

PERFORMING KNIGHTLY

By Bill Glovin

Win or lose, Rutgers' mascot always tries to get the fans involved in the game. But there's more to the role than meets the eye.



The Scarlet Knight needed to do something. The basketball team was behind, and the crowd was dying. He thought it might help to have a small boy participate in some towel-waving hoopla. "I handed the towel to this little kid, but instead of waving it, he blows his nose in it and hands it back to me," says the Knight. "I'm glad I didn't abuse the kid because I later found out it was Coach Theresa Grentz's son."

Such are the antics of Rutgers' answer to the Temple Owl and Penn State's Nittany Lion. A Rutgers tradition for 36 years—not long compared to the Knight's rivals—the mascot has been referred to as the sixth man on the basketball court and a great way to get the crowd involved in football. The importance of a mascot may be debatable, but one thing is evident: There's considerably more to it than meets the spectator's eye.

Before Bruce Barrios decided to relinquish the role this spring because of the demands it placed on his life as a junior engineering student, the Knight steadfastly refused to reveal his identity. "If you knew who Mickey Mouse was, it would take away from the character," says Barrios, who played the Knight for three years. "I don't let anyone see me getting dressed, and I don't go around campus bragging that I'm the Knight."

But at the last home basketball game he had a change of heart. Asked to remove the Knight's headpiece so he could be recognized for his years of service, he just couldn't bring himself to reveal his identity in costume because of the way children identify with the character. But he did agree to come out at halftime in his civilian clothes, and he received a standing ovation. "Being seen as a person felt really weird," says Barrios. "People told me I turned red—no, make that scarlet—from embarrassment."

More often than not, it's fate that brings someone into the role of mascot, and Barrios was no exception. Parking cars at home basketball games to

Up and away: The Scarlet Knight goes up for a slam dunk, right, at a home basketball game.





In the seventies, Professor William Bauer helped design a metal-and-fiberglass horse named Old Queenie that served briefly as Rutgers' mascot.

gain free admission, he was fascinated by the Knight, who he believed was an integral part of the action. Someone mentioned that the Knight's alter ego, Steve Ostergren, was graduating, and that try-outs were planned. Winning the competition was "just a matter of lucking out," Barrios says modestly.

Barrios might have had second thoughts about taking the job if he would have had to become the University's previous mascot, a chanticleer, named for a local restaurant that supplied the costume. In the early fifties, when the football team wasn't doing well, the opposition would see the chicken-like figure and crow at Rutgers' fans. In 1955, the football coach decided he'd had enough of the chanticleer. "It also didn't help that the costume was extremely hot and that the chanticleer's fraternity brothers got him loaded on wine during an important game and he collapsed under the goal post," says William Bauer, a professor emeritus and avid sports fan who has kept a close eye on Rutgers' mascots through the years. "For some strange reason, the costume got suspended, but the student didn't."

"The feeling was that poultry—even proud poultry—was inappropriate, and a change was needed," says Bob Smith, a Rutgers sports information officer.

A heated mascot debate ensued. Some wanted either a Dutchman or an Indian, which had both been Rutgers mascots in the past. Others lobbied for a red lion, the name of the New Brunswick tavern where the school's first classes were held. But administrators, who felt the decision should

be left to students, asked English professors to have their composition classes come up with ideas for mascots.

A sophomore, Oscar Karl Huh, conceived and promoted the Scarlet Knight, which had no historical connection to Rutgers. Following an election, Huh became the original Scarlet Knight. On November 3, 1956, he rode for the first time on a steed named Duke in a football game against Lafayette. For the next few years, a Knight with a helmet and cape rode up and down the sidelines. The cannons, bands, and crowd noise played on Duke's nerves, however, and at a football game in Princeton, Tiger fans surrounded the horse, which became so startled that it threw the poor Knight to the turf. Administrators were relieved that he didn't land on his sword.

When the University was unable to find a docile horse, the Knight not only became horseless, but practically anonymous. In the seventies, ceramics professor William Bauer and electrical engineering professor Charles Longo were asked to design a horse with an attached mechanical Knight to take the mascot's place.

