

*The information for this article comes from Jerry Swingle, high school art teacher from 1956-1962. This was sent by letter this week to Susie (Helliker) Long. Thanks to Susie for bringing it to my attention. It's interesting stuff!*

*We've seen Harold around for years, but this should make him a more personal character for us, knowing how he was born almost 50 years ago.*

*Bob Gibson*

*Advance Sports Writer*

Jerry writes -

I had felt for a couple of years that Higginsville deserved something better than an ear of corn and a block H for a symbol. I even wrote to the University of Nebraska asking about their mascot who looks like a blond surfer dude in farmer's hat and overalls. Must have addressed it to the wrong department as I never heard anything back. So I decided to wing it and see if I could come up with anything better.

I wish I could remember the exact when, but I don't. All I can recall is that one afternoon after school was out and things were comparatively quiet, I sat down at my desk and began doodling ideas. I finally began to get something I liked, and the first drawing of Harold was the result. I liked it well enough that I did a finished ink drawing.

The cartoon-style drawing is derived from the style of my favorite cartoonist of all time - Al Capp, who created the famous comic strip "Li'l Abner." The war club that Harold is leaning on is also taken from "Li'l Abner." It was carried by a huge hillbilly named "Hairless Joe." I added spiked cleats to Harold's brogans to indicate a little toughness. The wristbands are what used to be worn by cornhuskers when that job was done by hand. (Talk about carpal tunnel syndrome!)

The pose and position of the figure I intended to be

one of casual but restrained power and ability. I admired HHS's athletic teams so much at the time that I wanted to create a symbol that could be seen as peaceful but unwilling to back down, whatever the challenge, a characteristic that I hoped would characterize not only the pride and spirit of our school's teams, but perhaps serve as a symbol for the future, not just in athletics, but for the whole school. That was the philosophy I had in mind when Harold was created.

I've been asked about the lack of a face under the large hat - just a nose and a pair of glowering eyes in a shadowy background. I have to say that I just didn't want Harold to look like other human mascots, high school or college.



Personally, I didn't care that he lacked distinctive facial features or that he might be a little ugly. That's one of the things that makes him unique. I wanted a little mystery and didn't want a "pretty boy" for a tough mascot. Besides, not being handsome, everybody has a chance to identify with him! I realize I made it tough for cheerleaders to have a 3-D mascot roaming the sidelines, and for that I apologize.

After I did the first drawing, I showed it to our principal, Mr. Jim Stoner, to see if he might go along with the idea of presenting the image to the student body for their approval.

He agreed. There was an all-school assembly coming up and that would be a good opportunity to do so. I went back to the art room, pulled a long sheet of white paper from a roll, and began doing a life-size rendition in full color. When it was completed, and the paint was dry, I rolled it up like a window shade.

On the proper date, the full school was assembled in the gym. It came time for me to introduce my creation. After an explanation that this might be the future mascot of Higginsville High School if they liked it, I unfurled the painting. I recall there was a moment of silence before loud applause and cheers. Harold had passed his first test.

As for the name "Harold", it was almost accidental. The name of the school newspaper was the Husker Herald, and when the adoption of the new mascot was announced in the paper, it called him "Harold the Husker." I didn't care for the name, and I wanted to call him something else, but what the heck! It was the school's call, so Harold he became.

In the years since, I have felt honored to have been able to contribute something to the school's identity. Every time I have driven into Higginsville and have seen that big Harold and "Home of the Huskers" on the side of the building, I admit to a great feeling of pride.

Thank you all, students past and present, the school administrations, and the town itself for having given me the opportunity to contribute in some way to a great school and a fine community.

Jerry Swingle

*Now we know the story. Harold has aged very well for a middle-aged man. May he continue to show courage and determination and represent our school with class! BG*