wanted to play. So the day of the game I went into the back room with Dr. Peele and Morrison. Morrison told somebody to lock the door because he didn't want the referees walking in on this. Washburn held my hand while Dr. Peele injected my toe joint with Xylocaine. When he was done I couldn't feel my foot at all. It wasn't till the painkiller wore off during the bus ride home that I was in agony. I liked being on the edge: most athletes do. We're thrill seekers. Athletics itself is a high. Football players will do wild things because it keeps them on the edge. At South Carolina, when we had time off, some of us would take our guns and go out and shoot-at anything-to keep from getting bored. Taking steroids was just another way of living on the edge. And it became a big social thing. Seven or eight of us heavy users would get in a dorm room together and start shooting each other up. Guys would show up with their bottles, and there'd be a lot of chatter: I'll shoot you, you shoot me. We all enjoyed it. I had boxes of syringes that I got from certain pharmacies in Columbia for 20 bucks for 100. We'd say it was for B-12 shots, but those needles are shorter and you need an inch or so to do steroids intramuscularly. They would give us the longer needles as long as we signed "B-12" in the book.

We never used the same needle twice, I can tell you that. We tried to be careful how we injected each other, too, but sometimes you'd hit the sciatic nerve or something, and the guy's legs would buckle. I mean, none of us were doctors or anything. But we were needle-happy. We would have injected ourselves with anything, if we thought it would make us big.

A lot of times, if we were really getting bigger, we'd increase our dosage to gain bulk even faster-just fill the syringe to the end. We'd occasionally read the paperwork that came with the bottles, trying to figure out what dosage should be for someone with anemia or a guy whose body can't produce enough testosterone, which is what the stuff is usually used for. Then we'd take 2, 3, 4, 10, 20 times that amount. Sometimes we'd take our needles and pull half a cc from one bottle and half from another, just mix them up. The more the better.

By the fall of "87", my senior season, there was one guy who was taking so many tabs of a steroid called Anadrol that he developed liver problems. At one point during the summer of 85 there were guys so heavily on steroids that they couldn't make it once around the track without getting back cramps from being so bloated. This alarmed Keith Kephart, out

strength coach, so he took all the linemen in a room and said. "I want to know who's on Anadrol. I'm hearing horror stories. This is the strongest stuff around. It can be lethal. Now who's using."

A lot of guys raised their hands, but I didn't because I was on other steroids. Kephart wanted guys to cut back on their intake. I don't remember him telling us to stop, but he did say, "If you want counseling, come to me." I really think he cared, but he didn't think he could change us.

It was common knowledge that we were using the stuff. I had bottles of juice all over the place. We threw the used syringes into the waste cans in our rooms. I mean, we even had syringes sticking in the walls. Coaches would walk in and see the stuff, but nobody gave a damn. One of the coaches came in for a room check once, saw a vial with a skull and crossbones on the label and said, "I used to use Dianabol myself, What's this stuff?" We laughed and said, "It's a great new product from Germany. Look at the instructions. There're in German." He just laughed.

Players would stop by my room, as if it were a store, and ask if they could get some steroids. One time, even Todd Ellis, our quarterback, asked George Hyder about steroids. He wondered how much they cost, what the effects were and how long it would take to get them. I wondered what steroids could do for a quarterback. Build up arm strength, I guessed. Anyway, George told Todd he didn't have any. I didn't offer any myself, and I had a sort of no-big-deal attitude about it all.

The spring of 84, I bulked up some more, and people were in awe of my strength. I was benching close to 500 pounds, squatting more than 600. I could do 30 one-armed presses with a 100-pound dumbbell. I weighed 260, and I looked like a steroid user. I took all kinds of stuff, including Equipoise, a horse steroid designed to make thoroughbreds leaner and more muscular. It was tough on me-I got colitis and was bleeding rectally-so I switched to other stuff. Guys started calling me Quasibloato and the Experiment, because they thought I'd take anything.

My aggression level was so high that I got into an argument with the team trainer at one point during spring practice and went to my locker, put my hand through the mental mesh and ripped the door off its hinges. Then I went back to the Roost and took a baseball bat and demolished my refrigerator, smashed it to pieces and then ripped the phone off the wall. My nerves were on edge like they'd never been before. At practice one day I got into a fight with Shed Diggs, a linebacker, because he cut in front of me in line for a drill. I threw him down pulled his helmet up far enough so I could get my fist in there and smashed him in the eye. As he got up, bleeding and humiliated, I felt sympathy for him. But then the steroids kicked in and I said to myself, "All right! You're a tough guy!"

