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## BassNotes



## Beaver Felton

### Maestro Of Superchops

By Dave LaRue

It's almost impossible to talk about educational systems for the electric bass without addressing the Superchops 4 Bass method by Beaver Felton. Endorsements from such notables as Will Lee and Victor Wooten, a string of great reviews from major music magazines, and an incredible word-of-mouth reputation have made Superchops one of the most popular audio and video instructional series on the market today. But while the lessons contained in the tapes have been educating and inspiring bass students for almost a decade, none of them is as inspiring as the story of Beaver's personal struggle with adversity.

Born in Savannah, Georgia, on

March 22, 1956, Felton started playing bass at age 13 and spent his teenage years jamming in local cover bands. Eventually, progressive rock groups like Yes began to demonstrate the limitless potential of the instrument to the young bassist. He comments, "I still consider Chris Squire one of rock's most brilliant bassists for his ability to come up with a line that contributes to the song and carries it. Whenever I put together a bass line, I work in some non-root notes because of my Chris Squire influence."

While he was developing his bass style, 15-year-old Beaver also began competing in Olympic-style weightlifting. He went on to become a triple gold-medal winner at the Amateur Athletic Union's national competitions and was the junior and senior national champion in his weight class. Felton credits the rigorous three-hours-a-day, six-days-a-week training routine with helping him to develop his systematic approach to practicing bass. "There's a correlation between the two. Increasing the weight and repetitions is like setting the metronome to 100 BPM, then speeding it up to 110, and then to 120. That's good for technique—but if you get too wrapped up in it, you get away from the music. That's probably my weak point; I wish I had spent a little more time balancing my workouts."

After hitting the road full-time and gigging almost every night, Felton garnered a reputation as one of the hottest bass players in the Southeast. In 1979, he moved to Orlando, Florida, where he hooked up with the band Mantra, a funk-rock group modeled after Mother's Finest. Mantra recorded an album for Casablanca Records, but Beaver left the band before the record was

released. He went back on the road with prog rockers Hoochie and, later, Chimera. Though both bands were hugely successful on the club circuit, and although both were offered record contracts, the right deal never materialized.

Frustration and a lack of financial security led Beaver to begin formulating his taped-lesson concept. "At some point you start to wonder, What if the band doesn't make it?" he says. "But I was already a bass teacher—I knew all the current techniques—and I'd seen Doug Marks's successful *Metal Method for Guitar* series. The Superchops idea was conceived as I was lying in bed one night at the band house in Cocoa Beach." Beaver mailed tapes of his new method to most of the major distribution companies, but to no avail.

On June 26, 1985, on the way to a Chimera gig, Felton was in a car accident that fractured his fourth and fifth thoracic vertebrae, resulting in a spinal-cord injury that left him paralyzed from the mid-chest down. Ironically, at this time, Beaver got his first big break. Just before his accident, his tape was chosen to be featured in Mike Varney's Spotlight column in *Guitar Player*. Beaver first saw the issue when one of his friends brought it to him in the hospital.

After an extensive period of both physical and mental rehabilitation, Felton used the credibility he had gained from Varney's column to land some endorsement deals and to launch the Superchops series. "At first I was suicidal," he admits, "but I got over it. Turning a negative into a positive is an old and simple concept. I'm no pillar of society, trust me—but I did use the time after my accident to write and record my tapes. I've always felt best

## BassNotes

### Beaver Felton continued

when I'm playing music and when I'm contributing to someone else. There's no doubt that part of me is not just a bassist but an instructor—from the heart out."

Over the next year, the first nine Superchops audio tapes were recorded, packaged, advertised, and released. "I had help," Felton allows, "but I wore all the hats." And so a mainstay of the instructional repertoire was born, just 12 months after an accident that would have ended most people's careers.

Beaver's heartfelt instruction has continued. He's added ten more tapes and four videos to the Superchops catalog, and he's also produced 5- and 6-string bass videos featuring Roy Vogt. In addition, he's taped a video for Hot Licks and authored an eight-book/CD series for Hal Leonard. Recently, Felton also ventured into the retail bass business by opening a store called

Bass Central in Maitland, Florida (near Orlando).

Unfortunately, Beaver's hard-won success has an ironic downside. "I haven't really played out regu-

larly for two years," he laments, "and I miss it. It's weird when I was 13, all I wanted was to get a bass and play out. Now I'm 40 and I have a bass—but all I want to do is play

out. It's still my passion. I've come full circle."

The Web site for Bass Central is at: [www.basscentral.com](http://www.basscentral.com)