

# At ASU, Impersonators, Clowns And Missed Free Throws

BY ZACH HELFAND

© 2015 Los Angeles Times

TEMPE, Ariz. — Swim caps peek out from behind a door a short jog away from the basketball court. It's nearly showtime, and three synchronized swimmers, young men wearing only trunks and fake beards, await their cue.

When called, they are to scramble to a spot behind the closest basket. Thousands of fans will be counting on them. One person — the player preparing to shoot important free throws — will be trying to ignore them.

Backstage, in a tunnel connecting the court to the bowels of the arena, there is one final rehearsal. The swimmers drop to the ground, kick their legs not quite in unison, then rise slowly until they are standing, bare shoulders touching, arms not so gracefully draped above their heads.

They exchange looks: not bad. But can they help Arizona State win the game?

Student sections throughout college basketball try to unnerve opposing shooters with bursts of noise or by waving their arms or props. What Sun Devils students, the 942 Crew, offer is more creative — and wacky — than that:

The Curtain of Distraction. It rises during the second half of home games when the opposing team is shooting free throws toward the Arizona State student section.

Just before the first shot, the curtain flashes open and an act appears. The skit, lasting about five seconds, might involve a celebrity impersonator, Shakespeare or a kitten. Most likely, it will include some type of shirtless gyrating, a recurring theme.

The goal is to spook the shooter, to divert his attention just enough so that his shot clanks off the rim. And it works, the numbers suggest. Statistics show an extra miss or two per game — enough to swing some outcomes.

Surprise is key, and on this night the swimmers are the headliners. The theme is meant as a jab at the UCLA Bruins, whose home arena was flooded after a water main burst in July.

As the performers wait for a foul to be called, there are all the jitters of opening night on Broadway.

"It's a damn good thing we're not self-conscious," one of the swimmers says.

A whistle blows. A UCLA player will be heading toward the free-throw line.

From the tunnel, there is a mad dash toward the court.

## Attendance Booster

A few years ago, student attendance at Arizona State basketball games had fallen to what school officials called a "horribly bad" level.

The university responded with a marketing push designed to encourage students to be more invested in the team. They created the 942 Crew. The number was roughly the capacity of the home arena's student section, rounded down to rhyme with "crew."

By the time last season came around, student attendance had nearly tripled from 2010 and there was a different goal. Somebody noticed that opposing teams were actually making more free throws when down at the student section end of the court. Embarrassing. Something had to be done.

Student leaders adopted a patron saint in Speedo Guy, a Duke fan whose antics famously helped the Blue Devils defeat rival North Carolina in 2003. Speedo Guy got Duke's typically raucous student section to fall silent, then stripped down to his swimming trunks. During a free throw, he crouched on his seat, then rose slowly — he compared it to a flower

blooming — and started gyrating.

North Carolina missed both shots and a legend was born.

There were several brainstorming sessions as Arizona State plotted an adaptation. One idea called for a Brick Wall of Distraction, but no one could figure out how to quickly move it into place. A jack-in-the-box concept was scrapped because space in the box was too cramped and hot.

Finally, student Tim Schodt had a breakthrough: the curtain.

At the time, no one really knew how the idea would develop.

The students bought plastic piping, attached fabric and went about creating their acts. They made things up as they went, figuring they would push forward, senior Ryan Dytrt recalls, "until we got in trouble, or until it exploded."

It exploded. The core group of students who work on the performances has swelled to about three dozen. During last year's NCAA tournament, the curtain was shown briefly during a commercial. This season, the group has been profiled by media outlets from as far away as Italy.

With the added attention, the skits have become more topical and intricate.

For a recent game against USC, there was a re-creation of the Sun Devils' stunning, Hail Mary victory over the Trojans in football. It included a quarterback, a wide receiver, several USC defenders, a (human) football and roles for the two USC fraternity brothers who were shown after the game-winning pass, mouths agape, on the television broadcast of the game.

All that action fit seamlessly into just a few seconds.

Better still, for Arizona State, the shot missed.

## A Professor's View

Zombies, ballerina dancers and creepy clowns have emerged from behind the curtain. At a planning meeting before the UCLA game, a student was sought to perform Hamlet's soliloquy to Yorick's skull.

The best indicator of a successful act is whether it draws the shooter's attention.

Joan Vickers, a professor at Canada's University of Calgary, says the curtain works because it disrupts the crucial period before a shot, called the "quiet eye," when the brain calibrates for distance, direction, height and other factors.

When the curtain opens, it can disturb the shooter's brain calibration.

"It's a brilliant idea in terms of disrupting the neural networks underlying control of your whole shooting system for that particular shot," said Vickers, who pioneered research in the field. "Very rational."

This season, opposing teams have missed 5 percent more free throws in the second half than the first. Separate analyses by The New York Times and students at Harvard suggest that the curtain is worth between one and two points per game. And Arizona State has played plenty of nail-biter home games.

