

Retrievers of the Past...

By Joule Charney

1979 NFC-AFC McGUFFY

“
Guffy was a
natural and a
‘SPEED
ROCKET’
”



Winners table pictured left to right, Judges Joseph Wattleworth and “Cotton” Pershall, owner/handler T.J. Lindbloom, 1979 NFC-AFC McGuffy and Judge Jere Bogrett.

THE ROAD TO RIBBONS is paved with a lot of work, dedication, and heart. All of those who have been on that journey, we know. We have felt the extraordinary joy of teamwork with our canine partners whose all-important lines begin, and end, by our side.

We cannot go with them. We can only stand, and wait, as they go their way. Sometimes, we blow our whistles and direct. But, this is their show. As each of their feet takes them closer to the birds, we get closer to our goals, a ribbon, a leg or a point, ultimately, a title, and for the fortunate few, a National finish, or a win.

On the road to glory, during the times we remember the best, we have stood, basically, useless, watching, and praying, and holding our breath, as our dogs do something miraculous.

In perhaps the most profoundly poignant of these lines, a dog named McGuffy didn't go very far. And, his owner didn't even see his dog leave his side.

Even the most successful handlers and owners know the utter agony of that seemingly endless drive home – in the gloom and doom of defeat. For T.J. Lindbloom, it was going to be one heck of a long return from the 1976 National Open in San Antonio, New Mexico.

He drove away before the National even had ended. T.J. had given his three-year-old black Lab, FC-AFC McGuffy, a poor line that got them only through the 5th series. This “little blunder” dashed his hopes of completing their first National. Guffy had made it through the 4th series of the National Amateur in Michigan earlier that year.

How often do we have one of those ‘if only’ thoughts: If only I hadn't done this, or my dog hadn't done that, I'd be riding home in the afterglow. Friends and family had urged him to stay until the end of the event. T.J. instead opted to leave that evening, anxious to get home to his wife in Illinois. Debby, who was Guffy's co-owner and T.J.'s training partner, wasn't able to attend the National because she couldn't leave her job.

Also, “maybe I was pouting a little,” T.J. admits. “I really felt like I had let my dog down, and myself down.”

After a nap on the side of the highway, T.J. resumed the drive early the next morning, with Guffy lying beside him in the passenger seat. “Normally, he always rode in the kennel box. I don't remember, now, why I let him up front; but, that's where he was when the accident happened.”

T.J. and Guffy's station wagon was hit head-on going about 65 mph. T.J. was ejected part-way out the windshield, then thrust back into the vehicle, critically injuring himself on the steering wheel and dashboard. Guffy was crushed when part of the engine came through the firewall.

In what he later learned was a deliberate act, two men in a pickup were trying to run-down a sedan. The car sped up, trying to outrun the pickup, which sideswiped it, sending it out of control, into the oncoming lanes. There was no highway divider on Route 66, the four-lane freeway outside of Amarillo, Texas. T.J. was not wearing a seatbelt, which was not mandatory in those days.

The aftermath was clouded by “a tremendous amount of pain.” T.J.

1979 NFC-AFC McGUFFY

OPEN	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	TOTAL:
Starts	6	17	7	11	11	3	55
First	0	1	2	0	2	0	5
Second	0	0	1	1	2	0	4
Third	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Fourth	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Places	0	5	4	1	4	0	14
Jams	?	4	1	1	2	?	8
# Finished	?	9	5	2	6	?	22
% Finished	?%	53%	71%	18%	55%	?%	40%
Open Points	0.0	8.5	13.5	3.0	16.0	0.0	41.0
Cumulative Pts.	0.0	8.5	22.0	25.0	41.0	41.0	41.0

AMATEUR	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	TOTAL:
Starts	6	14	6	13	9	3	51
First	1	3	3	0	1	0	8
Second	1	1	0	1	1	0	4
Third	0	2	0	1	3	0	6
Fourth	0	1	1	1	0	1	4
Places	2	7	4	3	5	1	22
Jams	1	2	0	4	2	0	9
# Finished	3	9	4	7	7	1	31
% Finished	50%	64%	67%	54%	78%	33%	61%
Amateur Points	8.0	20.5	15.5	4.5	11.0	0.5	60.0
Cumulative Pts.	8.0	28.5	44.0	48.5	59.5	60.0	60.0

