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Big Dog on Campus —
The Greyhound as College Mascot

By Craig Pierce

From Bulldogs and Wildcats to Banana Slugs and Fighting Okra, collegiate nicknames range from the traditional to the peculiar. Fitting somewhere between such polemic extremes, five US colleges and universities call themselves Greyhounds. Just for the record:

- Assumption College (Mass.)
- Eastern New Mexico University (N.M.)
- University of Indianapolis (Ind.)
- Loyola College (Md.)
- Moravian College (Pa.)

While the history is imprecise, each school acquired the Greyhound moniker in the 1920s and 30s. During that era, most people only knew Greyhounds from what they witnessed at the track — an eye-popping combination of speed, strength and athletic prowess. Those more accustomed to retired racers strewn about their living rooms might find some humor in a team named after a lolling, sprawled couch potato.
Two of the schools, Loyola College and Moravian College, have integrated genuine, four-legged mascots into campus life.

A Priest, Russian Royalty and the Big Hound on Campus

When choosing a college, prospective students often cite considerations such as location, curriculum and school reputation. Father Francis Nash, the Alumni Chaplain at Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland said, “One student told me he came here because his mother fell in love with the Greyhound.”

And that’s not an unusual sentiment. Father Nash has been the Loyola College caretaker of four adopted Greyhounds for the past 20 years. At meetings with parents, high school students and guidance counselors, Father Nash often hears how a friendly, gentle Greyhound demonstrates “a family touch” on campus.

The most recent Greyhound addition is Nicholas III. Formerly known as Stainless Steel, Nicholas III wrapped-up his racing career in Florida and began the unique transition from track dog to college mascot. Father Nash had one request for Ethel Whitehurst at GPA/ Maryland. “The dog had to enjoy crowds.”

And, as Father Nash explained, indeed he does. “I picked him up at 7:00 a.m., and we had a meeting of the Alumni Board of Governors that day. I got him in and out of there quickly because I just didn’t know his habits and didn’t want him having an accident there.

That evening we had a Senior Social. It was very loud and crowded. After 10 minutes I had enough of the noise, but 10 minutes later, Nicholas wanted to go back in. We made four trips to the social, and this was his first night.”

When not participating in socials, athletic events and campus tours, Nicholas III lives a typical rescued Greyhound’s life. He can usually be found in Father Nash’s office lying across the sofa, “Students come across campus to pet Nicholas,” Nash said, “and they tell me ‘I really miss my dog.’”

This provides distinct advantages to Father Nash’s higher calling. A Greyhound promotes conversation with students Nash might not otherwise meet. “It makes me approachable,” Father Nash said of his reputation as “the priest with the dog.”

In fact, Father Nash envisioned this benefit before the first Loyola Greyhound was adopted 20 years ago. In 1988, Greyhound adoption was just bubbling to the surface of public awareness. While watching a Loyola soccer match, one of the students suggested adopting a Greyhound mascot. “In the name of school spirit, I thought it was a great idea,” Nash said.

“I said if we adopt a dog, I would keep it.” Father Nash then convinced the school Provost it would work. As the Campus Minister at the time, Father Nash understood this would be a comfortable way to meet the students. “Come play with the dog and not just to talk about God. It was a very good move.”

The school’s first Greyhound was Alexandra, “The woman who ran GPA/ Maryland at the time said she was the best Greyhound she ever handled. She really was the most regal and stunning Greyhound you would ever want to meet,” Nash said. He named her after the last Tsarina of Russia, and “figured she’d get much better treatment here than the real Alexandra received there.”

It’s impossible to dispute this was the case. “When I was teaching,” Nash said, “Alexandra would always come to class with me. She went to the office, receptions, socials and all over.”

Father Nash said Alexandra’s role as Loyola College’s first live mascot seemed to fit her quite naturally. “At a reception, she would make her way around the entire room greeting people as if it was her party.” Upon her passing, she was succeeded by Nicholas— in keeping with the Russian nobility theme.

“He loved crowds and people,” Nash said. “But Nicholas was more of an unruly boy—sort of like his master—he enjoyed annoying people.” He was followed by Nicholas II. And Father Nash soon discovered not every Greyhound loves big crowds. “He did love people,” Nash said. But Nicholas II never felt comfortable in arena settings.

This did not mean Nicholas II wasn’t loved and admired on campus. Father Nash learned of his passing while in Bangkok, Thailand. “Students created a wonderful college in memory of him.” In fact, Father Nash has always been struck by the condolence letters he’s received with each passing of a Greyhound mascot. “It’s always very moving to see how others observe and acknowledge my sense of loss.”

Because Nash spent 16 years heading Loyola’s study abroad program in Thailand, he found himself overseas — and away from his Greyhounds— several months at a time. During those times, a student’s family often took the campus mascot into their homes. “I’ve gotten to know some great families,” Nash said. “So often it’s because of the Greyhounds.”

