

# Purdue Pete to Reveal Makeover

Life's been a whirlwind for Purdue Pete since the 1940 advertising logo first took human form in 1956. The always-silent character has lost his head in public, rallied fans at bowl games, helped out with a marriage proposal, broken his collar bone, and filmed an ESPN commercial.

The unofficial athletics mascot — the Boilermaker Special train holds the official title — has sported various looks over the years, too, from bug eyes to square ears and grins to scowls. One constant: his over-sized head.

By Kathy Mayer

This spring, he'll debut a new look, his first head-to-toe, one-piece outfit, with specifics under wraps until the April gold-and-black football scrimmage. "We are looking for a costume change, not a personality change," says Morgan Burke, director of intercollegiate athletics.

## 1940 logo came to life

Pete's story began in 1940 when University Bookstore hired California artist Art Evans to draw a logo. The grinning, muscular icon reflected a boilermaker tradesman with a mallet for molding steel and hat to keep grease out of his hair.

In 1944, the logo jumped from retail to academe, starring in Purdue's Debris yearbook. "Introducing Boilermaker Pete," a headline read, with Pete drawings appearing throughout in various outfits: with signs for the Marines, Army, and Navy; carrying a rifle; toting a hoe; and wearing a home economics apron among them.

Pete moved from page to personhood on September 28, 1956, at a pep rally before Purdue played Missouri, when student Larry Brumbaugh (ME'57) donned foam rubber padding, football shoulder pads, long black pants, sweater with a P, and a papier-mâché head.

Mrs. John Keltner from Brumbaugh's hometown, Union City, Indiana, made the head. Anne Ream (CFS'57) and graduate student Ona Russell sewed the costume.

John Knot (LA'59), the third Purdue Pete, from spring 1958 to spring 1959, says the head weighed 36 pounds. He lost it when he tackled Bucky Badger after the Wisconsin mascot stole his hammer. "I tackled him in the end zone, and the head fell off and rolled near the goal post," the retired radiologist recalls.

Image came before comfort, early Petes recall.

The second Pete, David Hull (AAE'58), today a profes-

sor of aerospace engineering and engineering mechanics at the University of Texas at Austin, says, "When I raised my arms to lead a cheer, the pads moved upward and the head scraped across my nose — very hurtful."

For David Knoll (IM'61), the fall 1959 Pete, the foam padding proved challenging. "It was raining, and raining hard," he says of a game day. "The foam rubber inside the sweatshirt soaked up so much water, it felt like I was carrying a weighted vest."

Poor Pete lost his head again in 1962, according to the "Purdue Pete History" on the Engineering Computer Network Web site. The head flew out of the back of the Boilermaker Special on the drive back from an Iowa City game and never was found.

In 1963, Pete took on a new look that lasted a dozen years. Still sporting the square hat, he was fat-cheeked and big-eyed.

"My head was pretty big, heavy, and bulky, but it also sported a big friendly smile," recalls Pete Bodine (T'73), now an Attica, Indiana, Harrison Steel Castings mechanical engineer.

The head size was limiting, says James Jenness (LA'75), Pete in 1974 and 1975, now a retired farmer in Chrisman, Illinois. "The head was so cumbersome that not much could be done other than just being there."

It was also a target. Jenness's standout memory: "The trip to Ann Arbor, when we were shellacked 51-0, the temperature was around zero, and my head was (I guess) the best available target for snowballs."

Next came a boyish look with an all-fiberglass, less cartoon-like head in 1976, created by Van Betulius (A'76) with help from an Evansville, Indiana, artist.

Tweaks to the eyes followed the next year, along with protruding ears, says Moe Jackson (IM'78), who was Pete

## Changing Looks Purdue Pete over the years.

### 1956 to 1963

The first human Pete wore a 36-pound papier-mâché head with bulging eyes, giant grin, and perched-high eyebrows.



**1963 to 1976**  
A wide head with boxy ears, rosy cheeks, sideburns, and a smaller, open-mouth smile appeared.

### 1976 to 1977

Pete's narrower fiberglass head weighed 50 pounds and sported bigger eyebrows, human-like eyes, and flat ears.