The Sun Devils are 13-3 at home, and have defeated Oregon by one in overtime, No. 7 Arizona by three and USC by three.

## 'Be Over-The-Top'

During the UCLA game, the lead changes 17 times and the crew senses another opportunity to make a difference.

Urgency is in the voice of Bill Kennedy, an associate athletic director who doubles as stage manager.

"OK, unicorns," he barks

to cast members who will appear in one of the scenes, pointing the blade of a plastic saber for a little extra effect. "You guys just go out and be over-the-top, making out."

The first skit is a spoof directed at the game's television announcers, Bill Walton and Dave Pasch. Two students have dressed as the pets the broadcasters frequently mention on the air.

The problem is, UCLA's Tony Parker shoots his free throws before the dog and cat are ready. He makes both shots, and the animals scamper away dejectedly.

As the swimmers prepare for their chance, the dog offers a warning: "They shoot very quickly," he says. There is a solemn nod from each of the swimmers.

When the whistle blows again, the swimmers rush to their marks.

UCLA's Kevon Looney toes the foul line. The curtain flashes open. The swimmers cavort.

Looney misses one and the crowd cheers. He misses another and there is a roar.

The actors whoop and high-five as they run back up the tunnel. The Curtain of Distraction has been drawn on two UCLA points.

The game goes on, as does the show. Cows, fake bands and a Miley Cyrus (not-so) look-alike burst into view, then disappear.

The game is in doubt until the final possession. Arizona State wins. The margin?

Two points.

ZACH HELFAND/LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS  
Arizona State alumnus Nate McWhortor tries to distract a UCLA free-throw shooter.



### Family Medicine

**Women and Heart Disease**

Many people believe that only elderly people and men have heart attacks. The fact is that heart disease is the number one killer of women, causing one in three deaths each year. According to the American Heart Association (AHA), 90 percent of women have one or more risk factors for developing heart disease. The symptoms of heart disease can be very different in women versus men and therefore may go unrecognized and misunderstood. Heart disease affects the blood vessels and cardiovascular system. Atherosclerosis, a condition that develops when plaque builds up in the walls of the arteries, can narrow the arteries, making it harder for blood to flow through. If a blood clot forms, it can stop the blood flow. This can cause a heart attack or stroke. Prevention of heart disease is key. Women can make choices every day to reduce their chance of developing heart disease, including:

- \* Don't smoke
- \* Get your blood pressure under control
- \* Know your family history
- \* Lose weight
- \* Manage your blood sugar
- \* Lower your cholesterol
- \* Stay active
- \* Eat healthy

Women need to visit with their healthcare providers about their risk of heart disease and what they can do to reduce their risk.

\*\*\*Information from American Heart Association\*\*\*  
2525 Fox Run Pkwy., Lewis & Clark Medical Plaza, Yankton 260-2100

### Chiropractic

**Are there new options for chronic neck pain?**

Non-surgical spinal decompression is a relatively new technology used primarily to treat disc injuries of the neck. This form of treatment is safe and uses equipment to apply distraction forces to the spine in a precise and graduated manner. Distraction is offset by cycles of relaxation. Spinal decompression therapy unloads and gently separates the vertebrae from each other, creating a vacuum inside the discs that are targeted. The vacuum effect is also described as negative intra-discal pressure. This effect may cause the bulging disc to retract and offset the pressure on the nerve. It happens only microscopically each time, but cumulatively and over a period of four to six weeks, the results are quite dramatic. A proper exam and screening is important to determine if the patient is a good candidate for care. First Chiropractic Center uses spinal decompression therapy for patients and also accepts referrals for care from other providers.

2507 Fox Run Parkway, Yankton, SD, 665-8073

### Fitness/Health

**I have the exercise and weight loss blues and it's only two months into the new year! What can I do?**

If you're lacking motivation with your exercise plan, don't give up! At the start of the new year so many people have the excitement of a fresh start to their fitness plans. Perhaps monotony in the workout or lack of results on the scale have you feeling down or less motivated than when you began. Start collecting several types of measurable data such as the progress in your workouts, circumference measurements, weight, body composition and rating of your energy level, for example, to measure success against. That way you're more likely to find success at least in one or more categories. Mix up your routine. If you've just been on the treadmill for the last two months you need something new. Set up a visit with a trainer that can give you some new material and motivation! Last but not least, don't make exercise a chore. Exercise with a friend and find something that you both enjoy doing and you'll be more likely to stick with it.

501 Summit, Yankton • 668-8357

### Funeral & Cremation

**What if I change my mind?**

Any time a person makes a pre-arranged funeral trust, insurance or even information only, that is between them and the Funeral Home. There are various reasons that make a person want to change their mind. Moving to a different location, you feel you can get a better or more service else where, or you just want to. YES. You can and the funeral director of your choice will make all the arrangements for a transfer. He or she will do the paper work all you need to do is sign and let them do the work. That way there won't be any pressure from the other party. It is your money, your service, your choice and your right. What ever the reason you are in charge. We (as funeral directors) will always be there to help.