"It was a beautiful creation made of metal and fiberglass, given to the Univer-

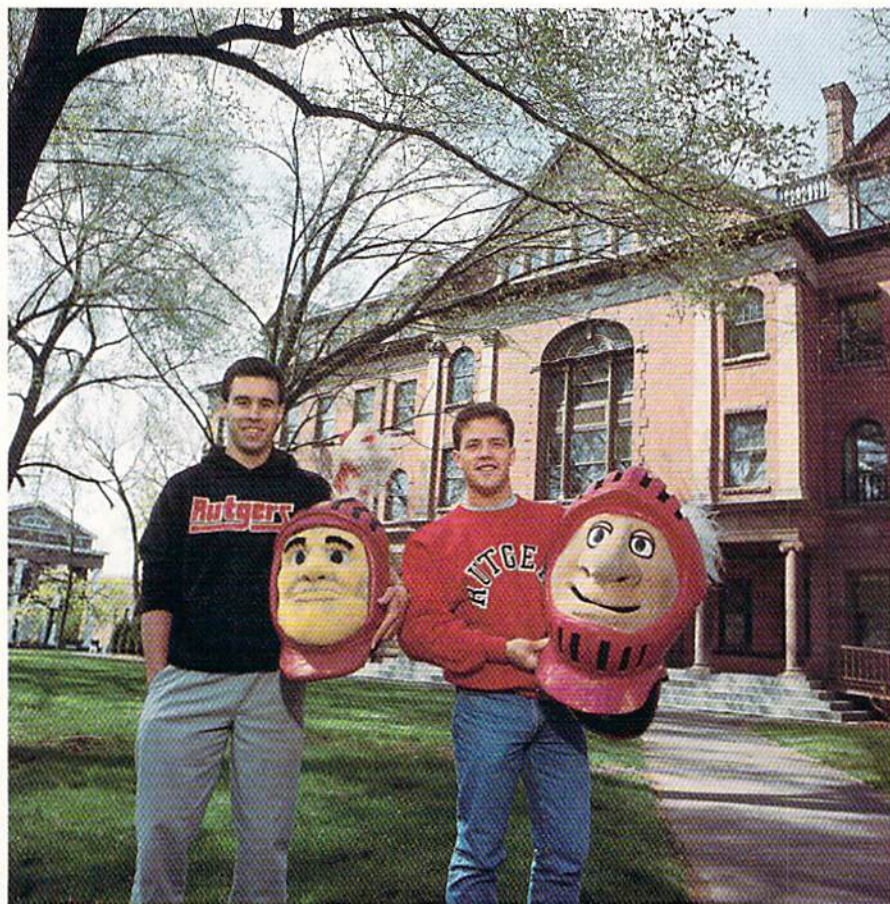
sity as a gift by the Class of '42," says Bauer. "Smoke blew out of the horse, and the Knight moved. Unfortunately, it was used only a few times."

"The thing was just too heavy," says Smith. "Two sizable students had to be positioned underneath just to move it." Now a University relic, the unusual creation—nicknamed Old Queenie—is still stored away in the Louis A. Brown Athletic Center.

After the Old Queenie experiment failed, horses were permanently removed from the act. Another idea was then tried: A group of women in red-sequined skin-tight body suits skipped and can-canned their way up and down the sidelines at football games. The athletic department, feeling that the act was inappropriate, quickly dropped the idea.

In 1983, sports fanatic Steve Ostergren arrived on campus and started a one-man movement to improve the mascot. He had played a rooster at Hillsborough High School—also Barrios' alma mater—and the athletic department liked his enthusiasm. They agreed to buy a costume if he could find an acceptable design. Ostergren contacted Stagecraft, a Cincinnati-based company that has designed costumes for

Thanks to Bruce Barrios and Steve Ostergren, the Knight has become a real attraction at games.



Disney Enterprises as well as for several universities. Among their creations are the Louisville Cardinal, the Virginia Cavalier, and the Wake Forest Deacon. Within a year, the Knight was once again a prominent fixture at Rutgers' games.

Still, it hasn't been all smooth sailing. First, the fiberglass flaps that held the Knight's arms in place snapped off before the first football game in 1984. Stagecraft quickly came up with a flexible revision, and the Knight was on his way to a healthy future. Then, two years later, the headpiece—known for its big, goofy grin—was stolen after a fall concert. The Knight missed the remainder of the football season and the entire basketball season while a replacement head was made.

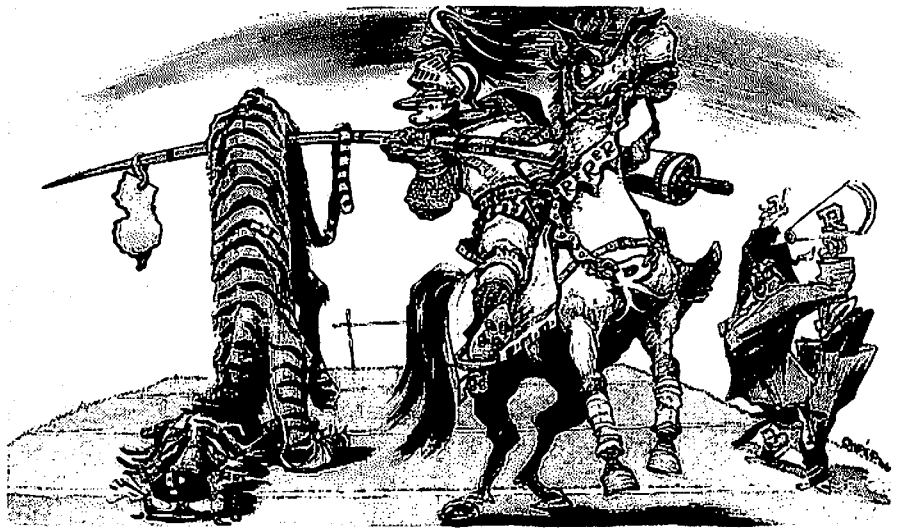
"In 1987 the missing headpiece was found hanging on the wall in a bar in Montclair," says Ostergren, who played the Knight for four years. "I called and reported it to the Montclair Police, but it disappeared. The following year someone spotted it at the bar again, and this time the Rutgers police were sent to retrieve it. It's now collecting dust somewhere in the back of the athletic center."