All-Age	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	TOTAL:
All-Age By Year	8.0	29.0	29.0	7.5	27.0	0.5	101.0
Cumulative Total	8.0	37.0	66.0	73.5	100.5	101.0	101.0

OWNER: T. LINDBLOOM
 BIRTHDATE 3/23/73
 25 DERBY POINTS

Avg Open points per year: 7
 Avg Amateur pts per year: 10
 Avg All-Age pts per year: 17

From "Retriever Field Trial Statistics 1941-1995," by Sue Reynolds.

was unable to move. Guffy frantically was trying to get out of the vehicle. "He was scared to death of what happened." T.J.'s only thought was that he had to get hold of his dog so Guffy wouldn't get loose and be hit by another vehicle.

Guffy's line out happened to be straight over T.J.'s lap. As Guffy crawled over him, T.J. grabbed hold of his collar for dear life – the life of his dog. Guffy pulled his master out with him, and the two fell out the opening where the driver's door had been. Guffy then draped himself over T.J.'s head and chest and the pair waited for help to arrive. Guffy whimpered and cried; but, he didn't move. "I talked to him, calming him down, letting him know everything was OK."

Things were far from OK. T.J. and Guffy sustained major, and yet similar, injuries: broken ribs and a broken leg. Guffy also had shattered his pelvis. His injuries were so severe, the vet where he was taken recommended that he be euthanized.

Three years later, this same duo would return to the National Open, and WIN IT!



Jerry Patopea (in brown jacket) giving encouragement to T.J. Lindbloom as he and Guffy wait in the holding blind at the 1979 National.

The Long Road to Recovery...

T.J. relinquished his grasp on Guffy only after the first person to arrive to the scene gave assurances he would see that everything possible would be done to save the dog. He had the man remove his wallet from his back pocket, and take his dog, leaving a broken T.J. literally lying on the pavement.

"He stayed with the dog that evening and he came and saw me in the hospital a day or two later." He had sustained seventeen hours of surgery. "I was not completely coherent yet. The doctors let him see me. He gave me the wallet and the business card for the vet, and the update," T.J. recalls.

There had been no opportunity for second guessing what should have been done with Guffy; and, it was completely out of T.J.'s control after his dog was removed from the road. T.J.'s inner guidance was as clear as his message to the vet, by way of the rescuer: "If this dog were my son, I wouldn't expect you to put him to sleep."

Especially problematic during Guffy's surgery was the fact that his femur head was badly damaged, as well as the leg itself. He would undergo a femoral head osteotomy and emerge with a plate holding together his pelvis.

Debby didn't even recognize her husband when she first saw him in the hospital. "His doctor was world-renowned and just happened to be in Amarillo," she adds. "We really kind of lucked out, if you can call any of that lucky."

It was anticipated that T.J. would need a six-week hospital stay. He left "to get Guffy" only three weeks later. "It was amazing that he was alive," T.J. realized when he first saw him. "His treatment was out of this world. How do you say 'thank-you'? We just did the best we could. The vet took a personal exception. He took a lot more effort than you would expect," T.J. believes.

"I can look back on it now, and I know the end of the story," he acknowledges. "If he were my son, you would do everything you could to put him back together and save his life. And, that's what they did."

Most people thought this was the end of the McGuffy story. But, the man wouldn't give up on his dog's survival, wasn't about to give up on his field trial career, despite the astronomically improbable odds of resurrecting it. T.J.'s faith in his dog would pay dividends no one else could have foreseen at the time. He intended to return to a future National – with THIS dog.

In the Middle...

The reunion was the beginning of what T.J. calls 'The Middle' of Guffy's life. The pair continued their recuperation at T.J.'s parent's home in Oregon, and returned to their own home after the holidays. Their long trip home was finally over; and, the long road back to physical wellness began.

