



# Tailgating Times



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Made by the fan, for the fan

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# Mascot's death brings ray of life to others

By Justin Gunderson  
TT Staff Writer

Emmitt and Charlotte Ray returned to New Jersey this weekend to see their son. They see him in the joy and gratitude of strangers who become family and in the stories of lives saved and people touched.

"Jason's spirit lives on through people like me," a man named Kenneth Williams tells them. He has bone chips from their son fused into his spine, a procedure that makes it possible for him to roll over in bed without excruciating pain.

"I just never want him to be forgotten," Charlotte Ray replies, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Oh, don't you worry. He won't," Williams says as he gently squeezes her arm. "Not in my lifetime, he won't."

They are standing in a conference room at the Musculoskeletal Transplant Foundation in Edison, and just minutes into their first meeting, they are sharing stories about Jason Ray.

The Rays live for moments like this now. If they could, they would meet every person Jason touched as an organ donor - to hear their stories and feel the connection - but the list has become too

long. And it keeps growing.

Eleven months ago, the Rays made a much different trip to New Jersey. They left their home in Concord, N.C., to find their 21-year-old son, a vibrant college senior who was here to entertain North Carolina basketball fans as the furry ram mascot, in a coma and on life support.

He had been walking along the shoulder on Route 4, just a few minutes from his hotel, when a car struck him from behind. His parents prayed for a miracle, but two days later, they made the decision to take him off life support.

They didn't know it at the time, but a decision their son had made two years earlier was about to change their lives. Actually, it would change hundreds of lives - maybe tens of thousands if his story continues to inspire people to make the same simple decision.

Jason Ray signed up to become an organ donor. He did it proudly, coming home one day and showing off the little red heart in the corner of his driver's license to his skeptical mother. She asked him to reconsider, but he made sure she knew he had made up his mind.

"Don't you dare put me in the ground with

anything that could help somebody," he told her.

Because of those words, that conviction, a life that ended much too soon is still making an impact.

For Williams, who had to retire from his job building airplanes because of back pain, that means he can take a walk through the park with his wife Althea, or play with his grandchildren.

Which is why he flew here from California this weekend to meet the Rays and deliver a message:

"Your son changed my life."

Williams, who has five children and six grandkids, is part of a new extended family now. He met them on Friday night at a reception in New Brunswick, then saw them again last night at a New Jersey Sharing Network Banquet where an annual award was named for Jason Ray.

Ronald Griffin has the heart. He is a 59-year-old former postal worker from Somerset who, just one year ago, couldn't move from his hospital bed. He had congestive heart failure, spending his days hooked up to a machine that kept him alive and struggling for every breath.

"Ronald, you doin' all right?" Emmitt Ray asks when they see each other again.



Photo by Jack Kippin

**Jason Ray in action cheering on the Tarheel faithful during a conference matchup against Duke in 2006**

"Super," Griffin replies. "Super!"

Antwan Hunter has a kidney. He is a 17-year-old sophomore at Weequahic High in Newark, and just one year ago, doctors feared that his one healthy kidney would fail and Hunter would need dialysis.

"I couldn't imagine Antwan missing a meal!" Emmitt Ray says as the

kid, wearing shiny yellow sneakers, walks into the room.

Hunter smiles shyly and picks up a plate, heading straight for the peanut butter cookies.

David Erving has a kidney and a pancreas. He is a 41-year-old Millstone resident who had spent so much of his life battling

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diabetes, with so many trips to the hospital and painful surgeries that he had made a decision as he entered his fourth year waiting for a transplant: He was ready to quit dialysis. He was ready to die.

"You look pretty good, David," Emmitt Ray tells him.

"No more dialysis. No more diabetes," Erving says, smiling. "I feel like a new person."

When Emmitt Ray decided he wanted to meet the recipients of his son's organs, he had no idea where this journey would take him. He just wanted them to know that Jason had crammed a full life into his 21 years, and to make sure that they had no guilt about what happened.

But then ESPN picked up on the story, turning it into a feature on its website and a half-hour special on television. Oprah soon called, bringing the entire group to Chicago to film a show. They have become spokespeople for organ donation, telling millions about the decision their son made.

David Fleming, president of

Donate Life America, believes the Rays' decision to tell their story helped register nearly 50,000 new organ donors by increasing traffic to the organization's national website, which, he estimates, could save more than 163,000 lives.

"All I could do was cry," Emmitt Ray says. "I mean, 163,000? Think about that number. And now that it's gone to Oprah, I'd say it's way beyond anything we could comprehend."

The Rays are not finished, either. They plan to speak at high schools, encouraging teenagers who are about to get their driver's license to register as organ donors. An assembly at Plainfield High had to be postponed due to the snowstorm on Friday, but the Rays say they'll try again.

