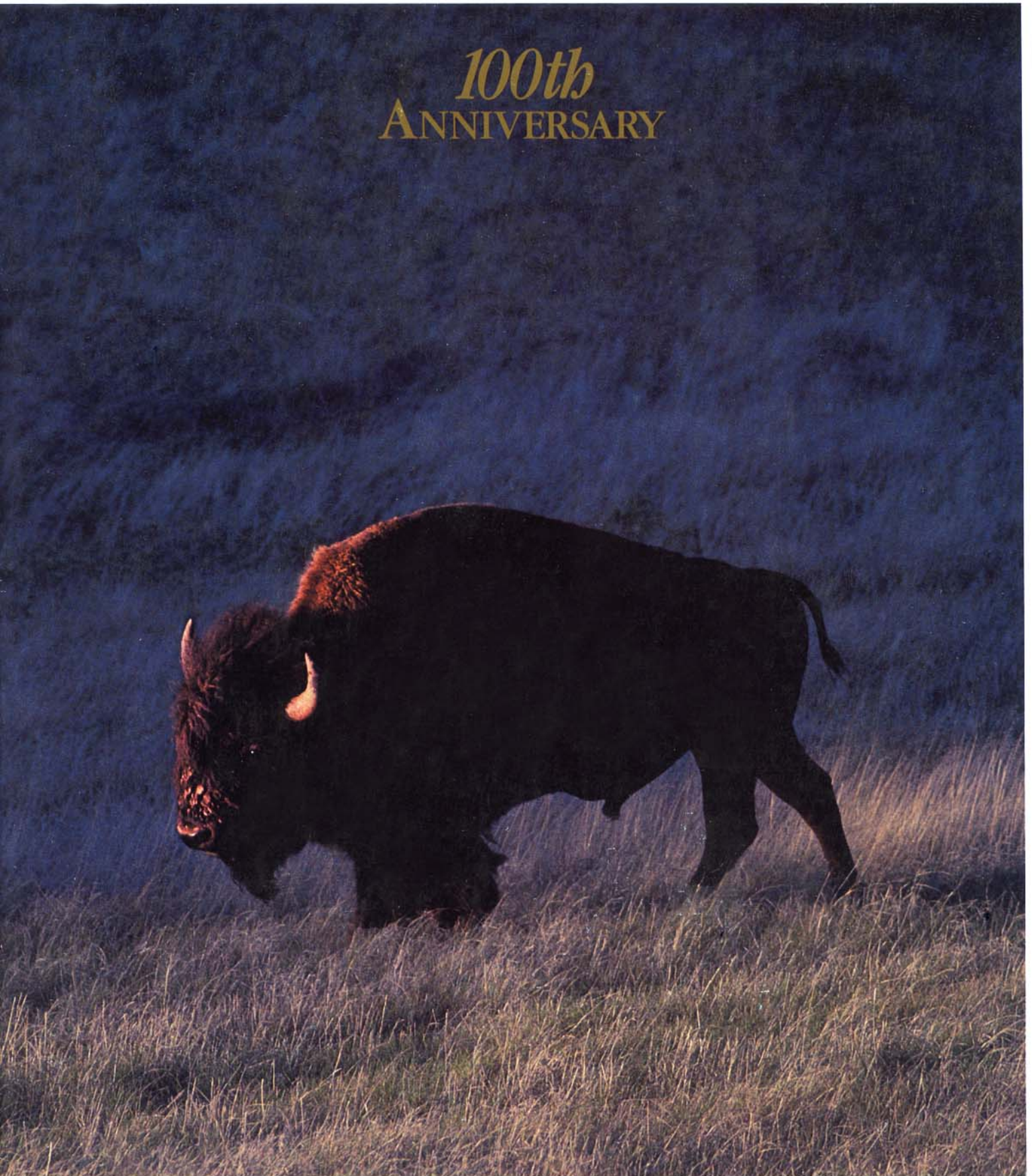


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Fight, Fight, Fight, Fight, Banana Slugs, Banana Slugs

by JAY STULLER

PROFESSOR Todd Newberry has dutifully lodged a request, a plea in fact, that any discussion of *Ariolimax columbianus* and *A. dolichopballus* be kept properly high-minded and scientific. A University of California Santa Cruz biologist, Newberry feels that spineless creatures deserve deference and respect. And he knows that word-drivers often cannot resist dragging such helpless targets through the metaphoric gutter.

"I know you will not join the crowd that can't seem to handle themselves when it comes to invertebrates," writes Newberry, in a cover letter attached to background material on *Ariolimax*.

"Play it straight."