It was a major accomplishment just for Guffy to stand. As winter wore on, Guffy eventually was able to limp painfully beside his T.J., who was on crutches. By spring, T.J. graduated to a cane and the duo would walk slowly to a pond where Guffy was able to work his maimed hindquarters. "The only thing that kept Guffy's hind leg in place was a mass of hard muscle," says T.J. "There was no bone connection with the hip." Slowly, Guffy regained his ability to run. When T.J. wasn't working him, he accompanied Debby on her jogs.

Guffy would not do anything again, however, without awkwardness, including sitting, walking and running. "I never fully understood how that leg worked. Everything that he did was awkward," says T.J. "He

compensated for that leg in everything that he did," T.J. continues, "but, he still ran straight!" This was of paramount importance. Guffy's recovery, as much as possible from his extensive injuries, had turned into resumption of a training regimen.

Guffy's limitations made his comeback even more remarkable. "The amount of time he could take, and the amount he could actually run" were fractions of what they had been before the accident. But, "he made it through the whole healing process; and, he made it all the way back," T.J. proclaims triumphantly. "His hind quarters were less developed due to the accident," but, he asserts, "he never seemed like he was in too bad of shape. He was just awkward. What a fabulous animal he was at a very young age!" he emphasizes. "His potential went untilled because of this accident; but, he was able to conquer over that. There were pieces missing in the middle."

There was one benefit to Guffy's physical challenges. "His bad back leg wasn't quite in sync with the rest of his body. It slowed him down. Before the accident, he was just running hard all the time. Being crippled slowed him. And, it may have made him think a little bit more."

Fast Forward Three Years...

Against all odds, McGuffy survived, he recovered, he trained, and ... HE QUALIFIED FOR ANOTHER NATIONAL!

Three years after McGuffy and his owner's journey to hell, and back, awkward gait and all, McGuffy made it to the 1979 National Open in Redding, California. As they waited to begin the final series, "I knew we were in great shape," says T.J.

The Tenth was a water quad over the top of the Ninth Series blind. It began with a 'water-fountain throw,' recalls T.J., followed by a double flyer. The first dog to run got a no-bird. His handler stepped back into the holding blind where the judges asked him if he wanted to come right back or go to the end of the line. "Let him run first," was the answer.

"Now I'm number 1 in the Tenth." It was a scary realization. Fortunately, one of T.J.'s first friends in the field trial world was nearby. Professional trainer Jerry Patopea was "trying to calm me down while we were in the holding blind."

It was a miracle T.J. and Guffy were there. It was a miracle Guffy could even walk to the line. And, "Guffy creamed it!" Being first might have been a charm -- every dog still in contention that followed was handled.

T.J. has a friend, Lanse Brown, who, to this day, likes to ask him, "How do you win a National?"

"I always look at him, and say, 'You don't handle.'"

McGuffy had pulled off perhaps the most miraculous journey ever to a National, and, in one of the most surreal moments of retriever history, he WON it!

"When looking at McGuffy's lifetime statistics, his accomplishments are even more impressive because he did not run many trials in his life," says Sue Reynolds, retriever statistician-author. "He only ran 55 Opens and 51 Amateurs, averaging nine trials per year. Yet, he qualified for four National Opens, winning in 1979. He also was a finalist in one of the five National Amateurs for which he qualified. He averaged almost a point per start in his All-Age career -- 0.95 points per start, with 101 points in 106 starts. In addition, he got a ribbon in fifty percent of the All-Age trials he ran in his life, with 53 ribbons in 106 starts. The fact that he did all this with such limited number of starts seems pretty special."

Although he automatically was qualified to run in the 1980 National Open, Guffy was retired soon after his National win. "It just wasn't fair to continue. It's a grind. Debby and I made the decision together that Guffy was going to live out the rest of his life in the kitchen, and the rest of the house," T.J. elaborates.



McGuffy, The Owners

The bond between T.J. and Debby Lindbloom and their mutual love of retrievers remains strong after 39 years of marriage. They presently live in Roseburg, Oregon, their home state.

T.J.'s field dog experience prior to Guffy was limited to one gundog. He was attending college and working with the dog on a golf course when a passer-by invited him to a picnic trial. Two concept doubles were diagrammed on a licensed entry form for him to emulate. A month later, his dog took a 2nd in the Derby.