Those connections aren’t limited to Loyola’s campus. “Did you ever notice how people who have Greyhounds can’t stop talking about them?” he asked. “I was in New York City with friends. Across the street someone was walking a Greyhound and I ran around the cars and taxis to chat them up...tell them I had a Greyhound too and they’re wonderful.”

Father Francis Nash: a Jesuit brother, priest, teacher and traffic-darting Greyhound ambassador. And what have Greyhounds taught a sage so educated and dedicated to matters of faith, spirit and goodwill? “Everything,” Nash said. “Just watching Nicholas’ tail is a wonderful thing. So many things make him happy.”

Then Father Nash paused and added, “They teach you openness...and gentleness.” At Loyola College it’s not always the classroom that provides its most important lessons.

A “Course” in Greyhound Football

About 150 miles northeast of Loyola College, the marching band thumps. College students turn away from tailgate parties. Pre-game anticipation simmers. Then it explodes as the school mascot leads the football team onto the field. Is it a portly bulldog slowly huffing toward the 50-yard line? Nope. Perhaps a Banana Slug oozing across the grass? Hardly inspiring. “Look in my binoculars, honey, the slug is wearing a knitted letter sweater!”

At Moravian College in Bethlehem,
Pennsylvania, the crowd locks in when Lightfoot and Shiloh — two rescued racers — enter through the gates. Then, at full, double-suspension, grass-flying gallop they zip diagonally across the field to the waiting arms of their owner, Linda Davis-Wallen. Fans are cheering. Players are pumped. The visiting team even pauses to watch — like the soft-spoken kid in the Mazda commercials. “Zoom Zoom.” Kick off for the Moravian College Greyhounds is minutes away.

Few colleges use a live mascot to open a football game with such a crowd-pleasing, adrenaline rush (though it’s admirable the University of Montana Grizzlies has refrained from the custom).

“It’s an exciting moment,” Marty Moyle said. Moyle works in the Moravian College Athletic Department, and is the de facto historian of their Greyhound mascot.

“Even opponents stop their pre-game activities and watch,” Moyle said. Well, not all of them. Apparently, unaware of the 70 lb hound sprinting across the field, Moyle added, “Lightfoot once scared the daylights out of a player from Susquehanna University.”

Unlike Loyola College’s Nicholas, Lightfoot and Shiloh live as typical household pets most of the week. Davis-Wallen is a Moravian College graduate and a volunteer for First State Greyhound Rescue (FSGR).

“Shiloh is usually flat out on her side next to our Coonhound/Brittany mix that I swear she has a mad crush on. Lightfoot spends most of his day sleeping in his favorite crate.”

But on football Saturdays and other special events, Davis-Wallen and her hounds continue a long and storied tradition at Moravian College. In the 1940s, Omicron Gamma Omega fraternity purchased a Greyhound from a racetrack and named him Ogo. He and the fraternity originated the game day sprints at Moravian College.

According to Moyle, Ogo’s successor earned the most acclaim. “Ogo II was, ‘everybody’s favorite pet away from home.’”

Fifty years ago, Ogo II hosted one of America’s most famous Greyhounds. Steverino (aka Lady Greyhound) was the mascot for Greyhound Bus Lines and she made frequent appearances on The Steve Allen Show.

“Sisterino was a goodwill ambassador and household symbol,” Moyle said. Steverino became the first spokesdog for “Be Kind to Animals” week, and appeared with Ogo II to kick off a game against local rival Muhlenberg College. During the visit, Steverino was awarded an Associate in Animal Letters diploma from Moravian College. It earned a mention on The Steve Allen Show.

A couple more Ogos followed, but the tradition vanished from the early 1970s until 2004. “I never thought about it,” Davis-Wallen said. “We didn’t have a mascot when I was a student.” Then, during a Moravian Alumni Day, Davis-Wallen was on campus with her hounds. A few older gentlemen commented that Lightfoot looked like their
old fraternity mascot. “They asked if I’d be interested in restarting the live mascot thing.”

The school approved. The renewed Greyhound sprints were slated for Fall 2005. Jen Esterly, a volunteer with FSGR, made racing silks in appropriate college and fraternity colors for each hound. Only one potential stumbling point waited on the horizon. Davis-Wallen doesn’t have a fenced yard. “This was going to be their first time off leash,” Davis-Wallen said. “I wasn’t sure what they’d do, and thought it could be a disaster.”

Davis-Wallen’s concern proved prophetic — at least from the local photographer’s viewpoint. Fraternity members closed the stadium gates as the football team gathered behind them. They unleashed Shiloh and Lightfoot. On cue they immediately raced diagonally across the field and directly to Davis-Wallen. The photographer didn’t expect them to be so fast. “He said he didn’t have time to set up a good shot,” Davis-Wallen recalled. “And just think,” she told him, “These were the losers.”

