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Character References™

Volume 5 Number 3

The Street Characters Inc. Newsletter

ThunderBug Takes On The World!

Tampa Bay Lightning mascot, ThunderBug, is used to squaring off against the teams who play on his ice in Tampa Bay, Florida. But competing in a European mascot steeplechase was a new gig for this popular bug, who makes more than 350 appearances a year.

“It was quite the experience,” says Jason Franke, Entertainment and Marketing manager for the Tampa Bay Lightning. Franke, along with Street Characters’ President Glenn Street, escorted ThunderBug to the British Mascot Grand National, which took place on the Huntingdon Racecourse, just outside of Cambridge, England, this past summer (Street Characters actually sponsored ThunderBug to attend the race).

More than 100 mascots from around the world participated in the event, with ThunderBug being the first-ever North American mascot to compete. And he did us all proud by claiming ninth spot



overall in what Franke says was a difficult race for the over-sized
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Street Characters scores big with the NFL!

When the NFL season kicked off last year, Denver Broncos fans returned to a brand new stadium, and were welcomed by the Broncos newest star, Miles the Horse. Also, the Seattle Seahawks fans were welcomed back by a refurbished Blitz, the Seahawks mascot, who was keen to show off his new look.

didn't take long to make an impact on Bronco fans. Joel Darby, mascot coordinator for the Broncos, says Miles' popularity is due to his unique character—he signifies where the team has been and where it's going.

Miles is a regular at the Broncos games (he can often be seen in the stands, on the sidelines and up on the Jumbotron) but he also makes time for community promotions. One of his biggest roles is promoting the Broncos' reading program, "Read Like A Pro."



Both Miles and Blitz are Street Characters Inc. creations. The company behind many of the mascots so well known to sporting teams fans.



His name represents an important part of the team's past. But being the Broncos' first-ever mascot means Miles also represents an important part of

Blitz takes on a similar role in Seattle. He is a big advocate of the Seahawk's literacy program "Ready Set Goals!" "Blitz travels to grade schools all over Washington to get the kids excited about reading and setting goals," says Garrett Thiemens, the Seahawk's mascot coordinator.

Miles, who was named after the Broncos' old Mile High Stadium,

the team's future. The kids love him and they are the football fans of tomorrow.

This season more than 300 classrooms have signed up for

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Street Characters a presence in the NHL

Two Street Character mascots—Tommy Hawk and Sparky the Dragon—have skated their way into hockey fans' hearts in Chicago, Illinois and Uniondale, New York.

the Blackhawks. And he's popular with the adults too. Sullivan says fans of all ages can be seen at each game lining up outside the Hawk's store, eagerly seeking their feathered friend's autograph.

Sparky, who also appears during the New York Dragons arena football games, albeit in different colours (he's magic, remember?) recently hosted the NHL Mascot Day. Seven of Sparky's best mascot buddies joined him on Long Island to entertain fans in front of the visiting Dallas Stars. Besides bringing the Islanders some luck (the Isles won three to two) the mascot team also brought a lot of laughs, and entertained the crowd all evening long.

Tommy Hawk, the seven-foot black hawk, nested in the United Center more than a year ago, and has been entertaining Blackhawk fans ever since.



In Uniondale, Sparky the Dragon inspires the Islanders players and fans to rise up and challenge any foe that enters the Nassau Veterans' Memorial Coliseum. This seven-and-a-half-foot magical dragon can use his powers to vanquish his opponents, although he admits he has a definite soft spot for kids.

Sparky manages to fit in numerous appearances—the Islanders have more than 40 home games and the Dragons have eight. This past summer Sparky took part in several kids' day camps. This fall he's also making appearances at private events, like birthday parties.

The fans, it seems, have taken to Tommy like a duck takes to water. "The kids love him," says Mike Sullivan, manager of game operations for



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Street Talk

with Glenn Street

Using mascots to promote your team, business, school or special event is something that any organization can do, and do successfully. Your mascots are the perfect tool to create awareness, generate merchandise sales and add fun to any event. Kids love them and so do adults, and statistics show that these large loveable creatures can do wonders for your business.

In a previous issue of *The Sports Business Journal*, an article called "Promotions to Pack the Park" was published. The article focused on promotions that were most successful in increasing attendance, as used during Major League Baseball's 2001 season. These promotions were ranked by the percentage increase in attendance. While the results may come as a surprise to some, they only reinforce what I've been promoting all along—mascots are key components to marketing campaigns.

The number one marketing promotion was mascot birthday parties, which resulted in a 25.2 percent increase in attendance. The second-ranked promotion was stuffed animals, which increased attendance by 16.5 percent. The third-ranked promotion was bobbleheads, which resulted in a 13.9-percent increase in attendance. Not surprisingly, the top three promotions are all mascot related, and all areas that Street Characters Inc. specializes in.

Mascot birthday parties can be easy to organize, and obviously have big results. It's as simple as inviting local team mascots from other leagues to help celebrate. Involve them in a pre-event activity where people can interact with them or watch them perform. Consider singing happy birthday, handing out birthday cake or having a gift opening for your mascot. And be sure to organize a mascot skit part way through the event or game, just to keep your mascot's celebration top of mind.

Handing out mascot stuffed animals is also a sure way to increase attendance numbers. Bobbleheads, which have become increasingly popular, especially with



sports fans, can also be created of your mascot. These are a valuable addition to any fan's bobblehead collection.

When you promote your mascot to the public, you also promote your organization. These examples are great ways to do just that, but please don't limit yourself only to these three. For example, earlier this fall I travelled

with ThunderBug, the Tampa Bay Lightning's mascot, to London, England. Street Characters Inc. sponsored ThunderBug to take part in the British Mascot Grand National 2002 race, which took place on the Huntingdon Racecourse just outside of Cambridge. More than 100 mascots took part in the 200-yard steeplechase event. ThunderBug was the first North American mascot to compete and did incredibly well, placing in the top 10. Thunderbug also attended a London Knights hockey game, where ThunderBug felt right at home. It was a wonderful experience and one Street Characters was proud to be involved with.

