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Yankees' Long-Forgotten Mascot

By [SCOTT CACCIOLA](#)

The biggest bust in Yankees history was 7 feet tall, made \$40 every home game and spent most of his brief career in the upper deck.

From 1979 to 1981, the Yankees employed a mascot named Dandy. He was big and blue and a spectacular failure—a historical oddity for a proud franchise that has collected 27 world championships but would just as soon forget he even existed. Which, to be fair, isn't terribly difficult to do.



The Yankee Dandy, the long lost and ill-fated mascot from the Bronx, deserves reconsideration ahead of the Yanks series with the Philadelphia Phillies. Surprisingly, the Phillies mascot, the Phanatic, shares a common ancestry with the Dandy. Matthew Rivera reports.

"It's one of the sadder stories," said Wayde Harrison, who created Dandy with his wife, Bonnie Erickson.

For Mr. Harrison and Ms. Erickson, who run their business, Acme Mascots, out of their apartment in Brooklyn Heights, the Dandy saga is all about bad luck and lost opportunity. And it resonates this week with the Philadelphia Phillies visiting Yankee Stadium for an interleague series.

In 1979, the Yankees appeared eager to replicate the success of the Phillie Phanatic, the green, pot-bellied mascot that Mr. Harrison and Ms. Erickson created in 1978. In his first two years of existence, according to Mr. Harrison, Phanatic-related products generated \$2 million in revenue—and his popularity has not waned.

He made more than 550 public appearances last year, has his own merchandise store in Philadelphia and is on display at the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Dandy, on the other hand, got thrown in a dumpster.



Wayde Harrison

Dandy, the Yankees' mascot, is modeled in 1979 shortly after being created. CREDIT: Wayde Harrison

He was designed by Ms. Erickson, who had worked on "The Muppet Show" and created Miss Piggy, among other characters. Dandy was marketed as a "dyed-in-the-wool" Yankees fan.

He was blessed with a pear-shaped physique that was almost Ruth-ian. He had a hat that spun, a cartoon-size baseball bat and a big, bushy mustache that evoked Thurman Munson, the team's star catcher—which was no coincidence.

Above all, Dandy was a New Yorker.

"He was supposed to be sassy," Mr. Harrison said. "He was supposed to have that Yankee swagger."

Yankees owner George Steinbrenner had final approval, and he met with Mr. Harrison and Ms. Erickson at his Yankee Stadium office one afternoon during the early part of the season.

He sat at a large oval table that overlooked the field while two top-level executives—both of whom had expressed their support for the project—sat quietly along a wall behind him.

It was clear to Dandy's creators that the onus would fall on them to convince Mr. Steinbrenner, who signed off on the mascot with one caveat. He pointed out that Dandy's fur was royal blue. "That should be Yankee blue," Mr. Steinbrenner said.

"I started to argue with him," Ms. Erickson said. "And you could literally see the guys in the back going, 'What is she doing?'"

With their differences ironed out, the Yankees agreed to lease Dandy for three years and \$30,000 and made plans to unveil him in late July.

Created in 1978 by Wayde Harrison and his wife, Bonnie Erickson, of Brooklyn Heights, the Phillie Phanatic went on to incredible fame and fortune. Created a year later by the same couple, Dandy the Yankee mascot traveled an entirely different path. Never embraced by the Yankee fans and often banished to the upper deck at most games, he lasted only three years and is largely forgotten.



Then disaster struck.

Want to know whom to blame for Dandy's premature demise? Look no further than the San Diego Chicken and Lou Piniella.

On July 10, 1979, the Chicken—on sabbatical from the Padres, his regular employer—was working for the Seattle Mariners at the Kingdome, where he threw a hex on Yankees pitcher Ron Guidry as he warmed up. Mr. Piniella, the Yankees' left fielder at the time, considered this to be in poor taste, so he chased the Chicken and, lacking apparent success, fired his glove at him in a fit of rage.



Wayde Harrison



Getty Images

In the wake of that fiasco, Mr. Steinbrenner supported Mr. Piniella by telling reporters that mascots had no place in baseball—this, just two weeks before the Yankees were to introduce their own.

"It was so unbelievable," Ms. Erickson said. "We just sat there in front of the TV with our mouths open. Did he forget or something? I can remember hearing him on the news: 'Those things don't belong on the field.'"

It portended disaster for Dandy—and for Rick Ford, a recent college graduate who had been hired to perform as Dandy. He had been choreographing routines for his debut. Eddie Layton, the Yankees' longtime organist, had even composed an original song for Dandy. But Mr. Layton never got an opportunity to perform it at a game, thanks largely to Mr. Piniella's squabble with the Chicken, according to Mr. Ford.

Mr. Layton died in 2004, and no known recording of the song exists. "The Yankees didn't even want people to know there was a mascot," Mr. Ford said.

The team did little to no promotion for Dandy and barred him from being anywhere near the field during games, effectively banishing him to the far reaches of Yankee Stadium. David Raymond, who performed as the original Phanatic until 1993, said he felt badly for Mr. Ford.

"I remember what it was like in the upper deck in Philadelphia, and that's why I never went up there," said Mr. Raymond, who now owns his own mascot company. "When you go up into the upper deck, they want to see if you can fly."

Marty Appel, the Yankees' former public relations director, said he had only a vague recollection of Dandy.

"It was sort of un-Yankee-like to have a big mascot running around," Mr. Appel said. "It had no

resonance."

Mr. Ford's job became even more challenging after Mr. Munson died in a plane crash on August 2, mere days after the mascot made his first appearance. In the wake of that tragedy, Dandy took some time off. "It wasn't the right time to have a mascot who looked like Thurman Munson," Mr. Ford said.

One of Mr. Ford's most high-profile gigs turned out to be his last. He said Citibank staged an elaborate corporate pep rally at Madison Square Garden after the season, and Dandy was pegged to be Bill Cosby's warmup act. By the time Mr. Ford donned his costume, grabbed his bat and got ready to hit the stage to

the tune of "Johnny B. Goode," the libations had been flowing for hours.



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Wayde Harrison

"As soon as the spotlight hit my face, I was completely blinded," Mr. Ford said. "I had no idea where I was, and these bankers were just crazy. Thousands of crazy bankers screaming at me, grabbing hold of me, almost ripping me apart. I felt like an escaped convict."

The real drama unfolded after the event. Mr. Ford claims he held Dandy for ransom—the costume, that is—because of a disagreement with the ballclub. The issue was resolved, but that marked the end of Mr. Ford's time with the Yankees.

Journal Community

[DISCUSS](#)

Looks like something George Costanza came up with.

—Arnold Niemanis

which means Dandy could be resuscitated for future use. Mr. Harrison and Ms. Erickson—and not the Yankees—own his rights.

And he will still work cheap.

Write to Scott Cacciola at scott.cacciola@wsj.com

Dandy, played by another young man, somehow lasted two more seasons before Mr. Harrison and Ms. Erickson declined the Yankees' request to renew the lease because they felt Dandy wasn't provided the support he needed to survive.

In 2000, Mr. Harrison and Ms. Erickson needed to clear out some storage space, and Dandy was a casualty. They still have the original patterns, however,

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