'Whiskey’—World’s Smallest Halftime Show in Football

By Robin Wright

Among the many football traditions originated at Michigan, there’s a new one that’s likely to stay exclusive to the school—a ‘letterman’ dog.

Her name is Whiskey and she’s unofficially a mascot in residence.

The three-year-old white, wired-haired fox terrier has gained considerable recognition for her half-time performances at Michigan football games.

She recently began her third season of half-time shows which feature a run from goal post to goal post pushing a maize and blue ball while weaving through U-M band members’ legs and eluding perplexed officials. After three seasons, Whiskey’s skill is matched only by her popularity and acceptance.

It all started during half-time of the 1968 Michigan-Michigan State game. Attendants saw a little terrier in a maize and blue jacket push a green and white ball across the field.

Fans cheered as the tiny pooch knocked the ball across the goal line, then pushed it the entire length of the field in the opposite direction to dodge officials, who were not as pleased with her performance.

Whiskey, in theatrical terms, was an immediate hit.

In fact, demand for a return performance became so great that the athletic department asked the student paper to request information on the dog.

Although the ad was not immediately answered, the dog mysteriously turned up at the next game and entertained the crowds with another half-time performance.

No official word ever came from Whiskey’s owners, who continued to secretly sneak the dog and her famed ball in and out of the stadium. But Michigan fans were content that she was at least coming back.

By the climactic moment of the 1968 season—the Ohio State game—Michigan had a new tradition. It seemed quite appropriate that Michigan’s only female football performer should accompany the team to the championship game—just for good luck, of course.

During Michigan’s first game of the next season, Whiskey made her 1969 debut looking even more flashy in a specially fitted new ‘M’ letter jacket.

The pooch again quickly established herself as one of the highlights of Saturday games. But it was only after fans began shouting “We want the dog,” that the owners came forward to make official arrangements.

As it turned out, Michigan’s No. 1 dog owners are, appropriately, a U-M grad student and his wife, Dave and Trudy Rogers.

The Rogers, originally from New York City, did their undergraduate work at Middlebury College in Vermont, then moved to Ann Arbor, where Dave is working on his doctoral degree in physical chemistry.

He explained how the whole thing started. “It was a complete lark. Balls and frisbees just turn her on. She’s never been formally trained. I guess you could call it a hang-up that’s been exploited.

“Whiskey’s always gone crazy when she’s near a playing field and there’s a ball around. At Middlebury, she made friends with an All-American soccer player, who was responsible for any of the training she did get.

“Whiskey would trot over to his fraternity house every day at 3 p.m. They played a game together—he would boot the ball and she would push it back with her nose.”

Whiskey keeps in shape by running as often as possible. The Rogers work her out by letting her chase their car for a half to three-quarters of a mile each Sunday. This is her only regular preparation for her weekly shows.

The Rogers would never have predicted fame for Whiskey. “We had no idea what she’d do on the field.

Oddly, the difficult part at first was not how to sneak the dog in, but how to get the colored ball past the ticket checkers.

Whiskey has been trained not to bark, so sneaking in under a blanket was no problem. But the men at the gates became suspicious when they saw the ball, so friends of the Rogers ended up passing through separately with the ball so no one would ask to see what was under the blanket.

As a result of her act, the friendly terrier has gained nationwide attention. Besides publicity in state papers and travels with the team to three different away games, Whiskey has appeared in newspapers throughout the country after a show at the Rose Bowl last year.

The Rogers feared there might be difficulties in getting her to Pasadena, but people connected with their trip were helpful in making arrangements for the dog.

The only real scare came when they learned at the last minute that the dog could not be accommodated on their chartered flight. As a last resort, Dave walked onto the plane at the end of the line with Whiskey in her traveling box, hoping that the other passengers would recognize her and insist that the dog be allowed to stay.

As Rose Bowl watchers already know, his request was granted and the dog was able to perform at the Rose Bowl game.

As for becoming a permanent tradition, the Rogers have no definite plans. Whiskey became a mother (of three) for the first time in July, but they have kept only one, who they appropriately named Brandy.

Trudy explained that “We thought about training Brandy to carry on the tradition, but now Dave loves her so much that he’d never part with her. Maybe the families who own the other pups—one in Ann Arbor and one in Plymouth—will train theirs.”

The Rogers do plan to introduce Brandy to Michigan fans before this season is over, probably at the Michigan State game. “She’s a natural—just like her mother,” they claim.

Beyond that, Dave, who has only one year left in his doctoral program, has made no decision. He admitted “I feel a responsibility to see that the show continues. After all, once you start a tradition, you’ve gotta see it through.”