

ver his toughest foe yet

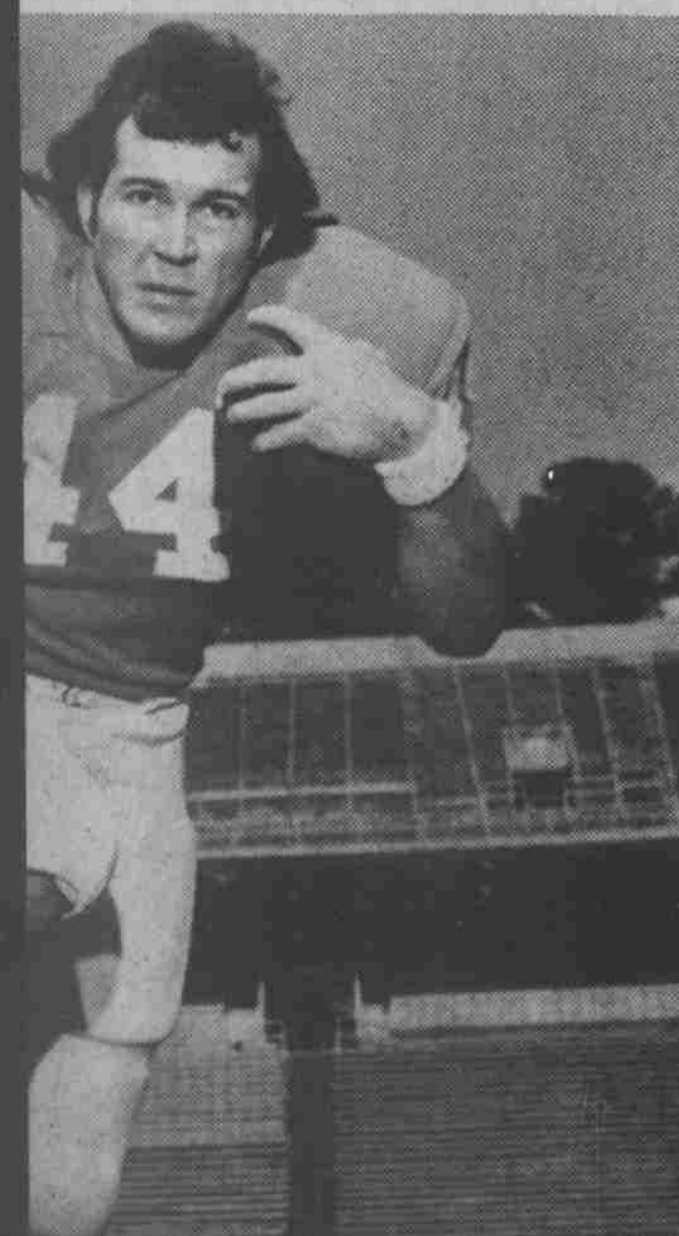
In Charlotte, Streater underwent two basic types of therapy: occupational, in which he worked on his ability in handling basic chores of day-to-day life, and physical, in which he worked to improve his mobility. As part of his occupational therapy this day, he worked with Brinker on improving his coordination by throwing pingpong balls with velcro wrapped around them onto a target board about 10 feet away.

Streater still writes with his right hand, but now uses his left hand for almost everything else. After a few left-handed tosses, a ball hits in the bull's eye but drops off.

"Aw, what's the deal?" he said. Again he hit the center and again it fell off. "Look at that, that was on the money."

Brinker adjusts the board and Streater, who once pitched for UNC, announces with a laugh that he will now throw his curve. One of the balls bounces off the wall and back to Streater, who neatly catches it. "Quick hands — still," he said. Soon he switches to his right hand, and again, the board proves to be no challenge.

Next the game switches to tic-tac-toe. Each wooden X and O has velcro on the bottom, causing each figure to stick to the playing board. After each game he picks up all the characters, seeking to improve the strength in his hands. Streater beats his visitor three games in a row before playing to a draw. Whether battling paralysis, wide receivers or tic-tac-toe opponents,



running star Mike Voight

DTH/Scott Sharpe

Streater does not like to lose.

After some more occupational therapy comes the day's exhausting work. Moving upstairs to a small gym, Streater begins his afternoon session of physical therapy.

After slowly working his way out of his chair and onto the floor, he lifts himself off of the floor and into his wheelchair, a tremendous feat of strength that awes Brinker.

physical handicap were a mental one, too. Streater, though, is the same man as before the accident. A bit more touched by the fortunes and misfortunes life has brought him, a bit wiser, but the same person nonetheless.