Shortly after college, they moved to the Midwest, "the heart of retriever land," according to T.J. While in Wisconsin, T.J. worked at Winchester Arms. Debby, a schoolteacher and reading specialist, made lesson plans for the training of their dogs, which evolved into a daily routine. Guffy's first Amateur resulted in a win at Duluth, Minnesota.

A second fortuitous chance encounter led T.J. to the famous Nilo Farms, where he took a crash course in game preserve management, and subsequently became employed. "What was so cool about being there was that all the pros would go through there. I was fortunate to join the pros at Nilo. At the time, it was very important," T.J. recognizes. "But, nobody ever trained that dog but Debby and I." John Olin, for whom Nilo is named, with the letters in reverse order, owned Guffy's dam and made a special trip weekly to watch Guffy work, he adds. "He loved that dog."

While their four children were young, the

Lindblooms' focus was on family, although Labradors always were a part of their life together. They kept a female pup from one of the few litters that Guffy sired before he became sterile due to a foxtail penetration, shortly after the 1979 National Open. When they returned to Oregon, T.J. was a timber broker, and Debby continued her career teaching school.

Presently, T.J. has three puppies, all around four months of age. "I had the great, good fortune," he says, "of getting pups from two outstanding litters, intending to keep one from each." The third pup, Zeke, is an EIC carrier he was going to return; so far though, "I haven't been able to let him go. Zeke is really the star of the three," he says; and, he likes the fact that he is "bigger, more mature, and stronger." Additionally, T.J. has dibs on a female from a hoped-for future breeding; and, he co-owns a Derby dog.

In an "eerie" *déjà vu*, T.J.'s older dog, AFC Savvy Sailor, now nine and a half, injured himself on his way home from the 2010 National Amateur in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Merely retrieving a bumper, Sailor sliced his flexor tendon in a hind leg exiting a river and had to be retired. For Sailor's pre-National training, T.J. was in a "large group" with eight friends. He was comparatively low-key with Guffy -- instead of cramming for the 1979 National Open, he and buddies Jay Walker and Pete Goodale went hunting near Klamath Falls in the mornings and training in the afternoon. "We had a ball! That was our pre-National!"

"I didn't run much; but, I was very success-

ful," T.J. points out, then, he corrects himself. "I should say, 'We.' Actually, it was the dog."

Guffy's story is so astonishing that present-day members of the retriever community recently asked for it to be retold. Even when Guffy literally was shattered in the accident, T.J.'s dreams for him never faltered. A friend of T.J.'s who worked at Winchester Arms and Nilo, John Madson, wrote a "Ducks Unlimited" magazine article in 1994 about Guffy that he included in his book "Labs Afield." Once in a while, T.J. pulls out the book and re-reads the Guffy chapter. "It is a tear jerker story for me. It tugs at the heartstrings; but," he adds, stoically, "I lived through it."

For T.J., the physical effects of the 1976 accident still linger. "If you saw me, you might not notice. My legs always hurt. My right leg hurts, especially when I get up. It takes me awhile to get going." Then, he laughs off the seriousness. "Running down puppies is pretty hard; but, at my age (60), it probably would be anyway!"

"I love training!" T.J. continues. The years, and their challenges, have not dampened his enthusiasm one iota. T.J. says he happily occupies most of his time with the training of his three pups and being 'Grandpa' to his and Debby's first grandchild, a girl who was born in August. Nowadays, T.J. goes to field trials in Oregon and some hunting tests. He doesn't run the circuit anymore because he does not like to travel. "I love Labradors. I love 'em and work with 'em and take 'em with me, wherever I do go!"



Retrievers of the Past

“It was good for him. We didn’t want to wear him out. And,” he feels, “it was good to give others a chance.”

In the beginning...

