

MASCOTS AND CHARACTERS

They're cute, they're fun, and their job is to welcome the world to their Games.



IZZY

Summer 1996: Atlanta. The first Character with a fully developed life story, IZZY will show up not just on thousands of pins, but also on TV cartoons, lunch boxes, and computer software.

The likenesses of official Olympic Games mascots and characters—whether human, animal, or fanciful—show up on collectible pins long before a Games' Opening Ceremony. A mascot's mission: to represent the spirit of its host city and to be an ambassador of Olympic goodwill.

The first recorded mascot was a live terrier named Smokey who roamed the 1932 Los Angeles Games wearing a blanket marked with the rings and the word MASCOT. (His photo appeared in the Games' program and its Official Report.)

But not until 1972 did each Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games (OCOG) begin adopting official mascots or characters. The first was a light blue cartoon dachshund named Waldi who waddled out of

Munich in 1972. Representing a popular Bavarian pet, he was chosen because he shares with athletes the traits of tenacity, endurance, and agility. (Waldi pins, however, were struck only *after* the Games.)

HOW MASCOTS ARE CHOSEN

An OCOG takes many things into account when selecting a mascot. Among the common considerations: appropriateness for summer or winter and distinctiveness to the host city or region. For instance, Calgary's polar bears, Hidy and Howdy, (1988) were chosen because the bears are indigenous Canadian animals who love snow and are active in winter. Mascot designs also tend to be child-friendly, so as to appeal to the youngest Olympic Games fans.

Today's mascots have a practical role, too, since the sale of mascot merchandise has become a valuable fund-raising source for OCOGs. Los Angeles organizers sold about 10 million replicas of Sam the Eagle, raising \$200 million. So another consideration of mascot selection is its adaptability

to all kinds of formats, from one-dimensional pictures to three-dimensional pins to live, costumed figures for promotional appearances.

Sometimes OCOGs select mascots from designs that they've commissioned; other times they seek public input, as

Moscow's organizers did in 1980. More than 40,000 TV viewers and newspaper readers helped to pick Misha the bear. Each mascot must ultimately be approved by the International Olympic Committee before any product bearing a mascot's likeness is offered for sale.

MASCOT TIMELINE



Schuss

Winter 1968: Grenoble. Schuss the skier was not an official Olympic Games mascot, though he may have been the first one ever to show up on pins.

Snowman

Winter 1976: Innsbruck. For what was often dubbed the "Simple Games," Innsbruck's organizing committee chose a simple mascot, the Snowman. Schneemann stick pins were the first official mascot pins issued.

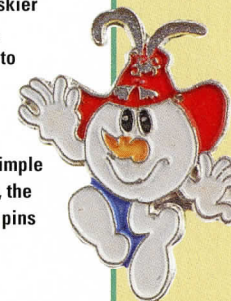
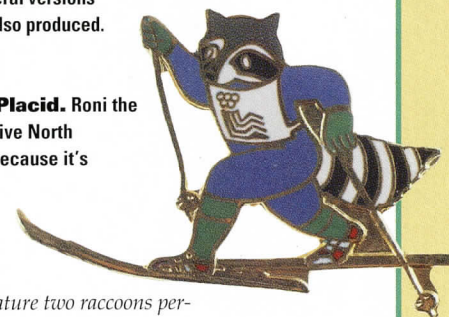
Amik

Summer 1976: Montreal. The industrious beaver played a valuable role in Canada's economic development and also appears on Montreal's coat of arms. Hence the selection of Amik (Algonquin for *beaver*) to represent this national symbol of Canada. Three versions, all of them the same size, featured the Games logo but appeared in different color combinations: white, with a red stripe; black, with a red stripe; and white, with a black stripe. Several versions without the logo were also produced.



Roni

Winter 1980: Lake Placid. Roni the raccoon's designer said the native North American animal was chosen because it's distinctive and cute, and it has a masklike face that resembles winter athletes' goggles.



• Who was that masked mammal? Though no official mention was ever made of a female counterpart to Lake Placid's 1980 mascot, Roni the raccoon, some pins feature two raccoons per-

EVOLUTION OF A MASCOT

Since mascots are often chosen years ahead of the Games (Atlanta's 1996 Character was unveiled in 1992), organizers have sometimes changed their minds about early versions. After Albertville's first choice—a mountain

goat (see page 96)—received poor reviews, it was replaced by the starlike Magique. Organizers in Nagano, Japan, unveiled a cartoonlike snow ermine called Snowple while bidding for the 1998 Games. Later they adopted four owls, the Snowlets, instead (see "What's Col-

lectible," page 83).

