



SOARING TO VICTORY, PLANTING A LEGEND

“How the Phoenix Squashed the Tomatoes” remains perhaps this University’s most endearing sports legend.

The official histories — the sanitized histories, some would say — note that Phoenix became the UW-Green Bay mascot in May 1970. That’s when students flocked to the polls for a pick-the-mascot contest and the mythical bird soared to victory.

The real story, it has been whispered on campus for years, is that Phoenix finished second, to Tomatoes. But visions of teams in tomato-red jerseys and shouts of “C’mon Tomatoes, ketch up” died on the vine as sinister forces foisted Phoenix upon the campus community.

In truth, 22 years later there is at least fuzzy evidence to support Tomatoes’ claim to the mascot mantle.

That Tomatoes was on the ballot is undisputed. An election-eye preview in the student newspaper, the Fourth Estate, carried sketches and supporting statements for each entry. Backers of Tomato touted its virtues as a distinctive, environmentally correct fruit with a cheerful disposition.

Competition was keen. A \$100 cash award drew more than 40 entries from students at UW-Green Bay and its two-year campuses in Marinette, Menasha and Manitowoc.

The Earthmen, Eco-nauts, E-Gulls (“they clean up the environment”) and The Environmentalists played to a primary academic emphasis of the new

University. Bisons, Dolphins, Sharks and Beavers (“a large rodent important to our area’s ecology”) also billed themselves as environmentally friendly. Nicolets paid homage to a 17th century European explorer, while Loggers boasted a hard-working outdoors spirit.

Supporters of the GeeBee Guzzlers said their nickname would pertain to a greedy thirst for knowledge, although the sketch submitted depicted a red-nosed little man peering from a mug.

Other suggestions included Apollos, The Aquarius, Buccaneers, Centaurs, Explorers, Gladiators, Grem-lins, Horsemen, Hydros, Spartans, Vulcanists and Zeppelins. The entry Phoenix was submitted by the Omega Kappa fraternity.

Organized by the student government association and the student newspaper, the election was the talk of campus. It was also tainted by allegations of fraud.

“It was obvious that it wasn’t the most scrupulously policed election ever conducted,” remembers former chancellor Edward Weidner, smiling.

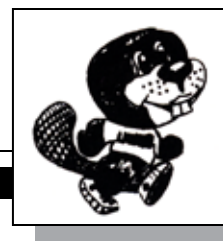
A source close to the election, Green Bay resident Nancy Phoenix, Class of 1979, hints at massive vote fraud on behalf of Tomatoes when she says, “Phoenix was the legitimate winner.” (Her recollections are presumably unaffected by her 1978 decision to adopt Phoenix as her last name.)

Donna Scheller Lipper, ’71, another election official who now lives in New York, says flatly, “Phoenix did not win. The real winner was just so ludicrous that we decided to toss it.”

Patrick Madden, ’71, claims to know the whole truth. And he paints himself as the man who canned Tomatoes.

“I was editor of the newspaper at that time and we were running the election,” Madden says, “On the last day before publication some guy came in with a sketch of a tomato he had made in blue ink on notebook paper.”

Madden had to retouch the art before it could appear in the newspaper on the official ballot. When Tomatoes squeaked to a 10-vote victory, as Madden tells the story, he went back to the rule book and made a judgment that the original drawing had



not met the requirements for a “reproducible drawing.” Phoenix was declared the winner, on a technicality.

Local media accounts of the time made no mention of Tomatoes, and no vote totals were provided. The election took place in late May at the very end of the second semester. By the time students returned in fall, the noble Phoenix had replaced the school’s unofficial first-year mascot, a water-skiing Badger, and a symbolic link to the parent campus in Madison had been severed.

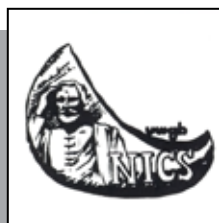
Madden, now a circuit judge in Iron County in northern Wisconsin, is satisfied justice was done.

“Phoenix was accepted right away, and there’s no question it has been a great nickname,” he says. “At the time, no one complained about the results.”

Weidner, amused but skeptical, maintains the legend of a cliff-hanger election with Tomatoes at or near the top is a great tale, but apocryphal.

“You have to remember the people involved,” Weidner says. “They were serious-minded students but they also had a great sense of humor. I know they had a lot of fun with that election. I think they’re still having fun with it.”

The GeeBee Guzzlers, E-Gulls, Beavers and Tomatoes were among 40 contenders in a 1970 mascot contest at UW-Green Bay.



Official accounts say Phoenix, Nicolets and Loggers finished 1-2-3 in the 1970 mascot contest at the new University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Greg King, then a member of Omega Kappa fraternity and now a St. Louis-area physician, claims credit for suggesting Phoenix.



PHOENIX IS HOT!

The UW-Green Bay Phoenix — the bird, not the basketball team — scored a three-point play this past season with a new-look

logo, a fresh mascot costume and a new licensing program.

The first of the changes came last year when the Phoenix logo underwent cosmetic surgery at the hands of UW-Green Bay graphic artist Steve Martinson. The new bird is now seen on sportswear, team jerseys, official publications, and in newspapers and on TV.

“It’s not such a radical departure that it makes all of the ‘old’ logos floating around seem outdated,” Martinson says. “Every inch was redrawn, but the major changes are that it has a more natural look. The flames are more of an integral part of the overall design and they don’t look like a broken egg-shell any more.”

The former logo design was adopted when UW-Green Bay entered NCAA Division I in 1981. Prior to that, the University had used as its

athletics logo an assortment of drawings depicting a mythological phoenix or the lower-case block letters “uwgb.”

The introduction of the new logo corresponded with the emergence of the Phoenix basketball teams into national prominence.

A new mascot costume was to follow. After the UW-Green Bay men reached the NCAA tournament in 1991, WNFL Radio launched a drive to raise nearly \$2,000 to replace the tattered, battle-scarred phoenix suit then in use. The new costume, less fierce but with more of an energetic, cartoon appeal, made its debut this past season.

The new collegiate licensing program is potentially the biggest Phoenix news of all.

The University formally initiated its licensing program in January, when it began requiring outside retailers to work only with licensed vendors. The agreement sets forth an 8 percent royalty payment on all goods bearing UW-Green Bay or Phoenix names and logos. The University reserves the right to inspect and reject goods deemed unsuitable.

Patrick Sorelle, manager of the Phoenix Bookstore, is director of the licensing program.

UW-Green Bay officials project a ballpark take of \$10,000 the first year for the program, with royalties split evenly between athletics and the campus general fund.

The phoenix, the mythological bird which consumed itself by fire after 500 years and rose renewed from the ashes, has changed its look as the UW-Green Bay logo.