Guffy was Debby’s gift to T.J. for their first wedding anniversary. The pup was born in March, 1973, when T.J. was only twenty-two years old. His selection was the result of “pouring over year-end stats in Retriever Field Trial News. We studied it like you wouldn’t believe – what puppy out of what litter,” he remembers. T.J. conferred with Ray Goodrich who impressed him with how gracious he was. “That’s how we got Guffy – on his recommendation.” FC-AFC Ray’s Rascal, Guffy’s sire, would win the 1974 National Amateur. Ironically, Ray would become chair of the 1979 National Open, which Guffy would win. Guffy’s dam, Candlewood’s Southern Deal, was out of a 6-time National Finalist sire.

Guffy’s full AKC registered name wasn’t much longer than his callname: McGuffy. That was it, per T.J.’s wishes, although he didn’t get it quite the way he intended it. Debby then, and now, is a schoolteacher. The pup’s name was supposed to be spelled ‘Guffey,’ after the extremely popular Guffey Reader elementary school books.

There was some disgruntlement that T.J. did not include a kennel name in Guffy’s full name, to which he points out, “I wasn’t naming him McGuffy for a kennel. I was naming him for my wife; even though, when Debby looked at the registered name, she said, ‘You misspelled it!’”

“Debby was a big part of what Guffy was,” emphasizes T.J. Together, the two did most of his training. “She was my main bird thrower, dog food person. Pretty much, Debby was my

pre-National training group,” too, he adds.

It didn’t hurt that “he just came to us special,” claims T.J. “It was the way he was born.” His first anniversary gift certainly would stand out for the rest of the lives. “Everybody remembers what Debby got me; and, nobody remembers what I got her!”

“Guffy was a natural and a ‘speed rocket,’” says T.J. “He was still fast after the accident, but slower returning. I’m a ‘momentum trainer,’” T.J. points out. He says that Mike Flannery, owner of 2x NAFC-FC 3x CNFC River Oaks Corky summed up his training philosophy better, and more succinctly, than anyone else could, in the Retrievers of the Past feature on Corky in 2010: “Teach, Teach, Teach!”

“
How do you win a National?
...You don’t handle.
”

T.J. knew Mike in the older days. “He was great, gracious. I was out of that era, too, the 70’s and a little bit of the 80’s. When everyone else was going to the e-collar, we ran to the pile. We did school blinds, repeated things for confidence, and the dogs went off like a missile. It was pretty simple. We were high momentum.”

Guffy lived just a few days short of his 15th birthday. “The children were all there. Guffy was lying in front of the fireplace, with his buddy the cat.” T.J. never has been prone to showing a large amount of emotion. “I walked in and said, ‘When did he die?’ The kids, who were very young, began crying. I wasn’t emotional when my dad died either,” says T.J. “It’s just part of the deal.”

Guffy’s many ribbons, trophies, the news and feature articles are tucked away in a box in their attic. T.J. is especially fond of Guffy’s National trophy, of course, but also Guffy’s takes from two double header wins and his placement in his first licensed field trial. He also particularly likes a silver bowl Sagehens Retriever Club gave him for judging. The only Guffy treasures the Lindblooms have on display are the 1979 National picture and trophy, about which T.J. rhetorically asks, “What else do you need to say?”

One thing about Guffy still seems to haunt T.J. – his eyes. “He was always glaring at me.” Wherever he went, for fifteen years, Guffy’s eyes would follow. “On the couch, or on the floor, his eyes would be locked on you. It was startling. He was always tuned in to me, concentrating on me. It was kind of ‘woah!’” T.J. still wonders what was going on in Guffy’s head. But, there never was a moment of doubt about Guffy’s heart. The story of Guffy is about so much more than broken bones and a miraculous recovery, an interrupted career and a stupendous come-back that exceeded previous accomplishments, to the absolute pinnacle of success. It is a story that is so far beyond all else, even love and devotion, that it boils down to something quite simple.

As T.J. puts it.... “This story is about Guffy’s heart, what a tremendous heart he had. Because of that, he was able to have these achievements that he had, even though it wasn’t like it was though he was blowing anybody away with the amount of points. He did have achievements that were great. He started out great. He had this bad part in the middle and then had a great ending. But, it was more than just that. I think it was a story about the heart of our breed, really -- the way our breed is. Our whole breed has heart. And, the Guffy story typifies that heart that is in our breed. It’s a wonderful thing.” ■