Beyond football game appearances, Lightfoot and Shiloh’s campus visits raise visibility about Greyhound adoption. They are joined by several hounds during each game at the FSGR meet-and-greet tent. “And it’s led to many adoptions,” Davis-Wallen said.

During a recent basketball doubleheader with the Moravian men’s and women’s team, Shiloh, Lightfoot and other rescued racers joined the Junior Greyhound Kids Club to raise funds for FSGR. They collected $1300.

While the experience has been helpful to Greyhound rescue in general, it has had a profound effect on one specific hound. Lightfoot was skittish and wary when he came off the track in 2003. “We could not get anywhere near his hindquarters, and he yelled and spun in circles if the leash got under a leg,” Davis-Wallen said.

After two years of routinely and gently running her hand down Lightfoot’s back, he learned to trust. “The old behavior stopped,” Davis-Wallen said. “But in the fall of 2005, when he started to run the football field, his personality really blossomed. He loves what he does at Moravian.”

In fact, just approaching campus elicits the kind of reaction most Greyhound owners witness whenever reaching for the leash. “Lightfoot starts stomping his paws and whining as we get closer and closer,” Davis-Wallen said. “He just knows.”

Not every visit to campus leads to an exciting romp across an open field. This past fall, Moravian College’s head track and field coach, Doug Pollard, passed away. “He loved the dogs,” Moyle said. “At his funeral, Lightfoot and Shiloh stood outside the church doors like silent sentries for a fallen Greyhound.”

The eternal question. An unlikely resource.

When asked about fallen Greyhounds of the four-legged variety, Loyola College’s Father Nash did not hesitate to share his thoughts about their ultimate destination.

Do all dogs go to heaven? For an answer, Father Nash did not consult the Bible or quote ethereal passages of Scripture. Instead he recalled a chance encounter and lengthy conversations he had with comedienne, Lily Tomlin.

During his former days as Campus Minister at Lemoine College in Syracuse, New York, Father Nash once volunteered three days as Lily Tomlin’s driver while she performed on campus. He paraphrased a recollection Tomlin shared from her childhood upon learning her father had died. “Yes, dogs go to heaven,” Father Nash said. “Because everything loved is going to be there. And we all love our dogs.”

Craig Pierce and his Greyhound Honey are heading back to school too, sharing his children’s book and educational program A Greyhound’s Tale: Running for Glory, Walking for Home. He can be reached at cpierce@ideate-prairie.com
More Greyhound Mascots

By Craig Pierce

Assumption College

A small Catholic school located in Worcester, Massachusetts, Assumption College's athletic teams were officially called the Blue and White. When a priest in the 1930s observed that the basketball team’s speed “resembled a bunch of Greyhounds,” the name stuck. (No word if the team also passed, dribbled and shot the basketball like a bunch of Greyhounds.)

The college was entirely French speaking until World War II. Even the Greyhound mascot was nicknamed Pierre. Visit the campus today, and you’ll see a statue commemorating Pierre along with a three-dimensional Greyhound relief built into a stone wall near the athletic facilities.

University of Indianapolis

Originally known as the Cardinal and Grey, the Greyhound name was applied to the scrappy football players of the University of Indianapolis during the late 1920s. More than twenty years later, the women’s athletic team name was changed from Buttercups to Whippets because they are “small and swift Greyhounds.” (Quaint might work in cottage décor; not necessarily so with team names. The women’s program has since adopted the Greyhound name.)

During the 1960s, a former athletic director provided a unique gift to the school: a retired Greyhound. The students nicknamed her Dixie. According to A History of The University of Indianapolis and its Legacy of Service, by Frederick Hill, Dixie “slept comfortably in a different room every night in Wilmore Hall.”

While no live mascots live on campus today, U Indy strongly advocates Greyhound rescue. In conjunction with GPA/Indianapolis, retired Greyhounds are part of alumni weekend, homecoming festivities and other social/athletic events. Students, alumni and Greyhound lovers living in Indiana can also order a specialty U Indy license plate bearing the striking Greyhound logo.
Eastern New Mexico University

The men's teams at ENMU have been called Greyhounds since 1934. The women's team adopted the moniker Zias in 1981 (named after the ancient sun symbol of the Pueblo Indian and a central part of the New Mexico state flag).

In 1966, a student wearing a bulbous, leather-maché Greyhound head became a forerunner to today's stunt-performing mascots. George Ross and his roommate discovered the mascot head tucked into a box in the dorm basement. The head was part of a Greyhound suit worn briefly five years earlier and promptly forgotten. The other parts of the suit were never found, so Ross fashioned a hybrid dog-meets-clown outfit with green pants, red suspenders and red sneakers.

He called his character Ralf, performed gymnastic stunts during athletic events, and became part of ENMU lore. According to a 1966 ENMU news article, “It is his antics that provide lighter moments to Greyhound spirit.” And the legend continues. The original Greyhound mascot head has gone missing once again….