*Legacy Affordable*  
**Burial & Cremation Solutions**

1014 W. 8th St., Yankton • www.goglinfh.com  
665-4414 • 866-615-2906  
Open Mon.-Sat. 10am-4pm  
24 Hours by appointment

### Pharmacy/Nutrition

**What are probiotics and should I be taking them?**

Probiotics are live bacteria and yeast that are good for your health. They are found naturally in our bodies and can also be found in supplements and some foods such as yogurt, kefir and kombucha tea. Look for food labels that say "contains live cultures". Our bodies are full of good and bad bacteria and probiotics can help balance these bacteria to keep our bodies working as they should. Some common conditions that probiotics can help to treat include antibiotic-related diarrhea, irritable bowel syndrome, and inflammatory bowel disease. When using probiotics while on antibiotics, be sure to separate the probiotic and antibiotic by at least 2 hours. There are many different probiotic supplement products available on the market and they are regulated as food, not medicine. Therefore, it is best to buy products shown to be beneficial in clinical studies. Probiotics have a good safety profile and very few side effects have been reported. Do not use these products if you are severely ill or your immune system is not working properly.

Pharmacy • 665-8261

### Ear, Nose & Throat

**Dr. Neugebauer, does Medicare cover the cost of hearing aids or hearing testing?**

That is an excellent question that I am asked nearly every day. Unfortunately, under the current Medicare plans, hearing aids are not a covered service; however, hearing evaluations are covered annually if an individual is referred to their audiologist by their primary care physician. Some private health care plans that may be used for supplemental insurances do include certain hearing testing, hearing aid evaluation, and hearing aid benefits coverage but vary greatly from one private health plan to the next. If the financial aspect of hearing healthcare is your main concern, there are programs to provide either temporary loaner hearing aids or financial assistance with the cost of hearing aids and their related services. Feel free to contact our office if you would like further information regarding these assistance programs or with any other hearing healthcare related questions.

David Wagner, M.D.  
Matthew Rumsey, Au.D., CCC-A  
Kendra Neugebauer, Au.D., CCC-A

**Avera Medical Group**  
Ear, Nose & Throat  
Yankton

### Podiatry

**Beware Of Diabetic Shoe Inserts**

Diabetic shoe inserts that come from the Medicare diabetic shoe program must qualify as "heat moldable." Government regulation dictates that this is the only material that qualifies for reimbursement to providers. We find this material has certain shortcomings that the diabetic patient needs to know about.

Our experience with diabetic inserts from the Medicare shoe program has been less than favorable. They typically "bottom-out" from pressure points in just a few short weeks. Once the padding compresses, it no longer provide any protection from pressure points, and the diabetic foot continues to be at risk for pressure ulcers and poor healing.

The diabetic patient who qualifies for diabetic shoes, receives 3 pairs of heat-moldable diabetic inserts each year. The patient is to change these inserts every 4 months. The problem is, they don't even come close to lasting 4 months. They last more like 2-3 weeks.

Once the patient is dispensed heat-moldable diabetic inserts, they need to come back in 2 week intervals for the 1st month for insert modification and re-padding. Then, they need to be rechecked at 2 months and 3 months for further modification and padding. At four months, the patient starts with a new pair of inserts, and the whole process starts over again. You just can't receive heat-moldable shoe inserts and forget about them. They need to be monitored and modified regularly.

Our office no longer dispenses diabetic inserts from the Medicare shoe program. We dispense high quality diabetic inserts made of materials that last, and provide much greater protection from pressure points. Though we still monitor the patient and insert at regular intervals, the modifications are less involved. Our diabetic patients perform far better with ulcer prevention and wound healing with the diabetic inserts we now provide.

Terence Pederson, D.P.M.  
Christine Wiarda, D.P.M.

**Avera Medical Group**  
Podiatry  
Yankton

Avera Sacred Heart Hospital Professional Office Pavilion  
409 Summit St., Ste. 2600, Yankton • 668-8601

## Redskins Re-Sign Former Coyote

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Redskins announced Friday that they have released defensive end Stephen Bowen and defensive lineman Barry Cofield, both of whom spent the last four years with Washington.

Cofield, 30, was limited by injuries to eight games last season, finishing with seven tackles and a sack, after starting every game his first three years in Washington. Overall, he totaled 100 tackles and nine sacks.

The 30-year-old Bowen was also limited to eight games due to injury in 2014, compiling 11 tackles. Bowen appeared in 50 games, start-

ing 45, for Washington and compiled 96 tackles and seven sacks.

The moves came as the Redskins confirmed the signing of free agent defensive tackle Ricky Jean-Francois. His contract is \$9 million for three-years and includes \$4 million in guaranteed money according to his agent, Drew Rosenhaus, who confirmed the details to The Associated Press Thursday night.

The Redskins also announced the re-signing of offensive tackle Tom Compton, 25, a restricted free agent. Compton played in 16 games last season, starting nine.