

Watching Ted Grow

MARY YOUNG

I've always liked my son. He's a super youngster, bright, sensitive, good-natured. He came into the world running, just thirteen minutes after I arrived at the hospital. Never could I have imagined the trauma he would bring into our household when he turned sixteen.

As he grew tall, he also grew long feet so that his shoe size always matched his age until he finished his sixteenth year. At the age of 12, he passed me in height, 5-8, then passed his father at 6-3 and just kept growing to 6-9.

I maintained my admiration, albeit with some degree of intimidation, for one night he and his brothers were having a fun wrestling match. I remember that he came running up to me, released one of his blood-curdling screams, and proceeded to squeeze me very tightly. I answered his scream with one of my own, a scream of agony because Ted with little effort had managed to break two ribs in my frail but tired body.

I endured and he learned gentleness. Now my son, Ted Young, is a starting freshman power forward at Vanderbilt University. He's happy; his coaches are happy; his daddy and three brothers are happy; and I

am happy. Also, he is close to home.

For nearly two years it wasn't that way, however. Recruiting turned our household upside down. The breach in our relationship came in his junior year when he was discovered by college basketball recruiters. While they pulled him in one direction, I pulled him in another. All our troubles that year were minor compared with the trauma brought on by the recruiting during his senior year. Friends, relatives, teachers, schoolmates—everybody got into the act as recruiting became the main issue in our lives. Even our cocker spaniel was remembered in a letter from one coach.

You see, nobody in our family had ever been recruited for anything except the Army. We were accustomed to indifference and at times to rejection. When colleges began competing for one of ours, we were naturally quite thrilled.

Unbelievably, about 200 letters of supplication came to Ted from schools in the East, South, and West. About two dozen schools received his serious consideration, and he narrowed it to six. I was considering only two.

When recruiters began visiting

our home, I was polite and objective, determined to be a good reflection on Ted. I offered coffee and Cokes and listened attentively. I was soon aware that the object of the home visit was to win the parents, especially the mother.

The visits of the coaches soon became routine. Recruiters sat on the living room sofa and opened briefcases full of brochures, clippings, schedules, and four-color printed material. While we listened,

they made their pitch. As they droned on, I began to see them as men who were on the road much of the time, living in motels, hawking their products to mothers and sons. I asked a few of them about this aspect of their jobs, but they never complained.

I remember that on one particular morning, Ted came to the breakfast table and announced that he would enjoy going to college a great distance from home. My heart sank.

Then as fate would have it, the coach at Stanford University in California called that night. When the coach did walk in, he was prepared with all the papers for Ted, plus all the things we would enjoy seeing when we visited Ted in California and, particularly, some literature about the California vineyards for Ted's dad, a wine aficionado. At that moment I imagined my dear third son gone from my home forever, and I wouldn't get to see him play ball at all in college.

Duke, Davidson, Alabama, Florida, Vanderbilt, and Tennessee were always high on his list, and some of the Ivy schools and private institutions did seem to have an unlimited travel budget.

When things got hectic after Christmas of his senior year, I began to avoid the coaches and even Ted would leave the house for a while. If coaches or alumni called after 10, I said it was too late. We even had to take the phone off the hook some on Sunday nights.

