

A Coyote Named Charlie

Working As USD's Fun-Loving Mascot Is Really About Entertainment And Promotion

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
randy.dockendorf@yankton.net

One student has become a beloved fixture at University of South Dakota (USD) home football and basketball games, even if fans don't know what he looks like.

"Charlie Coyote," the team mascot, struts his stuff along the sidelines and on the court. He has danced in a video with USD President Jim Abbott. He performs one-handed push-ups while doing a "Rocky" routine, then leads the cheer and dance teams up the bleachers — symbolizing Rocky's run up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art — to tower alongside the band.

He has even overseen the real-life, on-the-court wedding proposal for a shocked women's basketball player.

"I consider Charlie Coyote the No. 1 mascot in South Dakota and the region," he said. "USD is the only school in Division I with a coyote mascot. No one else has a Charlie Coyote."

Charlie's work hasn't ended with the conclusion of the USD basketball teams' regular season. The Coyotes are still in their NCAA Division I transition and therefore ineligible for the tournaments known as "March Madness." However, the women's basketball team is awaiting word on a possible invitation for other post-season play.

In addition, Charlie and the USD dance team are performing March 30 in Minneapolis during half-time of the National Basketball Association (NBA) game between the Minnesota Timberwolves and the Boston Celtics at the Target Center.

"This is the first time that I have performed at a professional level or venue," Charlie said. "It will be great to be in an NBA atmosphere."

Charlie is also working the spring football game April 21, which is also the mascot's official birthday and when the school started, he said. "They are holding a birthday party at the game, but we might just have a birthday week," he said with a laugh.

While USD students may know his true identity outside the costume, Charlie officially remains anonymous. It's all part of an unwritten code.

"I only have one requirement for an interview," the mascot said. "You can't use my real name. You can only refer to me as 'Charlie Coyote.'"

"Charlie" said he always loved to show his stuff.

"My mom says, growing up, I should be like one of the puppeteers on 'Sesame Street.' I have the personality to do it, and I love to perform," he said. "I always like to watch the college mascots, like the Oregon Duck or 'Sparty' the Michigan State Spartan. They were tough, and they were cool. But I always thought it would look silly if it was me, out there trying to make it work."

Still, Charlie couldn't resist the opportunity to give life to the coyote mascot.

"I enjoy stepping into the spotlight and showing it up. I love putting on a hammy," he said. "If you ever want to be a mascot, it doesn't start with the costume on the outside. You have to make it happen on the inside. It has to be a lovable character."

Charlie said he can't afford to have a bad day at the office, so to speak.

"When the lights come on, it's showtime," he said. "When they draw the curtain (and you go in front of the audience), you're 'on.' All eyes are on you, and you can make your teams look bad (with a weak mascot). You have to make the crowd laugh."

However, that can be challenging, especially during five-hour basketball doubleheaders that drain him of energy. Including his pre-game preparation and post-game handshakes and photos, he can easily put in an eight-hour day.

"The general rule is that I get there an hour before the game," he

said. "We go over the script and make sure that we have down the skits. We want to make sure we have the music, that the suit fits all right and we make any quick fixes."

People are intrigued at who resides inside the costume, Charlie said.

"The suit is built to withstand a lot of things. It's functional and flexible, but there are limits to what you can and can't do," he said. "People ask, do I smile when they take pictures? I say, 'Yes, I have on my funny face.'"

TAKING ON THE ROLE

The current "Charlie" — a former USD football player — has donned the suit for five years, continuing through graduate school. His role as Charlie started when he approached then-athletic director Joel Nielsen to ask about playing the mascot during a basketball game.

"I asked Joel to let me do (the

mascot) one time for fun," Charlie said. "Then it came about later on, the marketing director of ticket sales, Amy Hultgren, needed somebody to be Charlie. They asked if I would be interested. We met over lunch, and we got a new vision for Charlie."

But filling the mascot's shoes — or rather, feet — was far more physically demanding than he had anticipated. He was grateful that he was an athlete.

"I did a couple of games, and it was tough. I thought I was going to die!" he said. "You can't just jump into the suit. You have to be in shape. You can't believe how much energy it takes. Every time, you have to put out (a performance) and make Charlie come alive."

The costume literally weighs you down, Charlie said.