Street Characters prides itself on the products and service we provide, as well as the ongoing support we offer our customers. Recently we were recognized for our accomplishments by being nominated as one of three finalists for Small Business of the Year in Calgary. Although we didn't win, being nominated in the top three was an honour, and one that we are very proud of. We plan to continue doing all of the things that have made Street Characters successful in the past, and that means offering the best products, service and support to each and every one of our customers.

Glenn Street, president and founder of Street Characters Inc., is one of the first mascots in professional sports, and the first mascot in the National Hockey League

Thunderbug concluded

bug. The mascots had to run a 200-metre-long course, complete with six hurdles.

By the end of the race ThunderBug was tired, admits Franke, but he somehow found the energy to also take part in a London Knights hockey game. The game, adds Franke, was "absolutely crazy."

"ThunderBug just did what he does here, but he actually got one of the players kicked out of the

game. The fans were chanting "ThunderBug, ThunderBug," I guess they'd never had a mascot that was so interactive with the crowd before."

Franke adds that some fans even threatened to kidnap ThunderBug and keep him for their own. There was no word from Mighty Knight, the Knights' mascot, as to what he thought about this.

While Franke admits the mascots in Europe are like "night and day" compared to the mascots here, he says ThunderBug wouldn't hesitate to go back to England—to visit. "Every mascot we met was a class act," says Franke. And for Thunderbug, it was a chance to see the sights and take a few well-earned days off. 🙌

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A Worldwide Reach

Street Characters Inc. director of marketing Terry Willard wasn't surprised when he received a mascot order by e-mail. With Street Characters' in-depth Web site, customers often e-mail Willard with questions and requests.

But when Willard realized the enquiry had come from a Venezuelan baseball team he admits he was slightly taken aback.

The Tigres de Arugua had found Street Characters through the Internet while searching for a mascot company. After making the initial enquiry, which was followed by a few e-mails back and forth (Willard never did speak to anyone over the phone), the order was placed. Before long, the Tigres de Arugua were the proud owners of a seven-foot tiger mascot

and 600 tiger dolls—all made possible because of the Internet. Although Willard was somewhat shocked when the initial order was placed, he says he wasn't surprised by the ease of the order process, knowing first-hand the level of service Street Characters offers.



"Many first-time mascot customers wonder how the order process is going to work," says Willard. But it's easy to do, especially with the Internet. Says Willard, "We take the stress off of the customer by providing them with some sketches, which we can have out to them (via e-mail) in a matter of days."

The Tigres' order process began by Willard asking the team to e-mail him its logo. From the logo the Street Characters' art department was able to create

some sketches, which were e-mailed back to the team. After a few minor changes, an image was finalized and the construction process began.

The final result? An orange and black tiger dressed in a Tigres de Arugua jersey, baseball hat, tennis shoes and big square sunglasses to shield his eyes from the blazing sun. And, of course, 600 miniature tigers were ordered to match.

The Tigres also purchased a mascot training video and a cooling vest for the mascot performer. "An easy sell," admits Willard, considering the Venezuelan heat.

With the big cat now busy running bases, the Tigres de Arugua's main focus (aside from winning) is marketing their mascot and selling the dolls. But that should be an easy win with Street Characters on their team. Play ball! 🖐️

NFL concluded

the program - a sure sign of Blitz's popularity.

Of course, Blitz can also be seen at every Seahawks' home game as well as a few other special events that take place in Seattle.

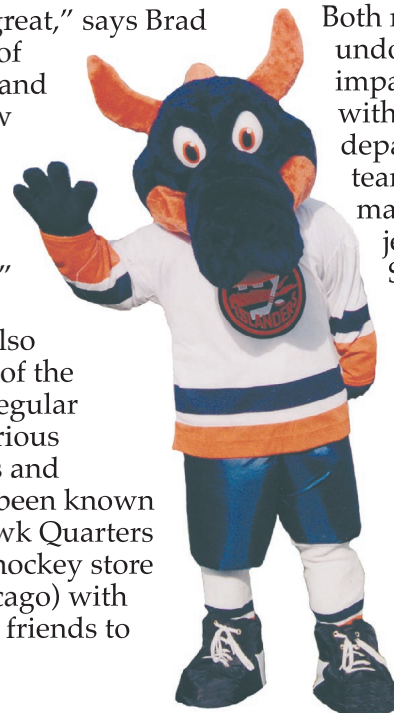
"The fans are always happy to see Blitz," adds Thiemens, which is why the Seahawks' marketing department keeps him so busy. In the stands, on the sidelines or dancing with the cheerleaders, Blitz rarely slows down. "He really is a wonderful marketing tool," says Thiemens, "he's all over the stadium."

Miles and Blitz are just 2 of 8 NFL teams proud to own a Street Character. 🖐️

NHL concluded

"Sparky is doing great," says Brad Preston, manager of Game Operations and Events for the New York Islanders. "The kids just start chanting "Sparky!" every time they see him."

Tommy Hawk is also kept busy outside of the arena. He makes regular appearances at various community events and schools. And he's been known to drop by the Hawk Quarters (the Blackhawks' hockey store in downtown Chicago) with some of his player friends to sign autographs.



Both mascots have undoubtedly made an impact with the fans—and with their teams' marketing departments. With the team stores now sporting mascot bobblehead dolls, jerseys, t-shirts and hats, Sparky and Tommy have become invaluable acquisitions. Can you say MVP? 🖐️

