

## SPORTS

### Football: Biggest loser

Guyer guard gains by dropping weight

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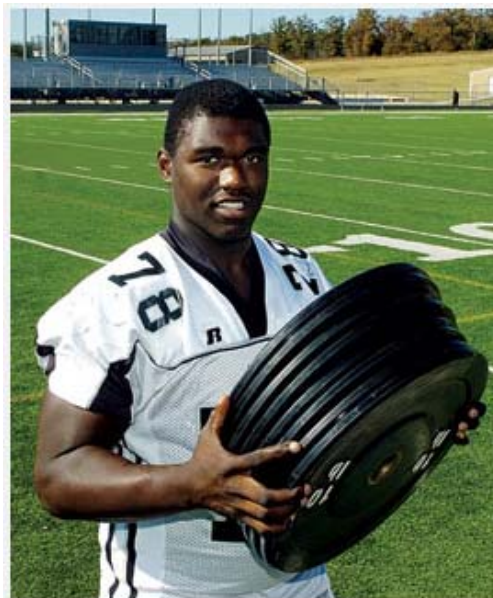
When Greg Hall showed up at the Guyer field house on the first day of football practice in August, assistant coach Jeffrey Barnett could immediately see the effects of Hall's offseason work — by jumping on him.

Hall is a hulk of a young man at 6-3 and 280 pounds, and he wears a size-18 shoe. So imagine him 78 pounds heavier, which he was at back in May.

So on the day the Wildcats' staff issued pads to its players, the enthusiastic guards and centers coach was so happy he jumped on Hall's back and felt a little stumble.

"He said he was a little bit startled," Barnett said. "But I could actually feel how he'd changed, not just see it."

Hall, a senior right guard, had just returned from two months at Wellspring Texas, a health camp in San Marcos that teaches kids aged 11-18 how to eat healthy and sustain a healthy lifestyle.



DRC/A Key

Guyer offensive lineman Greg Hall holds 80 pounds worth of weights, representing the amount of weight he lost at a health camp this summer.

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Hall started for the Wildcats during his sophomore season at 330 pounds before ballooning up to 358 pounds during his junior season and being demoted to junior varsity.

That's when Hall knew he needed to make a change, not just for football purposes but for his health.

Barnett said he had a telephone conversation with Hall's mother last spring after she was considering taking him out of football.

"I started worrying about what's gonna happen to Greg Hall as an adult," Barnett said. "Diabetes was my first thought, and the second, was he gonna become depressed and what's his mental status going to be? With all that weight it was hard for him to get excited and be enthused. I was worried about his heart and diabetes and obesity with depression and everything that goes with that."

Throughout his high school career, Hall's coaches had told him if he could drop just 30 pounds, he'd be in line for a college scholarship because of his immense strength and intelligence.

So when his mother found the information on Wellspring and read that the average weight loss during a four-week session is 30 pounds, it seemed like a perfect idea.

Hall didn't stop at 30. After dropping 40 pounds in the first four weeks, he called Barnett and asked if he could stay for another session. After Barnett and Guyer head coach John Walsh talked about the pros and cons, they decided it would be best for Hall and the team if he could drop even more weight.

Hall's days were comprised of a 6:30 a.m. wakeup call and an immediate 3-mile walk every morning. That was followed by a breakfast and then recreational activity such as swimming, Nordic walking, football, soccer or basketball.

For lunch and dinner, he was allowed to eat a small portion of buffalo or chicken and as much salad and fruit as he wanted, but the campers were held to 2,000 calories a day.

"It was hard," Hall said. "Everyone was hungry all the time. I got used to it after a while, though."

Hall's neighbor on the offensive line, right tackle Jesse Coffey, recalled when he lost a lot of weight his freshman year and bulked up after trimming a lot of fat, and the difficult times that can come with such a transformation.

"That takes a lot of determination," said Coffey, who is orally committed to Nebraska and is the class valedictorian. "I remember when I was losing weight when I was a freshman. It sucks. It sucks really bad. It takes a lot of character to be able to do that."

"Just because you go to one of those camps doesn't mean you're gonna lose the weight. It takes some work to do it. It was awesome. We were all wanting him to lose it because that's the only thing that's been holding him back."

Coffey, who stands 6-8 and weighs 290 pounds, said he and other teammates would often joke around with Hall before he went to the camp, but not in a malicious way. Now they couldn't be prouder of him.