### 1977 to 1980

The hat got bigger, eyes bolder, and ears more pronounced. The five-foot-high head weighed a lot — some say 47 pounds, others 65.



**1980 to 1983**  
Pete's bushier eyebrows bunch up in a frown, his eyes are elongated, jaw squared, smile turned down; his head weighs 10 pounds.

### 1983 to 1989

Pete's smile returns, he dons a construction hardhat, and a chin strap makes the eyebrows wiggle.



### 1989 to Current

The newest head of Pete was designed and created by students in the Aeronautical Engineering Technology department. They make several heads out of composite materials over the course of the year and also fix the heads when they get damaged, whether from use or bumping into things.

# Memories He's Made



Pete Bodine 1973

## Seeing Red

Pete Bodine (T'73) let his father-in-law join him on the sidelines during an IU football game. Dad wore a red coat, rooted for the wrong team, and was escorted out by security.

Jeffrey King (AAE'85) witnessed the 1985 IU chair-throw. "At the end of the game I ran to mid-court and danced on the Indiana emblem."

## Always a Flirt

Jeffrey Bell (T'93), Pete from 1992 to 1993 and now regional human resources manager for Worthington Industries in Valparaiso, Indiana, kneeled before a University of Illinois cheerleader and was kissing her hand when he learned she was a cousin of his girlfriend Susan, now his wife.

Current Pete Danny Runyon asked another Pete to help him propose. "He brought her down to the field to open up a large, wrapped present, which I popped out of."



Eric McClish with ESPN announcer Dick Vitale

## Midnight Madness

Eric McClish (S'00), now in Fishers, Indiana, and a captain for Republic Airways, helped present the Big Ten basketball trophy after Purdue won its third straight title. "Three Petes came onto the court holding one of the trophies." Two were student Petes, the third, then-president Steven Beerling.

from 1976 to 1978 and now owns Michigan Veterinary Supply Co. in Vermontville, Michigan.

Jackson remembers narrowly escaping Bloomington fans who tried to steal Pete's 47-pound head off his shoulders. "Fortunately, we were aided by IU's police."

## Pete, a legend

With the dawn of a new decade in 1980, the Pete logo now 40 and the human mascot nearly 25, it was time for a grownup look. Out stepped a scowling Pete with thick, furrowed eyebrows. The 10-pound head was a welcome lighter weight.

A fierce logo had been created five years earlier by Keith Butz, art director in the Telecommunications Center, and fans clamored for a tougher mascot, too. A 1979 athletics memo reads, "The head projects an image of a stupid, top heavy, wooden mascot," and recommends, "The face should look, if not highly intelligent, not like the village idiot."

Butz collaborated with Donald Carter, a designer in the office of publications, on a fierce look, a September 18, 1980, *Lafayette Leader* article reported. Pete still sported the grease-protecting hat, but the sweater was replaced by a jersey.

Perhaps that mean image helped Purdue beat Notre Dame in a last-second touchdown catch in 1981, one of David McGaughey's (A'84) fondest memories as Pete. Now a Lafayette, Indiana, financial advisor for Merrill Lynch, he also recalls Jim Rowinski's bank shot for a 1983 basketball win over Illinois.

By that game, though, fierce Pete had been replaced by a friendlier version. The little square cap was gone, and Pete wore a construction hard hat.

"The chinstrap made the eyebrows wiggle up and down," says Jeff King (AAE'85), today in sales at American Chemet Corp. in Vernon Hills, Illinois.

Pete's head weighed 12 pounds, a problem for Andy Gentry (LA'90), who had broken his neck in a high school wrestling meet. "I was miserable, my neck was extremely sore, and I could barely hold the head up after each event," he recalls.

The aviation technology department stepped in with a five-pound composite materials solution in 1989 that was also easier to move in.

The look has largely remained unchanged since. Christian "John" Coder (LA'92), Pete from 1989 to 1992 and now a public defender for the state of Tennessee, remembers frantic fun. "I did birthday parties, alumni functions, barbecues. I changed in restrooms and ducked behind cars to change."