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"It hasn't changed me," he said, his happy face taking on a serious look. "I've never changed, person-wise. There's a lot of things I sit around and think about... I try to put it (the accident) out of mind unless somebody asks me about it. But it hasn't changed me any. I'm still the same Steve."

"That's incredibly difficult," she said. "It takes incredible strength."

Breathing heavily, he repeats the procedure. After some more exercises, he wheels himself—he always wheels himself—out of the gym and outside, where a car awaits him. He said he will be driving a specially equipped car by the time he returns to Chapel Hill, but right now he must practice getting into the car, folding the chair up and placing it in the back seat.

It proved to be the most difficult task of the day. He transferred himself into the car easily enough, but getting the chair into the back seat of the car was a different story. Using a cord attached to the chair, he tried to pull the folded chair into the car. For 15 minutes, he struggled with the chair. After still another attempt, the chair tipped over and fell to the pavement.

Streater, clearly discouraged, looked down for a second. But just a second. Five minutes later, the chair was in the back seat of the car.

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Streater has reached a point where he is, for almost all purposes, independent. Because of his wheelchair, there will be those who will think otherwise, or will simply want to help. He prefers that people ask before aiding him, because he knows he must perform many tasks over and over again before he will have mastered them.

"It's going to be easy for people to pamper him, but he doesn't need that," Brinker said. "It's the hardest discipline to sit on your hands and not help out. But if that person doesn't practice, they're never going to master it."

There is also a tendency among many to treat people in a wheelchair differently, as if their

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So now it is back to Chapel Hill, where Streater will continue to rehabilitate and start a new life. He knows being in the town that holds so many fond memories will sometimes hurt. Soon he will see his first UNC football game from a wheelchair.

"Deep down inside, it'll hurt me to see them playing," he said. "That was my future, my goal. It'll be a hard thing to do."

Now the goal has changed. "My goal," he said, "is to walk."

He knows his chances. One in a million. The odds are so stacked against Streater walking again that it is difficult to imagine the immensity. Yet he continues to believe. "For his own sanity, he's got to believe it," Brinker said. If he didn't, it would give him less drive, less purpose, and most of all, it just wouldn't be Steve Streater.

He told a story of talking to a friend in the hospital about their current situations and what the future holds. "The guy said, 'It's just the bend in the road now, it will all straighten out in time.'"

He shifted his body in his wheelchair, looked down for a second, and then looked back up.

"No, I'm not playing ball now, but I think the accident was for the best," he said. "I'm just taking a detour now. I've got a lot ahead of me."

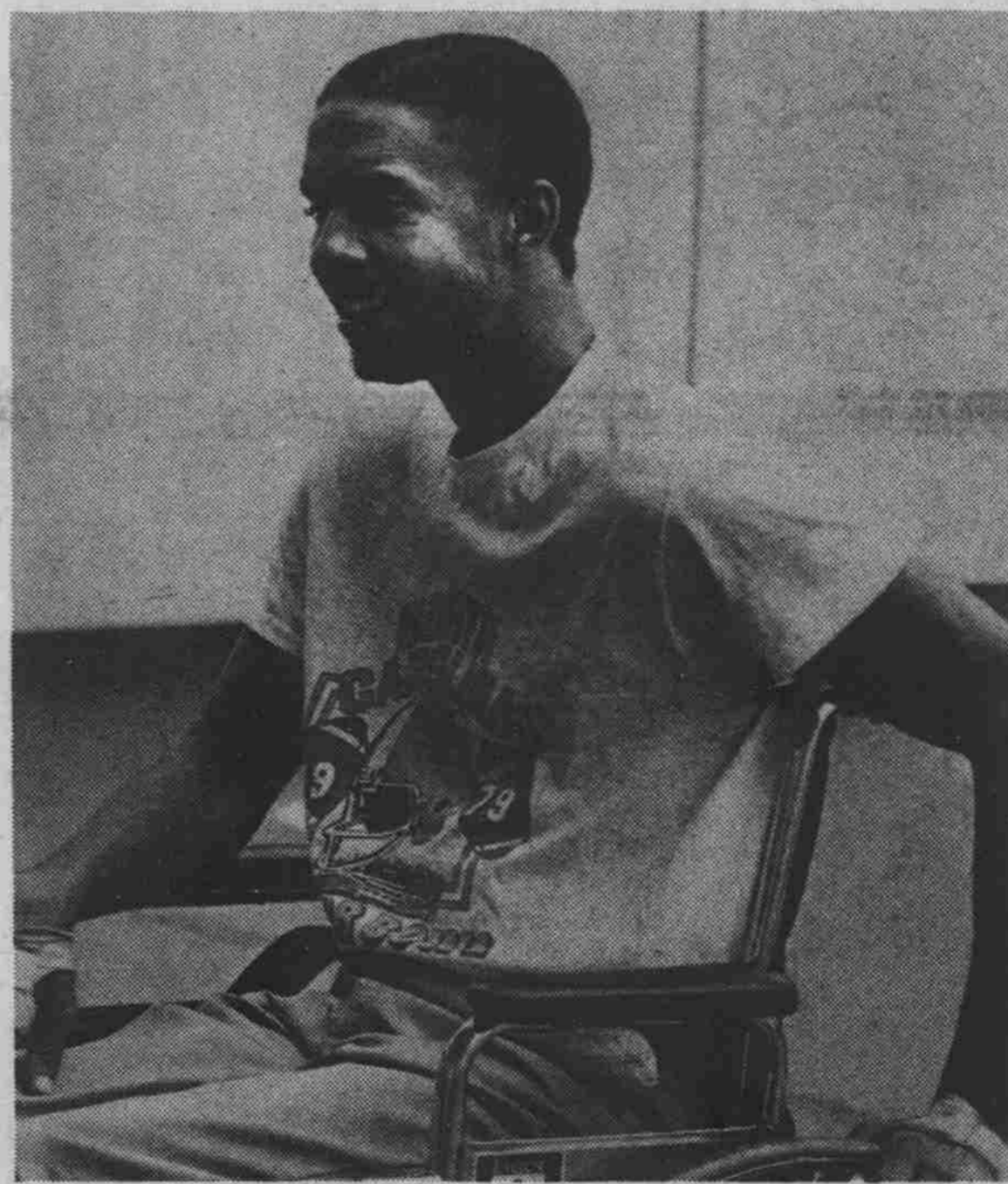
Streater (right), here wearing a 1979 UNC Gator Bowl T-shirt, likes to talk about football but he knows it will be tough to watch his first Carolina game from a wheelchair.