I went home for spring break, and my mom took one look at me and said, "My God! What have you done to yourself?" I tried to deny everything, but my dad looked in my bag and found two vials of testosterone. He got very upset. He called our family doctor and had him try to convince me to get off steroids. My dad tried to talk me into quitting football and told me that he'd pay for my schooling. My sister called me constantly, trying to get me off the stuff. But I wouldn't listen. "I'm sorry," I said to my parents, "but it's a decision I've made, and I'll try not to abuse the steroids."

I don't know if you can call steroids addictive, but there's a vicious cycle involved with using them. The growth of the muscles enhances the aggression and other psychological changes caused by the drug, and those changes, in turn, make you want to get bigger and

take more steroids. Plus, there is a terrible let down when you come off them. I would be very high and then there'd be this extreme depression. And after each cycle, the come down itself would get worse, plus, I'd get sick. I got walking pneumonia, bronchitis, exhaustion to the point where I had to sleep 12 to 14 hours at a time. Steroids were definitely wrecking my body.

I was also going through a personality change. I was becoming a hard-ass, one of the meanest guys on the team. It was a dramatic change, and the coaches loved it. So did I, in a way, because being passive hadn't done anything for me. But I also knew my behavior was becoming erratic, and that frightened me. Images of violence often filled my mind. I'd drive along and find myself thinking about sick things like crushing people to death, tearing off their limbs. I'd be grinding my teeth and gripping the wheel so hard that my arms would hurt.

Because of the tension at my house, I started spending a lot of time at my supplier's place in the summer of 85. Hyder and Myers came up from school, and we sat around injecting ourselves with all kinds of steroids, what ever was there.

One night we all injected each other, then went out drinking and got crazy. George had a pistol and we picked up and drove everybody out into the country in George's pickup. As we went past signs, those guys would blast away at them. They blew out the spotlight and security camera in front of an estate, and then shot the windows out of a bus parked in front of a church. One of the bullets went through the bus and killed a cow in the nearby pasture, and the cow slumped over the fence and rolled into the road. Blood was dripping from its head. I freaked, but the other guys were laughing. One of them wanted to shoot the cow again. Right then a cop car started chasing us, but we drove down some paths in the woods and lost the cop.

This hadn't been my way, but it had become my way. Steroids ruled my life.

That fall, my second varsity season, I played pretty well, but we finished with a 5-6 record. The high point for me came when we played Michigan, A team, I'd dreamed about playing against since I was a little kid. Ohio State-Michigan, that was what college football was all about. And if I played for South Carolina against Michigan-well, that was pretty damn close.

To get really fired up, I started taking a steroid called halotestin a couple of weeks before the game. Its only effect, as far as I could tell, was that it enhanced aggression. It should have been called holocaust, judging by what it did to me. My aggressiveness was out of control. I was cheap shooting people in practice, clothes lining them, ripping scout team quarterbacks helmets off in non contact drills. The coaches liked my enthusiasm, but they had to sit me down a few times for being a little too wild, I played great against Michigan, even though we got our butts kicked. Against Georgia the next week, we lost again 13-6, but I was named defensive player of the game.

I started getting sick toward the end of the season, though. During the game against East Carolina in late October, I had bad chest pains, numbness in my arm and chills, and I had to come out in the second half. I thought I was dying. They cut off my jersey and took me to the hospital in an ambulance. The doctor said my cholesterol level and blood pressure were off the chart, probably because of the steroids. The pain was from angina, a pre-heart attack condition. Still, the coaches didn't seem to notice. My dad told Washburn he wanted me tested weekly for steroid use, but nothing came of it. And me-all I could think of was

football. I was obsessed. WE players even had a motto: "Bury me massive, or don't bury me at all."

I stopped taking steroids for a while because I'd been so sick, and after the season I had knee surgery. Then, over spring break, I went down to Fort Lauderdale. I was back on steroids and was very big and cocky, and after a few drinks one night, I got into a hassle with two cops in front of a bar. They told me to move, and I told them that if it wasn't for their guns and badges, I'd beat their asses. The next thing I knew, they'd clubbed me across the neck and legs, beat me up pretty good, and taken me to the station. When I went in front of the judge the next day, though, he just looked at me and said, "Trying to be a Fighting Gamecock, huh?" Then he let me go.