So, class, let us remain stone sober and crack not a smile while we review the natural history of a hermaphroditic animal commonly known as the banana slug, a variety of which carries a Latin appellation meaning "long penis." While analyzing this mollusk's reproductive behavior, we will eschew sly allusions to human beings, a feat of herculean restraint considering that a scientist has observed these gastropods still attached in post-copulatory afterglow, chewing off the lengthy organ to break free.

Moreover, we will not consider it the least bit unusual or mirth-provoking that Santa Cruz students have decreed the slime-covered beast the mascot for the university's athletic squads. When we learn that the school's basketball team—which this season will wear yellow, hooded warm-up jackets with antennae on the top—means to crawl onto the floor prior to home games trailing a length of cellophane "slime," we will view this strictly as a serious attempt to psychologically disrupt the opposition.

We wouldn't pick on an invertebrate that, outside of the U.C. Santa Cruz campus, thoroughly disgusts the human species. Or which apparently also produces a reflexive "yech" in forest animals that try, but quickly give up trying, to eat them. And what *can* one say about an institution that has styled itself as the Pee Wee Herman of intercollegiate athletics? With a chant that could chill blood from UCLA to North Carolina—or simply kill a starting five through the induction of uncontrolled laughter—Santa Cruz fans speak as one: "Go, Slugs! Go, You Sluggos!"

Schools and professional sports franchises usually select names that suggest power, aggression, deception, or invincibility: eagles, bears, lions. Others take names with geographic, social, or historical significance, such as San Francisco's 49ers, the Dallas Cowboys, and the New York Knickerbockers. (The Los Angeles Lakers were founded in Minneapolis, where the name made sense; but at least L.A. Lakers has a rhythmic ring to it. Why the Utah Jazz didn't change its name when the franchise was moved from New Orleans is just plain weird; Salt Lake City is better known for its Tabernacle Choir than for its blue notes.) Whether these designations contribute a whit to team prowess is arguable.

To understand how and why the University of California Santa Cruz officially allied itself with *Ariolimax* last



Mating banana slugs (*Ariolimax dolichopballus*): An eight-hour tryst.

spring, one must first comprehend the nature of both the student body and the banana slug. In a sense, the two are in the same league. Or, at least, so felt the young scholars, who overwhelmingly voted for Banana Slugs over Sea Lions in a referendum on the university's mascot.

Founded in 1966, Santa Cruz has from its beginnings consciously developed an oddball reputation. Like the other schools in the University of California system—including Berkeley, Davis, and Los Angeles—it skims the academic cream from the state's high schools. Residents need a 3.0 grade point average for acceptance, while out-of-state applicants must pack a GPA of 3.5 or better.

However, as Newberry explains, the school was born "in frank opposition to the university system of the fifties and early sixties. We set up against a system that fostered an almost industrial approach to education." Santa Cruz, he adds, "has been raised on improbabilities; peculiar arrangements like our colleges [there are eight of

them under the UCSC umbrella], strange procedures like narrative evaluations, odd absences like no football, weird dances like the waltz."

In fact, for twenty years, Santa Cruz students have generally viewed the festive and zealous hoopla of intercollegiate athletics with disdain. Throughout most of the college's history, campus sports were organized on a club basis. There were athletes who fenced, sailed, and participated on basketball, volleyball, tennis, soccer, and cross-country teams, but who carried the obligatory Frisbee to show their solidarity with the predominantly nonathletic student population.

"We're proud of being noncompetitive and different from other universities around the country," says Eric Satzman, 1986 chairman of the school's Student Union Assembly. "We've been able to step back from the football mentality that is so pervasive everywhere else."

And yet, in 1980, Santa Cruz joined the National Collegiate Athletic Association as a Division III school, which

made some of its teams varsity squads. Division III colleges and universities are usually small and place a low emphasis on sports, with meager budgets, few or no athletic scholarships, and little recruiting. On the other hand, some tiny schools have become NCAA Division I basketball powers. But the Santa Cruz branch of the University of California chose to compete against the likes of Bethany Bible College, Dominican College, the University of Redlands, the College of Nazareth, and San Jose Bible College.

While Banana Slugs had floated around for years as an informal moniker for the club squads, Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer decreed the sea lion as the university's mascot and Sea Lions as the name for the school's teams. He believed it more dignified than Banana Slugs; students called him a dictator and launched a five-year insurgency to overturn the decision.

Sinsheimer announced once again that his Sea Lion decision was final. "Perennially," he wrote in a letter to the student newspaper, "some group

JIM KARAGEORGE



The Santa Cruz Banana Slugs and their newly chosen mascot: The chancellor preferred sea lions.