While Ostergren and Barrios say that playing the Knight can be extremely rewarding, they point out that it's not all fun and games. Ostergren recalls missing a trip to Cancun during spring break one year because he had to attend a road basketball game. Barrios says that there have been times when his services were required at a football game on Saturday afternoon, an event that evening, and at a basketball game on Sunday. "If you have a test on Monday, you've got little choice but to pull an all-nighter," he says.

But both are also quick to add that they wouldn't trade the experience of being the Knight for anything. "When you have that costume on, it's a feeling like, 'I'm the Knight, no spectator in the gym is better than me or in more control,'" says Ostergren, who now runs Scarlet Fever, a clothing store near the College Avenue campus. "Bruce has done a great job in the role. He was always moving and let the fans pass him over their heads all the way to the top of the stands. That helps those who aren't close to the action feel involved."

Allowing the fans to play "Toss the Knight" has become Barrios's signature of sorts, but it has also gotten him into trouble a time or two. "At an away game at Boston College the students got a little rough, and I could have fallen through a gap between the sections and broken my neck," says Barrios. "Some people just don't realize that there's a person inside the costume."

To help mascots avoid such pitfalls and learn the nuances of their trade, there's a



The Princeton Tiger and the Scarlet Knight duke it out in this cartoon from Bauer's collection.

Spirit Camp for university mascots from schools throughout the Northeast every summer. Held at Rutgers last year, the camp, among other things, uses Tom and Jerry cartoons to demonstrate how to exaggerate movements. It asks the quintessential question: What makes a mascot effective or able to achieve the kind of professional status of two of the best-known

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mascots in the country, the San Diego Chicken and the Phillie Phanatic?

For starters, says Barrios, nothing beats experience. Learning the do's and don'ts is a gradual process. Among a mascot's commandments are: Don't talk, Don't watch the game too much, Don't hurt the athletes' concentration, Don't cross the imaginary line into the opposition's territory, Do the unexpected, and Do keep it light.

Experience is where Barrios felt he had an edge over most of his rivals. After three years in the role, he's practically seen it all—from the mass frenzy of the NCAA men's basketball tournament to the great emptiness of thousands of unfilled seats at a football game in Giants Stadium.

Seeing items right in front of him, such as cheerleaders' megaphones and small children, is another matter. "The mask limits your field of vision," says Barrios. "It also can get awfully hot inside the mask, and the sweat literally pours into your eyes. It may seem like I'm clumsy at times, but it's mainly because I can't see."

The current headpiece design has been used for about seven years. Criticism from fans that the Knight doesn't resemble the real thing—coupled with a worn costume—will lead to a new look this fall. Before permanently passing his wooden sword on to his successor, Barrios hopes to redesign the costume.

"At the UNLV-Rutgers basketball game in Las Vegas this winter, I was intrigued by the Runnin' Rebels' foam-rubber shark," he says. "The material is more durable, easier to clean and adjust, and weather resistant. I'm going to give the shark a call so I can get more detail." Innovations may also include a more exaggerated look as well as new armor, leather, and boots.

Despite lacking the latest enhancements and the problems he had with keeping it clean, Barrios didn't find his costume too restricting—something he says is a problem for other mascots. "I didn't know what the [Arkansas] Razorback was when I saw it," says Barrios, reflecting on the mascot camp. "I expected to see something like a powerful boar, but instead it looked like a red Gumby. And the St. Joseph's Hawk is required to constantly flap. What good is flapping if it doesn't get the fans into it?"

Barrios also sees the Knight's role as more challenging than most of his rivals. "At Penn State, the fans cheer no matter what," he says. "All the Lion has to do is walk out on to the field and the fans go bananas. Our fans can be extremely loud,

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ment of Nachman's own lost letters—the written language of music.

He returns home, but his odyssey is not yet complete; he must go to Israel. In the Holy Land, in a desert cave, he confronts himself in an ultimate test of his own deepest values.

