

In Battle of Mascots, San Dorito State Usually Wins

by Con Chapman

SAN DORITO, California. Like many college presidents, Norman van Dorn of San Dorito State College wouldn't mind the publicity that comes with a winning sports program. "You look at what Doug Flutie did for Boston College," he says, referring to an upsurge in applications that school enjoyed after a "Hail Mary" pass by the diminutive quarterback beat Miami on the final play of a nationally-televised game in 1984. "I'd like to have some of that mojo working for us when a kid is choosing between us and Stanford."



The "Hail Mary" pass: Tuition just went up 11%.

For now, van Dorn's recruiting weapons are limited to his men's basketball and women's volleyball teams, but the former marketing specialist isn't letting that limited arsenal hold him back. "A lot of kids—granted, kids who aren't too bright—will choose a school because of its mascot, and that's what Chipper is all about," he says.



Chipper

"Chipper" is a mature male Komodo dragon, the largest lizard species in the world and a deadly carnivore that stalks its prey with a stealthy approach and a sudden, fatal charge. "It's a great

teaching tool for our business majors,” van Dorn says. “It's kill or be killed once you graduate.”

“Your stupid lizard ate our puppy!”

Chipper is restrained during San Dorito State games by one of two heavily-muscled male cheerleaders who alternate due to the toll that holding back the ten foot long, three hundred fifty pound monster takes on them. “Chipper's a big dude,” says Tyler Lawrence, “and he can smell another team's mascot when they stop for dinner at the Arby's on the edge of town.”

“Rhett”: Grrr—sort of.

Today the San Dorito Fighting Taco Chips take on the Hiram Morris College Terriers in the semifinal round of the Mountain Ocean Conference tournament. The game will be broadcast on ESPN13, an occasion that van Dorn hopes will garner his school some headlines to sway last-minute college applicants. As the contingent from Hiram Morris enters the building, Chipper's eyes swing towards the other end of the gym as he first smells, then sees,

"Rhett", the school's terrier mascot. "Whoa, Chip, easy boy," Lawrence says as he pulls the leash taut. "Don't jump the gun."



Tastes like chicken.

The San Dorito players emerge from their dressing room to scattered cheers from the crowd that van Dorn says will reach one hundred by tip-off time. "This isn't Duke, but we're getting there," he says a bit optimistically. The team goes through a series of flashy half-court drills, with each team member stopping to pat Chipper on the head for good luck.

Norman van Dorn: "A little 'Wild Kingdom' gets the crowd into the game."

Hiram Morris's players wander onto the court, still a bit groggy from the cross-country travel that is par for the course due to this far-flung conference's footprint. Rhett, a five year-old black and white male dog, is clearly the most energetic of the group as he strains at his leash when he smells hot dogs cooking at the concession stand.

Chipper senses his chance and begins to slink forward. His handler drops the leash, and the giant lizard reverts to the law of the jungle, skittering across the floor and grabbing the smallish dog in his jaws, consuming him in two gulps before the terrier can get a yelp out.

"What the hell?" screams Hiram Morris athletic director Dennis Windsor when he sees the Wild Kingdom-like scene unfold before horrified fans.

"Send me your bill," van Dorn says as custodians rush out to clean up the mess. "Whatever it is, it'll be worth it if we make Sportscenter's 'When Mascots Attack!'"