"When we'd be going up to the line in practice, I'd leave about an 8-foot space for him and just stuff like that. Now he's made it hard on me," Coffey said with a chuckle. "Now I'm the heaviest lineman, which is different than what I'm used to."

When Walsh saw Hall for the first time after his return home this summer, he said there was an emotional moment for both he and his soon-to-be starting guard.

"When he came back, no one had seen him, so I drove to Sonic and got me a sweet tea and stopped by his house to check him out, and he was nearly a different human being," Walsh said. "He looked like a very fit offensive lineman."

"I'll never forget. He came out of the door and I had a big smile on my face and he had a big smile on his face because he knew what he'd done and how much we'd like it. We gave each other a big hug, and I was glad he was back and glad he was different."

Hall has been a big part of the Wildcats' success on the ground this season, as they've averaged 290 rushing yards per game with their multi-faceted rushing attack. While Coffey and left tackle Kyle Clark, who committed to Texas Tech in the spring, have gotten a lot of the attention on the line, Hall has begun to make a name for himself as an athletic guard who loves to get downfield.

"I don't see any difference [between Hall and the tackles]," Walsh said. "One might say Greg's got more to prove, but with all the losing that's taken place in the first two years of these guys' career, they've all got something to prove. It's got nothing to do with a scholarship. It's just their pride."

"I haven't seen much difference. I think Greg realized that after about [our third game] that he was as good as them and he's gonna get where they're going. I assured him of that. It's a no-brainer. If those guys are college football players, so is this guy."

There were some mixed feelings about whether the massive weight loss could affect Hall's strength, as he was always one of the strongest players on the team.

"There was a lot of concern because we didn't lift weights there," Hall said. "It was more aerobic and cardio stuff. I was afraid, but it didn't take me long to get it back. I wasn't sure how it was gonna be, but I was ready to come back."

Walsh said he was also curious as to how Hall would handle being so much lighter, but others said there was never a concern.

"He never really worked out all that much when he was big, and he was putting up more numbers than we were, easily," Coffey said. "He came back and he's still stronger than us. He has the strongest squat on the team."

What did change was Hall's mobility. He'd always been an athletic kid with some of the best hands on the team and could throw a football like a quarterback, not to mention his skills on the basketball court.

But after shedding the weight, Hall now relishes reverses and screen passes when his objective is to get downfield and beat Guyer's left guard, Andy Laney, down the field.

"When we're running reverses or counters, and Greg's pulling and Andy's leading, Greg's barking at Andy before the snap saying, 'I'm gonna get you, Andy! I'm gonna get you!'" Barnett said. "When he pulls, he pulls to be faster than Andy, and Andy has a head start. Somewhere it clicked that he knows he's good."

Hall said when he gets back to the huddle after beating his teammates downfield, he lets them know about it and relishes the fact that he's no longer tired after every play.

"The only thing different about the game is I don't feel as tired," Hall said. "I used to be like crazy tired. Now I can get down the field, and I'm always messing with the other guys. Andy Laney always has his hands on his hips after plays, and I call it the 'Andy stance.' He gets real mad."

And make no mistake, some of the first people to notice Hall on that day in August were the guys who would benefit most from his transformation — running backs Deandre Wilson and Jaimaine Wilhite.

"I saw him and I was like, 'Whoa,'" said Wilson with his signature smile. "It was good. Me and [Wilhite] were even happier because he could move around even better and do whatever he wants now since he lost all the weight. We knew he was committed to the team."

Hall admits he used to eat "anything that was edible," but now he sticks to a diet of mostly sandwiches and no fast food — except for Subway — and no fried foods or soda.

He now has an offer from Stephen F. Austin and is about to take an official visit to the University of Houston. Walsh said he expects Hall to have at least a dozen Division I offers after the season ends.

"I'm extremely proud," Walsh said. "He's a very likeable kid. He's smart and has goals and dreams, and his weight was keeping him from those. Now that he got rid of it, it's nice. It is very refreshing to be in this profession and see things like this happen to kids. He's a great story."

Barnett, who said he looks at his interior linemen as his children, has been particularly moved by Hall's dedication and results.

Barnett said it's made Hall a more confident kid, on and off the field, so much so that he's taken on the role of Wilson, the team's emotional leader, at times by dancing and having fun in team meetings.

"It's so neat. It's so great for the kid," Barnett said. "He's just flamboyantly happy, and I couldn't ask that for any better human being out there to deserve it."