The book has been highly praised. The New York Times review says that "Mr. Leviant's engaging exploration of the spirit will seduce and delight readers of any faith—or lack thereof." Elie Wiesel comments, "It is the work of a gifted writer. Read it and you will plunge into an enchanting spiritual universe—filled with imagination, humor, and warmth—that to our deep regret exists no more."

View from the Bench

DOING JUSTICE: A TRIAL JUDGE AT WORK. By Judge Robert Satter. 256 pp. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc. \$9.95.

Judge Robert Satter (RC'41) disarms the reader of this unpretentious autobiographical account early on. Before becoming a judge, he writes, he ran for representative to the Connecticut state legislature—and won both the primary and the general election by exactly one vote: "That earned me the nickname 'Landslide Satter' and made me a legend in Connecticut politics," he observes wryly.

But it is his experiences as a judge that occupy this book. In conversational style, Satter invites courtroom-drama fans to join him in deciding what justice is for the real human beings who come before his bench: Who should have custody of a five-year-old boy—the father who has raised him from infancy or the mother who, having straightened out her life, now wishes to reclaim him? Did police chasing a stolen car cause the accident that cost a passing motorist his leg—or was it the car thief alone who was responsible? And can a couple who decide to break up and sell their home after an angry quarrel cancel the sale contract if they reconcile?

The wide range of cases the book describes is a result of Connecticut's

unique court system, Satter explains. The Connecticut Superior Court is a trial court for all sorts of cases—jury trials and those heard by a judge alone, including traffic cases and murders, personal injury claims and juvenile arrests, divorces and landlord-tenant disputes.

For the presiding judge, the law is occasionally ambiguous, and sometimes legal precedents conflict. "Then the judge's scholarship, his judgment, and ultimately his values come into play," Satter writes. In revealing his own soul-searching struggles to reach the most equitable decision, he gives reassuring evidence that the often-cumbersome American judicial system can, sometimes at least, dispense real justice.

The Arabic Connection

SANDMAN. By Richard Martins. 292 pp. New York: Atheneum. \$18.95.

The names in Richard Martins' (RC'63) timely spy thriller read like recent headlines: Riyadh, Mecca, Baghdad, Hezbollah, Qadhafi, Arafat. For this is a midwestern tale of Middle East intrigue, Arab terrorists, and an American professor who knows more than most of us ever will about Farsi, Berber tea-drinking customs, and the traditional recipe for *fuul*.

The professor, Philip Hallet, pursues his Middle East specialty at a private think tank in Chicago. His colleagues know he's an alcoholic; what they don't know is he's also an intelligence professional who runs a network of deep-cover Arab agents known as the "Prophets."

The cast of characters includes a boy who is memorably blown up in an airport terrorist attack, an icy-eyed hired gun, Chicago mobsters, a think-tank philanthropist, a female FBI agent, and a rough-and-ready cop.

Hallet's operation, known only to the mysterious "Sandman," attracts police attention when several Muslim cab drivers are killed. From then on the story unfolds in bursts of mayhem and clouds of suspense, in an atmosphere as murky as anything by John LeCarre. □

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but they can also—if things aren't going well—be deadly silent. I just won't accept it. If I can't get them to chant *R-U*, I'll jump into the stands or do something to try to generate interest. At least our fans react like human beings, not robots."

Both former mascots say there's nothing like winning to help make the job enjoyable. Ostergren envies Barrios, who had more successful teams to cheer for. "There were times at basketball games when we were down by 20 before halftime against teams like Duquesne," says Ostergren. "At times, there's only so much you can do. It's a lot easier when your team is at least competitive."

Barrios regrets that he didn't keep a journal to record all the highlights, including Rutgers finally beating Penn State in football; sitting on top of the basket when the team won the A-10 championship; meeting Bill Cosby, Gregory Hines, and Dick Hale; and all the special encounters with children.

Before passing his headpiece on to his successor, Barrios has some advice: "Realize before you take the job that you'll have no more free time. The job is much more physically demanding than it looks. If you don't want to become ill, drink plenty of water—not just before the game but all the time. Develop your own character so that when you put on the costume, you simply react to the role rather than act to it. And if you think something new may work, don't be afraid to go for it."

Although the opportunities for going on to professional mascot ranks are limited, the idea of being paid for sideline antics has crossed both Ostergren's and Barrios' minds. Ostergren even contacted the New York Giants and Philadelphia Eagles about mascot jobs, without meeting much success. Barrios says he isn't optimistic about the odds of turning professional but that he, too, would welcome the opportunity.

They may be in luck. The new World League of American Football, an international spring league backed by the NFL, will include a team playing in the New York/New Jersey area called, coincidentally, the Knights. "Maybe they'll be looking for someone with experience," says Barrios. "It might be time to start putting a résumé together." It may even come to pass that Rutgers' two most-recent Knights may end up jousting for the job in front of the fans. □