

Not His Final Final Four
BY BERNADETTE NICHOLSON
Oakland, Calif.

I intend to come back to the Final Four next year, and when I come back, we're going home with the whole thing. I don't think we're going to be content with just going to the Final Four!

— *Miles Tarver*

Miles Tarver, who is finishing his sophomore year at the University of Minnesota, has recently undergone the opportunity of a lifetime — a chance to compete in the NCAA Basketball Championship Tournament.

Out of 64 teams chosen to play in the prestigious tournament from hundreds of colleges nationally, the focus comes down to the Final Four. The two elimination games are sometimes more exhilarating and suspenseful than the championship game.

Miles, a reserve forward, is the player many remember dancing with CBS-TV sports announcer Al McGuire when the Minnesota Golden Gophers beat former champion UCLA to make it to the Final Four. At the big game on March 29 against defending champ Kentucky, besides his nine rebounds, Miles will best be remembered for his never-give-up spirit, scoring the last basket for Minnesota in the last seconds of the game when it appeared that some players had given up.

Miles is the son of Mary Miles, a 24-year SGI-USA member and vice headquarters leader in Miles' hometown of Oakland, Calif. Miles himself began chanting 15 years ago at age 5 because he wanted to "feel happy."

At age 10, he began to play basketball when his peers pressured him to be on their team because of his height. Miles turned out to have a great deal of skill. In fact his high school team, which starred now Phoenix Suns guard Jason Kidd, went on to win the state championship two years in row.

Miles then attended Maine Central Prep Institute before entering the University of Minnesota to play for Coach of the Year Clem Haskins. Their team won the division championship.

"Our team had obstacles all year long," Miles said. "The biggest one was convincing the nation we were a good team and capable of beating anyone. Personally, I had to overcome my mood changes during the season. I would chant to boost my spirits. During the school year, I experienced many ups and downs. My chanting helped me lift myself out of my down times."

Seven years earlier, Miles' mother overcame a critical battle with breast cancer using her Buddhist practice. She traveled to Puerto Rico, Kansas City, San Antonio and Indianapolis to support him in this tournament. Even though they sometimes had only a few minutes, Miles and Mary would spend their time together before each game chanting daimoku.

"Seeing my mother sick when I was 14 made me feel so helpless because I really couldn't do anything for her," Miles said. "Right now it feels good to be able to give her something back emotionally. Now she's having real fun with it. It's great. She's my support system. She's the No. 1 woman in my life!"

When the family came through that hurdle, Miles had learned a great deal and had much appreciation for his mother. "I learned that anything is possible through hard work and a strong determination," he said. "Practicing Buddhism has shown me that all goals are attainable."

And what about the future? As he mentioned, Miles is definitely determined to win in

next year's Final Four, saying that he was buoyed by the possibility of winning the NCAA championship this year. "You strive to be recognized as the best, but nothing beats winning it all," he said.

Miles, a theater major, would like to play pro basketball. But whether or not he plays, he says, "My determination for the future is to continue to practice Buddhism, for it can help to make every day pleasant and more enjoyable than the last. And happiness is my ultimate goal."

Another chance to win the NCAA championship next year might help a bit, too....

WT

Title: Not His Final Final Four
Subject: World Tribune 05/30/97 n.3141 p.6 WT970530p06 Oakland, California
Author: Bernadette Nicholson
Keywords: Athletes Basketball California Final Four Miles National News Oakland People Player
Tarver