

# Turning losers into winners

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Philip Hawk said he's always been the king of fad diets.

That is until several months ago, when the 6-foot-5 ex-football player was pushing 403 pounds.

Instead of opting for another trendy diet, he stood in line for hours in 15-degree weather to tell his story in five seconds to a bunch of NBC officials.

Unlike the diets he'd been on until then, this venture worked. As a contestant on this fall's season of "The Biggest Loser" he peeled off 31 pounds and was still counting as of last week's episode.

"it's something you totally have to get used to, but it was our job," said Philip, who is back at home in Columbus, barred from blabbing about his end results. "It was a journey for sure."

"The Biggest Loser," now in its fourth season, is a reality series that challenges overweight contestants to lose weight through diet and exercise as part of teams. After weigh-ins and eliminations the winner – aka – the "biggest loser" gets \$250,000.

Three episodes have aired so far, and the series will run on Tuesdays through Dec. 18.

Before he responded to the open call at Schmidt's Sausage House about two years ago, Philip had always been a big fan of the show.

"This is one I set TiVo to watch," he said. "We just wanted to see what happened and it was great to see the transformation of everybody."

His father, who goes by Phil Hawk, said his son always had been large. Philip graduated from Ashland High School after playing offensive and defensive tackle for four years weighing in the high 280s and 290s said Phil. After that, he attended Miami of Ohio where he was a four year letterwinner as an offensive lineman at 320 pounds.

"At times I had to watch my weight," said Philip. "But my coaches said whatever I wanted to eat I could."

Philip, a contractor in Powell, said when he went to open call – attended by about 2,000 people – he told NBC officials he was an ex-athlete. But more than that, he said, he shared his goal of becoming a firefighter, something he's tried many times but kept failing due to his height and weight.

"It seems like every time I'd go test for a fire department, I'm just too big to do some of the stuff," said Philip. "I needed the weight back then, but I don't need it now. It's just a hindrance on my life and well-being."

While he didn't get a call back for the third season, he got a call this past February, interviewed again and chosen for the fourth. He and his family – including wife Stephanie and daughter Grace –

were excited for the experience and his opportunity to "start the journey of weight loss."

"I think it's tough because when they do the filming of the show, they show all the important parts but it is hard to show as much time as you have to put in," said Philip. "You wonder how you can lose 31 pounds in a couple of weeks, but you have to understand that's six to eight hours of work a day."

Philip was designated captain of the red team, which battles against the blue and black teams. On the first few episodes, the contestants have had to take part in endurance races through a desert and run stairs.

The show's host is Alison Sweeney, who stars as Sammy on "Days of Our Lives." Philip admitted he actually was a big fan of her's in college – when he finished classes for the day the only thing on TV before classes was soap operas.

"It's weird when you get there and meet someone in person when you've watched them for so long," she said. "It seems like your sister."

He's not allowed to divulge details like when he left for the show, when he got back or how much weight he lost. While he was gone, he said, he wasn't allowed any outside contact. Now that the show is airing, he and his family watch every Tuesday.

"I was there for it and everything, but it is kind of fun to watch it on the opposite end," he said.

Philip, 28, said he doesn't yet get noticed because of his participation on the show. His dad, Phil, who is in charge of career-based intervention programs at



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Ashland High School, hears a lot from fellow teachers.

“They said they watched the program and it’s just something being able to see Philip because they remember having him in class.” said Phil.

He’s been watching from Ashland with his wife.

“I give people on the show a lot of credit,” said Phil. “They go through a lot with their weigh-ins. That takes an awful lot of guts on their part to get up in a pair of Spandex and take your shirt off in front of the whole country and weigh yourself.”

Philip’s goal is to get to 250 pounds. The show also motivated Stephanie to loose weight as well.

“Some days I wake up and my body is just killing me and I don’t want to take another step and she’s bouncing off the walls,” said Philip. “The rest of the family has been a huge support.”

Ev DeVaul, former Ashland High School athletic director, and a friend of Phil’s said he’s known Philip for years.

“I give Philip and the others a lot of credit,” said DeVaul. “I always tell people if you want to lose weight ... if you don’t have the will power, you’re not going to lose weight. He’s an outstanding young man who loves his family and has a mission to lose weight and I think that’s why he was selected.”

Phil said he could tell the initial weight-in affected his son.

“He never thought he’d go up to 400 pounds,” he said. “The thing that makes me feel good as a parent as I’m watching, he realized he has a weight problem and he wants to do something with it,” he said. “My concern is that, like with any other diet, he just has to make sure he follows through on this.”



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