Such changes, however, aren't always so complete. Atlanta's original Character, WHATIZIT (a blue computer-generated creature introduced at Barcelona's Closing Ceremony), was reborn 10 months later following interviews with children on

how to maximize the Character's appeal to young fans. The makeover resulted in its becoming a slimmer and more muscular teenager—and it was renamed IZZY. After the new and more personable name was revealed, sales of the stuffed Character doubled.

Misha

Summer 1980: Moscow. Misha the bear is a prominent character in Russian folk tales, songs, and poems. Mikhail Potapych Toptygin (Misha's full name), designed by a children's-book illustrator, became one of the most popular Olympic mascots ever. Moscow organizers were the first to issue hundreds of mascot-pin designs.



Vuchko

Winter 1984: Sarajevo. More than 800 artists submitted suggestions, but eventually Vuchko the wolf, designed by a painter, was chosen by newspaper and magazine readers.



Sam the Eagle

Summer 1984: Los Angeles. When America's national symbol was selected as the mascot, who better than the Walt Disney Company to remake the regal eagle into a cute, cuddly character. Thus, a smiling Sam the Eagle—shorter and plumper than the real thing—was hatched.



Hidy and Howdy

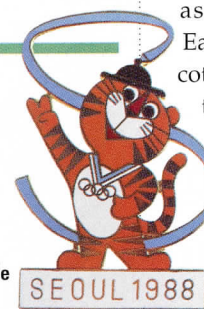
Winter 1988: Calgary. For the first time, a male-and-female pair of mascots was chosen. Sporting Western costumes and names, the polar bear-cub siblings, Hidy and Howdy, reinforced the idea that sports are for men and women, young and old.



forming together as figure skaters. • Fine art: To

Hodori

Summer 1988: Seoul. Wearing the Olympic rings around his neck and a traditional farmer's dance hat on his head, Hodori the tiger cub was drawn from popular Korean legends in which tigers are seen by Koreans as helpful creatures. Hodori's name comes from *Ho*, which is Korean for *tiger*, and *Dori*, a common masculine diminutive. A female tiger named Hosuni also appears on some pins.



Magique

Winter 1992: Albertville. Organizers hoped that children especially would respond to Magique, a whimsical figure who was said to have descended from the heavens to participate in the Games. It was the first mascot since 1976 that wasn't an animal.



Cobi

Summer 1992: Barcelona. Designer Javier Mariscal modeled Cobi, his ultracontemporary canine, after a Pyrenees sheepdog. The pooch's name came from the Spanish acronym COOB, Barcelona's organizing committee, and was chosen because it was easily pronounced in almost any language.



Håkon and Kristin

Winter 1994: Lillehammer. Håkon and Kristin, 13th-century Norwegian historical figures, became the first "human" mascots for the Olympic Games. Initially Håkon was going to be the sole mascot, but organizers later added Kristin (historically, Håkon's aunt) because they wanted mascots of both genders.



apply most colors to the surfaces of pins, artisans use bamboo shoots.

In 1994, a fine-tuned IZZY received a nose, bigger eyes, and bigger shoes for his debut as an animated cartoon star.

Many of IZZY's forebears also took a little getting used to before being enthusiastically embraced by the public: Sarajevo's Vuchko the wolf (1984) was criticized as too fierce; Sam the Eagle, L.A.'s 1984 mascot, was first derided as too comical; and Cobi, Barcelona's avant-garde dog (1992), just wasn't sophisticated enough for many Spaniards.

On pins, mascots and characters often appear with an Olympic Games logo or with official sponsors' logos and products.

MINOR MASCOTS

Some national teams also adopt mascots. Collectors can find pins that feature Olympic Oscar, a bulldog mascot for British athletes, for example, and Australia's Willy the koala. But the 1984 French team's mascot probably caused the biggest stir—they appropriated Walt Disney's Goofy character.



1992



1993



1994

The evolving IZZY (from top): the original WHATIZIT; the revised and renamed Character, IZZY; and the animated version.