

NATION

Mascots: The Nittany Lion is accounted for, jury still out on many others

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National On-campus Report

What's in a name? According to Shakespeare, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet - and have just as many thorns. But what about the names colleges choose for their teams and the mascots that represent them? Now, that's a different story.

Mascots tend to be animals: The world of college mascots is teeming with lions and tigers and bears - and other such ferocious beasts.

Some schools are particular, with an animal representative of the state or region: the University of Michigan Wolverines, the University of Arkansas Razorbacks, the University of Florida Gators, and the University of Texas Longhorns - to name only a few. But what region do the Nittany Lions represent? Are they indigenous to the Pennsylvania State University campus? And for regional animals, you can't beat the University of Missouri-Kansas City Kangaroos. No geography majors at UMKC, it seems.

These are all some tough critters. But what about the Texas Christian University Horned Frogs? It's enough to strike fear in the hearts of ... the University of Oregon Ducks, the University of South Carolina Gamecocks, the University of Maryland Terrapins, or the Temple University Owls!

Some push their animal instincts into unusual realms. For instance, take the Evergreen State College (Wash.) geoducks. Webster says it's a large edible clam with siphons several feet long, that lives deep in the sandy mud along the Pacific coast. Maybe so, but it makes one ugly mascot.

Then there are schools that bug their opponents with six- and eight-legged mascots. We find for example, the Kalamazoo College Hornets, the University of Wisconsin-Superior Yellowjackets, and the University of Richmond Spiders.

Some nicknames are serendipitous. For example, the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point decided on the obvious - Pointers. But what if the campus had been located a few miles away in Junction City - the Junkers? There are some interesting regional representatives. A few favorites: the University of North Carolina Tarheels, the University of Nevada-Las Vegas Runnin' Rebels (running far from the Old South!) and the West Virginia University Mountaineers.

But sometimes regionalism can raise questions. Are there still Boilermakers around Purdue University? Can the Buckeyes of Ohio State University terrify anyone? (And how does a horse chestnut overcome its adversaries anyway?) And why the Hoosiers for Indiana University? What's a Hoosier anyway? Webster says "an awkward, unhandy or unskilled person, an ignorant rustic." Now that's a mascot to inspire students to greater heights!

Some mascots are historic artifacts. Michigan State University continues the



file photo
George Young, Coordinator of the PSH Residence Living Program, and Brian Humble, former Assistant Coordinator, visit the Nittany Lion Shrine at University Park in this 1988 photo.

Penn State's mascot is named for the mountain lion that roamed Mt Nittany and Nittany Valley near the University Park campus before Penn State was founded in 1855.

Spartan tradition after 2000 years - but where are the archrival Athenians? - and the University of Southern California keeps Trojans on our minds.

But why should history be limited to facts, when it can be rewritten on the playing fields? For example, we have the Beloit College Buccaneers: Just how close did pirates actually get to south central Wisconsin? And the University of Idaho Vandals? When you're done conquering Europe, got to Moscow ... Idaho?

Another point: nobody wants a wimpy mascot. At least not at the University of Central Florida. Recently student government leaders at UCF have been pushing to replace the current Mac the Knight - who has an image problem since a recent ad campaign for a national

fast-food chain - with Knightstalker, a big burly individual with spikes on his shoulders and a big club.

A few recent name changes have been in response to charges of racism, as when the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse changed from "Indians" to "Eagles." At their cousin campus, in Whitewater, the Warhawks have been in hot water to change their name. Last year, St. John's University and Northeastern State University replaced their Indian mascots as well, while St. Mary's College (Minn.) Cardinals dropped their nickname, Redmen.

Other schools have had problems with another type of mascot - the satanic. Some people have voiced opposition to such mascots as the Blue Devils of Duke University or the

Arizona State University Sun Devils. If Duke can't convince critics that blue devils are just a type of flower, maybe they might be converted to another inspiration, along the lines of the Mount Senario College (Wis.) Fighting Saints. Or join the ranks of the Crusaders - with the College of the Holy Cross, Valparaiso University and a small army of others.

How about mascots that are really wild, dangerous, out of control? We're talking about the weather - and we can't do anything about the University of Miami Hurricanes or the Iowa State University Cyclones. Then there's the awesome force of the sea in the University of Alabama Crimson Tide. But Mother nature turns from power to peacock with the University of Hawaii Rainbows. Go, 'Bows, go!

No matter what mascot is chosen, there's always the question of live performances at sporting events and rallies. The Lakeland College (Wis.) Muskies can dress a fan in fins and scales - or opt for a large aquarium and the real thing. But what costume can you devise for a Hurricane.

If you decide to go with a real animal, there may be problems. The death last year of Shasta V, the cougar at the University of Houston, has split the campus community. The Alumni Association wants to replace Shasta, while the Faculty Senate has voted to oppose replacement. And if dorms don't allow cats or dogs, is campus really a good home for a cougar?

But perhaps the biggest problems for most of us are philosophical. What are the Georgetown University Hoyas anyway? Are they related to the Virginia Tech Hokies? And what about the St. Louis University Billikens - animal vegetable, or mineral? But such names have a certain obscure charm.

What about colleges in other countries? In Japan we find the Doshiba University Hamburgers. Hmmm ... it probably loses something in the translation.

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