"Any time you have a mascot, with a layer of fur, it's hard to breathe and get your circulation," he said. "Some suits come with a



P&D FILE PHOTO

University of South Dakota mascot Charlie Coyote has become one of the more visible symbols in promoting the school. His work is not limited to athletic events, although he is a major component of the in-game entertainment at USD games.

cooling vest that you can wear underneath the costume. You keep the vest in the freezer and take it out in time for the show or performance. I personally don't like using (the vest). If little kids come running up to you, they can feel like they hit a brick wall. It's also uncomfortable, so I only wear it during parades."

Charlie also took on a new look,

he said. He characterized the old "Wile E. Coyote" costume as "more of a jump suit and sweaty pajamas." The new costume represents a more professional-looking mascot reflecting the school's move to NCAA Division I, he said.

"Standing next to other mas-

CHARLIE | PAGE 8B

Charlie Coyote: In The Beginning

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
randy.dockendorf@yankton.net

When it came time to give the first Charlie Coyote a costume, University of South Dakota students literally took up a collection.

According to the Summit League website, Dr. Mick Shaeffer of Ottumwa, Iowa, helped create the legacy of Charlie Coyote in the early 1970s. He established Charlie while performing at old Inman Field and the New Armory.

The Summit League, which includes USD, provides the following narrative:

Shaeffer, a USD student in the 1970s, helped design the costume and persona of "Charlie Coyote." He once passed the hat among South Dakota students to pay for the first mascot suit, which was constructed of papier-mâché.

Shaeffer, who spent 5 1/2 years as "Charlie," including two years while attending medical school, also funded his own way to USD games.

ORIGINS | PAGE 9B

FREE

LUXURY BLANKET EVENT

Buy any Serta® Mattress or Mattress Set \$695 and above and receive a Free Sleep to Go™ by Serta® Luxury Fleece Blanket by mail. Quantities Limited.*

LIMITED TIME ONLY!

sleep to go by Serta

*Offer redeemable by mail (not redeemable at retail). Offer valid only with proof of purchase of (i) any Serta® mattress or mattress set with an invoice price of \$695 or more or (ii) any iComfort® mattress or mattress set purchase. Offer valid only at participating retailers and only on qualified purchases between 2/9/2012 and 3/13/2012. Quantities limited. Visit www.serta.com for participating retailers and official terms and conditions.

	Twin Mattress	Full Mattress	Queen Mattress
ONLY \$79	ONLY \$124	ONLY \$149	
BUY ANY MATTRESS SET \$499 & UP	BUY ANY SERTA MATTRESS SET \$695 & UP		
FREE Local Delivery & Set Up...\$39 FREE Disposal of Old Bed.....\$20 FREE 12 Month 0% Financing...\$64 FREE Ultra Plush Pillows.....\$64	FREE Local Delivery & Set Up.....\$39 FREE Disposal of Old Bed.....\$20 FREE 12 Month 0% Financing...\$64 FREE Ultra Plush Pillows.....\$64 FREE Blanket.....\$125	\$183 TOTAL VALUE FREE! \$312 TOTAL VALUE FREE!	

FREE Local Delivery | **FREE** In-Home Set Up* | **FREE** Removal | **FREE** Blanket* | **PLUS!** 0% Financing for 12 Months!*

BONUS CASH UP TO \$800 ON ADDITIONAL ITEMS OR INTEREST FREE UP TO 48 MONTHS*
WITH QUALIFYING PURCHASES*

- \$50 bonus cash** with a purchase of \$399 or more
- \$100 bonus cash** with a purchase of \$699 or more
- \$200 bonus cash** with a purchase of \$1299 or more
- \$300 bonus cash** with a purchase of \$1899 or more
- \$400 bonus cash** with a purchase of \$2499 or more
- \$800 bonus cash** with a purchase of \$4499 or more

*Applies to furniture and accessories only. Discount to be applied to everyday low prices. Advertised specials will be at whichever best for the customer. Bonus cash must be used at time of purchase. Limit one Bonus Cash offer per household.



www.hatchfurniture.com
hatch
FURNITURE & FLOORING
"Your Home's Best Friend"

Find us on Facebook

Visit Our Flexsteel Gallery in Yankton

Hatch Furniture Outlet 413 Pierce St., Sioux City, IA • 712-252-7750



Flexsteel
America's Seating Specialist

109 East Third, Yankton, SD
605-665-4416 • 800-798-4663

*See store for complete details.