Clothing funding was scarce, recalls Patrick Cottler (ID'95), Pete from 1994 to 1995 and today a biomedical researcher at Luna Innovations in Charlottesville, Virginia.

"We had one pair of old football pants we shared and rough football jersey replicas. For basketball, we just wore shorts and a black shirt with gold block P. My mother made one for us since the previous one was almost gray from laundering."

In 1995, Petes started painting their hats in different designs, says Josh Rutherford (CFS'98), Pete from 1995 to 1998 and now owner of six downtown Chicago restaurants.

His favorite memory: making a backward hoop shot during halftime at the 75th anniversary of Purdue Basketball. He also broke his collarbone when fans piled on during a bit of horse-play with Bucky Badger.

In 2006, the idea of a soft-sculpture Pete was floated but dropped.

So far, 73 male Purdue students have played Pete, some for multiple years. Stints as Pete have been popular with students in Alpha Gamma Rho; the ag fraternity boasts about 20 brothers chosen to be Pete.

During Pete's first 22 years, one student covered all appearances. From 1978 to spring 1990, two students shared duties, then three a year did until 1993. Since then, three or four students have served each year.

## New era begins

Now, it's time for a new look, say athletics, marketing and media, and branding and advertising representatives.

"Purdue Pete has undergone numerous changes in his history, so we are exploring how we can improve the mascot's look," Burke says.

Also, at \$2,600 each, heads are pricey, and each student needs a custom-fitted one. Some children are frightened by Purdue Pete. And, says Rwititi Roy, director of branding and advertising, "Pete has a poor retail presence right now. People don't buy him."

Roy spearheaded research that included surveys at athletic and alumni events, focus groups, a look at other mascots, and a review of how other characters, such as Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny, have evolved.

Overall, she reports, respondents found Pete cartoony and mean. "Our goal is to make Purdue Pete more friendly," Roy says, and to communicate strength, determination, and heroism. And the full-body costume will allow anyone to play Pete.

"We'll characterize Pete as heroic and approachable rather than childish and scary," says Teri Thompson, vice president of marketing and media.

Some Boilermakers welcome the change, others resist. A Facebook page, Save Purdue Pete (again), has nearly 5,000 members. One asks, "What's next, changing the Boilermaker Special to an SUV?"

Freshman Matt Altepeter, born in Boilermaker country after today's look debuted, says, "I don't think it will be that big a deal. It will still be Purdue Pete. But it would be odd if they made him a big furry thing."

Knote, who wore the first design, says, "I hope the next Pete visage is one of pleasantry and strength."

One former Petes weighing in: Cottler wants "a blue-collar everyman fan of Purdue"; King, "fearless and determined, but not mean or angry"; and Jackson, "powerful, inspiring."

Former Pete Sean O'Connor (LA'02), says, "I'd like to see a more modern costume used, something like Nebraska, University of Virginia, or Vanderbilt's. They seem to have made the transition from fiberglass heads on human bodies to full costumes."

**P** Kathy Mayer is a freelance writer. Former cheerleader Tom Eckel helped by providing a list of former Purdue Petes.

## Family Affair

Charles "Shorty" Whittington (A'68) was Pete in 1968. His son, John Whittington (A'96), picked up the hammer from 1994 to 1996. Today, they're entrepreneurs together in several Grammer, Indiana, ventures.



Charlie Nichols with coach John Wooden

Charlie Nichols (A'04) was Pete from 2001 to 2003, and brother Woody Nichols (A'09) followed in 2007-2009. Charlie's favorite memory: meeting famed basketball coach John Wooden. Woody's favorite memory: being flown to New Orleans by an alum to have Purdue Pete present an award.

## On the Road

Vernon Pratt II (EDU'07) loved traveling to Hawaii with the 2006 football team. "I had Thanksgiving dinner with the team, spent a few days in Hawaii, and got to cheer the team on as Pete from the field."



Vernon Pratt II

## Lives on in E-mail Addresses

Years as the popular mascot are memorialized in many e-mail addresses of former Petes. They include purduopete, xpurduepete, purpete, purduepete, and pastpete.