

Signs of a True Fan

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one, though, and the chicken now comes to the arena with a complete wardrobe. It includes a black and white striped shirt (made from a diaper) and a tiny blue jersey bearing the name of whoever Hershey is playing, both to be worn when the chicken is hung in effigy.

However, the signs alone were the real start of Al's popularity and they have truly developed into a sophisticated art. Painted on large rectangles of heavy paper, each sign takes Al about 20 minutes to do, although some have taken hours. The ideas come from anywhere from "The Flintstones" to a suggestion from another fan to Al's dreams. In fact, Dee no longer even asks what he's doing when he leaps out of bed at 3 a.m. to scribble something on a piece of paper.

After painting them, Al numbers each one so they're easier to work with. On the back of a large envelope, he has every message listed by number and categorized as to what action in the game it would follow. Say, for example, Rochester scores; Al replies with "I CAN'T BEAR IT" or "4 SALE -- USED TICKETS." Other favorites at the arena are: "SEND IN THE CLOWNS" when the refs come on, "NOBODY DOES IT BETTER" when Hershey scores and "GONG SHOW REJECTS" when opponents enter the penalty box.

It's been two years since "Big Al" held up that first sign and today he's as much a part of a Bears' game as the opening face-off is. Now a season ticket holder, he sits (and stands and shouts and performs) where else, but at center ice. "Sure, I'm a hot dog -- I've gotta be at center ice, right on camera," he admits with a botish grin, "but I don't do it for the publicity. I do it for fun, to entertain everyone and to get the crowd fired up and involved with the game." Apparently, he has accomplished this goal.

One lady, whose seat for the season is right across the aisle from Al's, remarks, "I've been to other arenas and their crowds seem more passive than Hershey's. Al's a positive force; he gets you into the game. And at times," she adds with a giggle, "it's like getting two shows for the price of one." Tom Tulli, sales and promotion director for the Bears, notes, too, that "there's definitely less crowd enthusiasm on Wednesday nights when Al isn't at the games and Saturday nights when he's in full swing."

The players, also, feel the Sign Man is a plus for the fans and for themselves. Defenseman Greg Theberge says Al's like a bit of extra entertainment, "something for us to watch during a stppage of play."

Left winger Harvey Poczka admits he, too, finds himself watching Al and he

adds, "You can't help but notice him!" Even the Bears' serious captain, Claude Noel, laughs just thinking about the Sign Man and says, "He's pretty vocal, if you know what I mean, and not many people could do what he does, but it works. He gets the crowd going and really adds to the game."

Even the refs, usually the brunt of Al's jokes, take his razzing well. Though they're not to show any emotion on the ice, especially concerning a fan, Al catches them giving him a wink or peeking at his signs and chuckling. Once while visiting relatives in Pittsburgh, Al went to see the Penguins and took a few signs. "When Alf LaJeune, who frequently refs in Hershey, saw me, he just shook his head and said, 'I don't believe it.'"

Although publicity isn't the Sign Man's purpose, Al realizes he can't avoid it. He has been featured in several local newspapers and NBC's "Real People" recently contacted him, saying they may be interested in having him on a future show. He admits his job does have added dividends. "I really am flattered -- like when I missed two games in a row and a bunch of fans said, 'Where were ya? It just wasn't the same. We missed ya!' or when the players invite me to join them for a few drinks." Then, with a worried look, he adds, "I hope this doesn't go to my head."

Unfortunately, the publicity is not always positive. Last year, some fans complained about the sign "PUCK YOU," which happened to be Al's favorite. "I realized the sign might have been a little riske," he adds, "but the next game after the front office told me I couldn't use it, my buddy put a bag over my head and told me to use it as the Unknown Sign Man. I just couldn't resist! After the second warning, though, I stopped. I'm not there to offend anybody."

As he remembers, only one person was ever really offended and Al was asked to leave the game because of it. After one of his frequent on-ice bouts, Ed Hospodar, then with the New Haven Nighthawks, was boiling in the penalty box. Dangling the chicken over the glass, Al harassed Ed until he lifted his stick to take a swing. "I shouldn't have said anything about his mother," Al says innocently, "that made him real mad."

While he sometimes gets too rambunctious, the Sign Man's intentions are sincere. last Christmas, he got permission from Hersheypark Arena Security to play Santa Claus. Outfitted in a red suit and with a big belly, white hair and beard, Al skated around with CoCo, the Bears' mascot, in between periods. He also bought candy and gave it out to the kids.

There isn't anyone who would do what Al does, just to show he's a number one fan.

Recently, local radio station WKBO sponsored a contest called "What I would Do For \$5,000." One brave guy wrote that he would dress as a Playboy

bunny -- stockings, high heels and all -- and go to the Bears' first home playoff game. To increase his chances of winning the money, he added that he would cheer against the Bears and try to get the crowd to do the same. What grown man would do such a thing? You got it.



