



# Bucky Badger's Winning Ways



*Bucky Badger, the University of Wisconsin's lovable mascot, has long been the face of Wisconsin. Furry and friendly, Bucky never fails to delight the crowd, whether it's rabid Badger fans at a football game, or the littlest patient at the UW Children's Hospital. Dressed in a red and white striped sweater with a large "motion W," Bucky has cheered and danced his way into our hearts at sporting events and special appearances since the 1940s.*

## The First Badger Wasn't Fuzzy, Was He?

Way before Wisconsin had a "Bucky," the university's sports teams adopted the nickname "Badgers." Oddly, the name wasn't in honor of the furry little critters found around the state. Instead, it came from the lead miners of the 1820s who had to burrow into hillside tunnels to keep warm in the winter—just like badgers.

The name may have originated from an occupation, but the mascot has always existed in animal form. In fact, the first badger mascots were live animals that were more ferocious than funny. Several escaped their handlers, and the critters were eventually retired to the Vilas Zoo.



## Bucky's Background

The first badger costume came to life in November 1949 after Connie Conrad, of the university's art department, was asked to create a papier-mâché badger head. It debuted at homecoming, with cheerleader Bill Sagal of Plymouth wearing it first. The furry fellow was



such a hit that a contest was initiated to name him. Several names, including Benny, Bouncy, Bobby, Bernie, and Buddy, were all tried, but none really seemed to suit him. The winning name, of course, was Buckingham U. Badger—or Bucky to his friends.

Thankfully, Bucky gained a following and managed to withstand a threat of extinction from assistant attorney general Howard Koop in the 1970s. The ill-advised politician got little support when he suggested replacing Bucky with Henrietta Holstein. What a cheesy idea.

## If You Want to Be a Badger

Nowadays, Bucky's familiar face is portrayed by not one, but seven students. With more than 600 appearances a year, it takes a lot of dedication—and schedule juggling—to make it all work. Tryouts are held each April for the job, which is, by the way, a year-round commitment. Candidates are warned that Bucky may need to be available over Thanksgiving, winter break, and even summer vacation.

That doesn't seem to deter those who want the job, however. They come to tryouts prepared to show their stuff in the areas of role-playing and body language, handling props, and rhythm. And anyone who's seen a Badger football game in person knows that Bucky needs one more skill—doing push-ups for every Badger point, repeated each time they score.

In most years, the seven mascots are all men. Yet this isn't a sexist decision. In fact, there were two female Bucky's in the 1990s. There are two main problems facing female badgers, however. One is height. Bucky needs to look the same wherever he goes. Heights of the seven mascots typically range from 5'10" to 6'2" and the crowd doesn't seem to notice the difference. Yet, showing up with a 5'2" Bucky might raise a few eyebrows. The other problem is weight. Not the weight of the student playing the part. No, the weight in question is Bucky's head, which tips the scales at an astonishing 35 pounds. That's a lot for a mascot to shoulder.





## It Takes (More Than) Two

The chosen mascots divvy up a schedule that includes all home and away football games, both men's and women's basketball, wrestling, men's and women's soccer, volleyball, and softball games. Other UW sports may get an occasional visit by Bucky, and he attends all postseason tournament appearances. And did we mention hockey? Bucky also needs to be available to skate in front of the crowd at UW hockey games.

And that's not all. The mascot world isn't all about sports, and Bucky knows that better than anyone. He attends other university-sponsored functions, including parades, pep rallies, community events, and even some private functions (for a price).

The 2009 fee schedule offers Bucky appearances ranging from \$25 per half-hour for UW student organizations and up to \$100 per half-hour for Madison area nonprofit groups. Private and out-of-town events cost a bit more. But wouldn't it be worth it to have Bucky at your wedding? The most unusual event Bucky has attended, according to Spirit Squad Director Josette Scheer, is the funeral of a die-hard fan.

## Claim to Fame

Bucky usually just cheers for his teams and brings smiles to the faces of Badger fans everywhere, but he also gets an opportunity to gain a little glory for himself. Along with the rest of the UW Spirit Squad, Bucky has the chance to compete to be top dog, er, Badger at the UCA College Mascot National Championship held every January at Disney World. Each school submits a video clip of its mascot in action, and finalists are judged on their video along with their use of props, a short skit, and crowd interaction. In 2008, Bucky was awarded with his best finish ever—2nd place.

And even though he's still alive and going strong, Bucky got his biggest honor yet in 2006. Along with Aubie, Auburn's Tiger and YoUDEe, the Blue Hen Chicken of Delaware, Bucky was inducted as a charter member of the Mascot Hall of Fame's College Division.

Go, Bucky!