Wilson (left) sits on Streater's lap and gives him comfort and cheer on his long road back.



Streater enjoys a laugh with UNC junior Andree Wilson of Charlotte ... he says marriage is on his list of goals

DTH/Scott Sharpe



DTH/Scott Sharpe

Officials want to curb accidents

Staff and Wire Reports

UNC athletic officials are trying to help athletes avoid traffic accidents such as the ones this summer that left football player Steve Streater and baseball player Joe Reto paralyzed.

UNC officials and an expert from the state's Highway Safety Research Center are working on a presentation to be made to Tar Heel athletes this fall with emphasis on highway safety and the use of seat belts.

In addition to helping athletes avoid injury in traffic accidents, the group may use the program to enlist assistance of athletes in getting a safety message across to young drivers.

Associate Athletic Director John Lotz said that after Streater was injured in a traffic accident last May, he asked officials at the research center to help devise a program that would impress upon athletes the need for auto safety.

Lotz said his department cannot restrict the activities of its athletes, but he said it can help them.

"The responsibility for your athletes is such that you really can't do a lot about them off-campus," Lotz said. "But you can become concerned and try to do what you can to help."

Lotz said his idea was based on reports from the scene of the two accidents plus the accident of basketball player Jimmy Black last summer.

"Streater, Black, Reto — none of them had seat belts on. The seat belt is a major factor in accidents today," Lotz said.

He said he is aware that many others receive disabling injuries in traffic accidents. But Lotz said the accidents to

Streater and Reto were magnified mainly because they are athletes.

Dr. B.J. Campbell, director of the Highway Safety Research Center, will work with Lotz in planning and implementing the program. Campbell said the presentation will include a brief talk and a short film showing the effects of automobile crashes when seat belts are not used.

"It's just an unbearable tragedy to see this kind of thing happen," Campbell said. "My personal hope is that we can get some kind of community program organized."

Both Campbell and Lotz suggested that athletes may do a series of television commercials to stress the need to use seat belts, especially to younger drivers.

Streater and Reto were the fifth and sixth Tar Heel athletes within the past six years to be either injured or killed in an automobile accident. In the 1940s star running back Cotton Southerland was killed in an auto accident, the earliest such occurrence on record.

Football lineman David Barrett was paralyzed from the waist down in a 1975 traffic accident in West Virginia.

Another Tar Heel football player, wingback Jimmy Jerome, was killed in late 1975 in a California traffic accident on his way to visit former teammate Sammy Johnson, then of the San Francisco 49ers.

Tailback Mike Voight had graduated from UNC when he was seriously injured in a January 1977 accident while on his way to Norfolk, Va. Voight's car hit a slick spot, crossed a median and collided with a truck. Although he recovered after four months in a hospital, Voight never returned to the Houston Oilers of the National Football League.



Jimmy Jerome led Tar Heel receivers for three years in early 1970s ... died in California car crash in 1975

DTH file photo