Not long after that I had a pain in my side, which I thought was from the beating. But when I went to a doctor I found out I had a swollen liver from the steroids. About his time Dr. Akers asked me if I was on steroids. I told him I was but asked him not to tell anybody. He turned right around and told Morrison, who called me in to find out who else was taking them. I told him I wouldn't talk about anybody else. Morrison looked at me and said, "Don't do it anymore." That was it. He's very quiet, not real communicative. He played for the New York Giants for 14 years, and he's very old school and tough: YOUR hurt? Put a little dirt on it. So the whole thing just sort of went away.

Just the same, I vowed to turn over a new leaf. I was going to watch what I ate and if I used drugs at all, it would be very little. I was getting sick a lot, and even though I'd been doing O.K. academically, I was having a hard time concentrating on school. I'd either be up all night or I'd be listless and sleep a lot. Also, the way my sex drive came and went was bizarre. And when I got dunk-oh brother! One night in my dorm room, I pulled a shotgun on the pizza delivery boy, threw him down and put the gun in his face. It was loaded and I could have blown the kid all over the floor, but I was just fooling around. It was the kind of thing I thought was funny.

In 1986, my third varsity season, we lost some close games and finished a miserable 3-2-6. I moved around from nose to tackle and even played a little linebacker. After the season, though, I developed a tumor on my chest and it grew to the size of a handball. I was in bed coughing up mucus, and I was very depressed and fighting bouts of severe anxiety. Right before spring ball, I started another steroid cycle and, boom!, my blood pressure shot right up. I was sweating and had hot flashes. I knew my body was rejecting the drugs so I stopped taking them.

I went to Dr. Akers and showed him the tumor, and he said, "Don't worry about it, it'll go away." But I didn't trust him, so I went to another doctor, and he said I needed surgery right away. I also had a tumor on my right hand that he said needed to come out. The tumors he said, were caused by steroids, but the athletic department said they weren't football-related injuries, so the school wouldn't pay the medical bills. My dad's insurance paid for the surgery, which was performed at Baptist Medical Center in Columbia in February of '87. As I lay in bed recovering, I began to wonder what this was all about. I was very depressed and I needed time for rehab, but spring drills would begin soon. Since the school hadn't paid for the surgery, it was as if it hadn't happened. You're fine, get your ass out there, boy -that was their attitude.

I said, "Screw it, screw all of you," and I quit the team and moved out of the Roost. I was sick, but I still had the desire to play, to excel. I couldn't kill that. I was reading a lot of philosophy, and I started thinking that this mindless aggression and physical self-

destruction wasn't what life was all about. But I couldn't quit football before my senior season-I just couldn't come to terms with that. so I write a letter of apology to Morrison, and he took me back. It was a phony apology, but I would have done whatever was necessary to get back on the team. My sense of self-worth was tied up in the game. About this time I was starting to battle anxiety attacks that I was sure were caused by the steroids. I can't really describe an attack, except to say that it's like your mind is a car engine stuck in neutral with the gas pedal to the floor, just screaming. There is terror mixed in, and you think that you're going to explode. The anxiety attacks were the worst mental pain I'd ever experienced.

By the end of the summer of '87, though, I was getting a handle on things, feeling better, working out a lot, doing it the natural way. I had vowed never to touch steroids again, but once again, I did. I couldn't stop. I did a shot of Parabolin, yet another steroid. I blew up to 270. I couldn't bench much because of a shoulder injury, but I could squat 650 pounds. I also started to get that edgy feeling again. My mind started racin, and I felt out of control. The night before two-a-days began, I went out drinking with the other players, and we got crazy, head-butting each other, getting ready.

The next morning I had an anxiety attack, a big one. I sat in my room for hours, just trying to hold on to reality. I had another attack a few days later. I didn't think anybody could help me. I had tried to explain the feeling to my parents, but they couldn't understand. They didn't think I was doing steroids any more, and so they tried to reassure me. "Don't worry, you're just tired and worn out," they said.

But the attacks got worse and worse. Somehow, I was still a starter. I spent a lot of time in my room because I was so afraid, so paranoid. I'd wake up in the morning and everything was gray-I swear to God-everything had lost its colors. It was the worst thing you can imagine. There was a roaring in my ears. and I saw trails behind moving objects. I couldn't read, because I couldn't concentrate. One minute I would think the mental illness was over with, and the next minute it would come racing back. Thoughts of suicide came into my mind. Every day was torture, and I started saying, "Please , God, let me make it through one more practice," I had to make it through practice." so I could play in the games. That was all that mattered. I didn't care about my health, just football. I wasn't going to quit, by God, and I didn't want anyone to take my position. I didn't care if I died, as long as I completed the season, as long as I finished like a man.