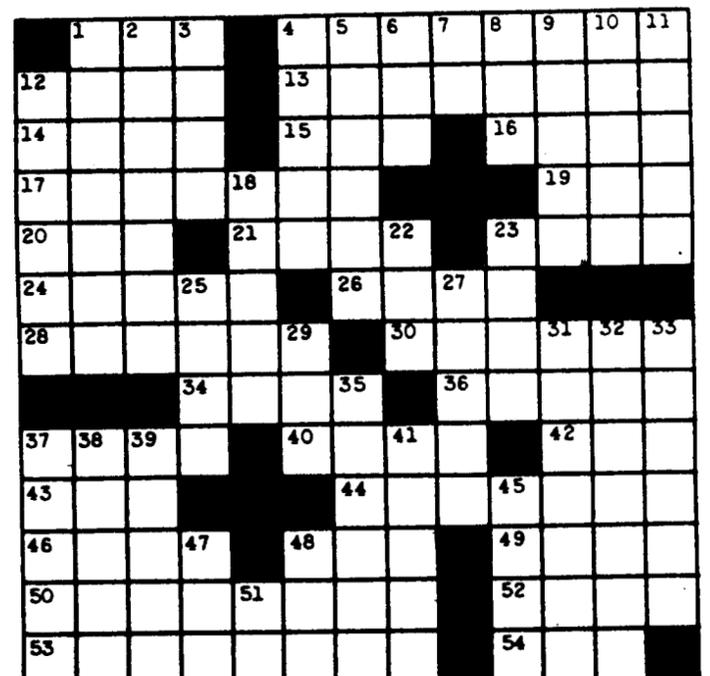
THE SUN ALSO SETS-- READER Photographer Mark W. Clauser captured this awe-inspiring sunset near the Main Building last week.

ACROSS

- 1. Diamond club
- 4. Hopeful one
- 12. Curved span
- 13. Turkish sword
- 14. Daytona 500, for one
- 15. Minded the baby
- 16. Nudge
- 17. Nemesis
- 19. Born
- 20. Improper; disorderly
- 21. On the briny
- 23. Four-posters
- 24. Archetypal
- 26. Shaped like an inverted bowl
- 28. Pamper
- 30. Sunflower State
- 34. Former Russian ruler
- 36. Austere
- 37. "House" in Seville
- 40. Nevada city
- 42. In the past
- 43. Ersatz; unnatural: abbr.
- 44. Birch Bayh or Lawton Chiles
- 46. Peruse
- 48. Diminutive
- 49. Geometric function
- 50. "Knight of the road"
- 52. Stopovers
- 53. Personal items
- 54. Personal data item

- 3. In that case
- 4. Blockheads
- 5. Alarmed
- 6. Poe's "The — and the Pendulum"
- 7. Common contraction
- 8. Actor Torn
- 9. Make up (for)
- 10. Without covering
- 11. Corners
- 12. — numerals (1, 2, 3 etc.)
- 18. Strong winds
- 22. Excellent: hyph. wd.
- 23. Propensity
- 25. Nick Charles' dog
- 27. Stonecutter
- 29. Thick black liquid
- 31. Reception arrangement
- 32. World War I French battle site
- 33. Dormitory sounds
- 35. Express displeasure at
- 37. Slice with finesse
- 38. Pertaining to a region
- 39. Olivier's milieu
- 41. Requires
- 45. Polo's destination
- 47. Foal's mother
- 48. Came through
- 51. Exist

CROSSWORDS



DOWN

- 1. Blustery conduct
- 2. Consents

GSU NEWS

By Francis Guidarelli

The Graduate Student Union (GSU) elected a new set of officers for the 1981 academic year. The new officers include: President, Roya Salmassion (MPA); Vice-President, Raj Varma (M Adm); Secretary-Treasurer, Francis Guidarelli (MPA); and, Mia Reynoso (Masters Psycho-Social Science), who serves as Public Relations Officer.

Graduate students are encouraged to join the club, or talk with any of the officers and members about matters which affect graduate students, such as early tuition payments, career planning, and social activities.

On Thursday, April 30, the GSU sponsored a reception from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Gallery Lounge. Graduate students and faculty spent a relaxing time meet-

ing over coffee and cookies. More than 40 students found time to stop by, and many were pleasantly surprised to find a graduate organization on campus.

The GSU has scheduled other activities, including an informal discussion about career planning, and a post-exam colloquy at a local restaurant.

On Wednesday, May 20, the GSU will sponsor another get together from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Gallery Lounge. Grad students and faculty should plan to drop by either before class, during a break, or before going home. Meet some old friends and make some new ones. Graduate education is a demanding business. If students work together to pool their energy and ideas, Capitol Campus graduate education can become a more productive and enjoyable experience.