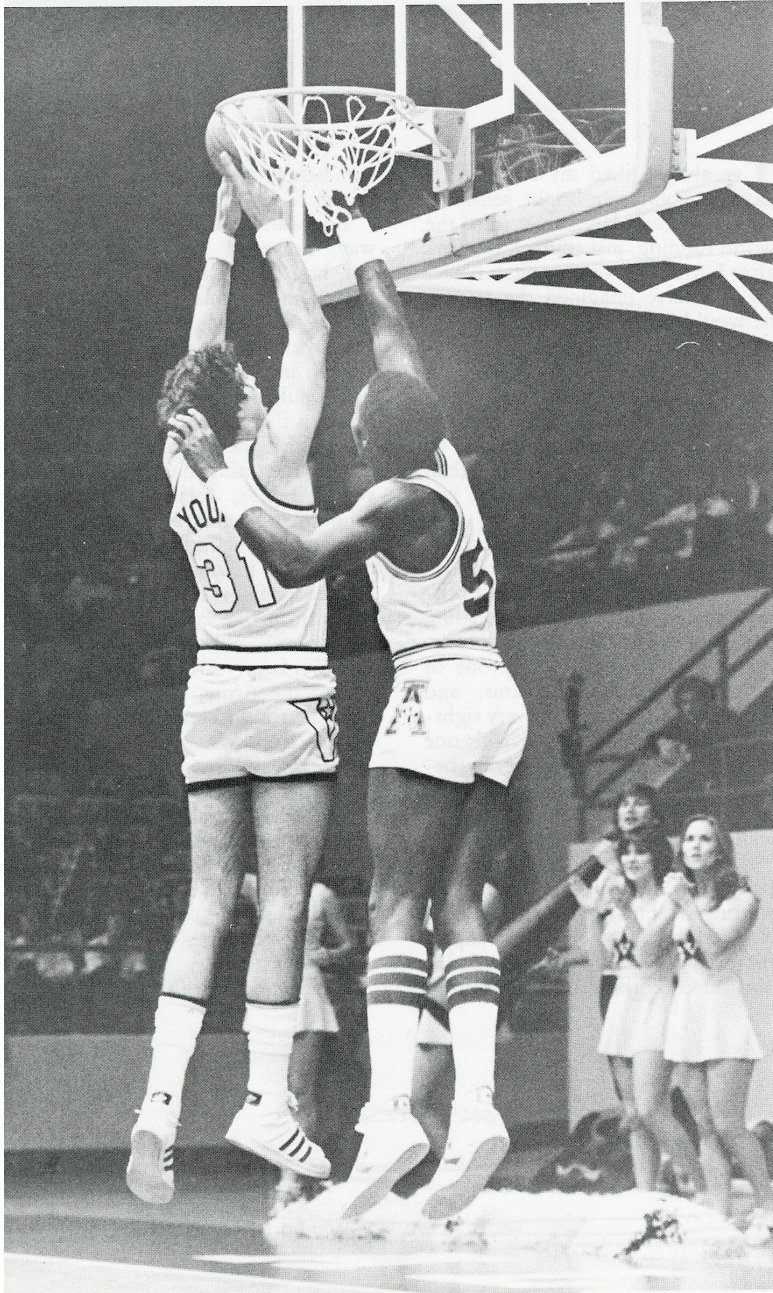
But really, everyone was polite. I don't think Ted was pressured or enticed by anything illegal. We've met some wonderful people through this experience, and if Ted has changed at all, it is greater belief in himself. But he's the same Ted he's always been, I think, and he felt very lucky to be in such a wanted situation.

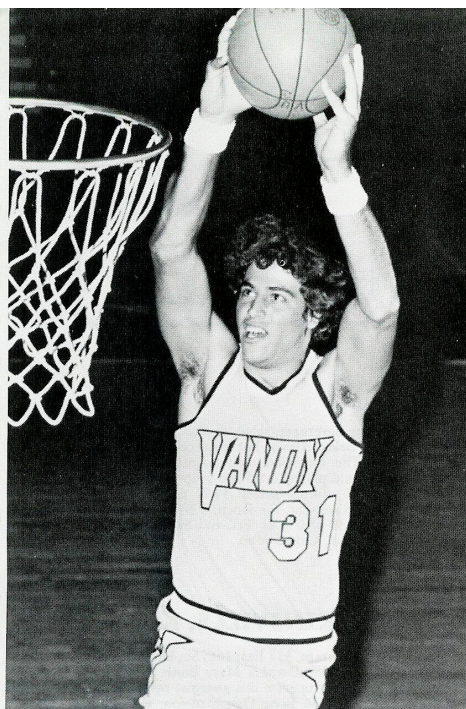
When coaches were not visiting us or attending his high school games, they were telephoning, the calls increasing in frequency as the signing date neared.

"It's for me," Ted bellowed happily during the fall. "Tell them I'm not home," he pleaded as the school year wore on.

By March, signs of paranoia were evident. The pressure at home was tense. What is he thinking? Where does he truly want to go? What is he going to do? Each day I unearthed a new, favorable bit of data about the two colleges I was interested in. He often complained of his confusion about the choices confronting him. "They all sound so good," he said, "and I like so many of the coaches."

We listed the advantages and disadvantages of each school's location, basketball program, courses of study, campus environment, record for getting its students into graduate school.





Ted set April fourth as the deadline for making his decision so he could get it over. The suspense was almost terrifying. So consumed were we as the day approached that Ted's dad suggested that we should eat out at a restaurant. At least our stomachs would be happy if we didn't like his decision. We all dressed and let the phone ring. At the restaurant, just before ordering, Ted said, "Well—Mother, I'm going to Vanderbilt!"

We couldn't believe it at first. Had we at long last listened to a definite decision? Then I began to wonder about myself. Had I said too much about Tennessee and Vanderbilt, the two schools I liked? Making myself look at him directly, I asked, "Are you sure this is what you want and not what you think I want?"

"Yes," he said, "I am sure!"

I tried to control the joy I felt. I had not lost a son to some distant college.

Now, as his first season at Vanderbilt comes to a close, I know that I have gained far more than I ever imagined. I have suffered greatly during tough games but I have also soared to glorious joy during victories.

But most of all, for me and his dad, Ted is at home—here in Middle Tennessee. ■