A bill recently endorsed by the state Senate would require high schools to teach the importance of organ donation in health class. It also would require anyone obtaining or renewing a driver's license to choose whether to register as an organ donor - a mea-

sure that's long overdue.

More than 4,200 New Jersey residents are waiting for new organs.

"There shouldn't have to be a waiting list," Charlotte Ray says. "People are dying every day while they wait. It shouldn't have to be that way."

March Madness is just a few weeks away now. North Carolina will be among the favorites in the NCAA Tournament again, but Charlotte Ray can't bring herself to watch any of the games.

"When I see that mascot walking through the crowd," she says, "it just brings back memories."

She has 15 scrapbooks back at her house in North Carolina, each filled with more than 200 sympathy cards, notes and letters about her son. She can't bring herself to read them yet, either.

Each time Charlotte and her husband make a trip like this, they have to relive the worst days of their lives - the accident, the trip to the hospital, the decision to take Jason off life support.

It never gets easier, but seeing

the people their son helped with his decision is comforting.

"Jason was younger than my youngest daughter, and I have grandkids" Ronald Griffin, the man with his heart, tells Emmitt. "So it was very personal to me. I felt tremendous guilt. It's been therapeutic to be around you."

Emmitt smiles and nods. Later in the day, at the Musculoskeletal Transplant Foundation, he would learn that between 80 and 90 people have received tissue and bone from Jason.

There is a 12-year-old girl in Oklahoma, an 80-year-old woman from Minnesota, people in 24 states and Canada.

And a 58-year-old man from California, who flew across the country to tell two proud parents how his life has changed.

"I just wanted to say I'm so grateful to be part of your son's gift," says Kenneth Williams, one name on a list of thousands who were helped by Jason Ray's decision.

And the list keeps growing.

## Student fan section reigns supreme



Duke's Cameron Crazies  
are America's #1 fans

Photo courtesy of Devil's Den

# The Wave



## One fan's creation continues to keep crowds on their feet

Photo courtesy of ESPN

By Janie McCauley  
TT Staff Writer

OAKLAND, CA.-"Krazy" George Henderson has spent the last quarter-century trying to persuade everyone that he debuted the "Wave" during an Oakland Athletics' playoff game against the Yankees - not those Washington football fans who claim the Huskies first performed the famous cheer.

Debate aside, the Wave is 25 years old and still going strong.

"It's been really interesting," Krazy George said in a phone interview from his home in New Rochelle, N.Y. "I see it at the Olympics. There's a video of Fidel Castro doing it. If it had actually originated in New York at a Yankees game, they would have thought it was sent by the gods."

Krazy George, now 62, says he spent three years perfecting the Wave. He first pulled off the move - in which fans take turns, section-by-section, standing up and waving their arms - on Oct. 15, 1981, at the Yankees-A's AL Championship series game in the Coliseum. Washington, meanwhile, did it two weeks later, on Oct. 31.

Former Huskies yell leader Robb Weller had returned to campus for a homecoming game against Stanford. He began a vertical version of the Wave in the '70s, but first did the horizontal Wave that day.

Officials at Washington acknowledge Krazy George as being first, but what they are certain of is that the Huskies popularized the cheer. It soon caught on at a Seattle Seahawks game, too.

It took a year and a half, according to Krazy George, for the Huskies to fess up that they'd seen the Wave on television and given it their

own twist. Good thing, too, because he has the proof on tape: The Wave was part of the A's 1981 highlight video shown to potential season-ticket holders for the following year.

"That's the best-kept lie in the last 25 years. But now, most of the world recognizes me," Krazy George said. "Their theory is that they came up with it in 30 seconds! 'Oh, we just thought it up.'

"They kept doing it the whole football season and of course they were a big national football power with a big budget. I tell everyone to call Seattle and get their side of the story. It's like a war with me."

Krazy George, known best by that name and for pounding his drum in stadiums across the United States, is a California native who moved to Napa from Southern California at age 17. He left for New York three years ago.

A former high school shop teacher, Krazy George's lone job the last 30 years has been as a for-hire cheerleader - working all of about three hours a week. Yes, that's it. He averages one game every seven days.

In that first Wave game, the Yankees eliminated the A's, 4-0, to reach the World Series. Dave Righetti, now the San Francisco Giants pitching coach, was the winning pitcher. A crowd of 47,302 was on hand for the first Wave.

"We put it on the map in 1981," said Shooty Babitt, a rookie on the '81 A's. "A lot of people wish the Wave would go away now. A lot of people don't understand when you should do it. ... The new-age fan doesn't understand where the Wave originated. But Krazy George still looks the same today as he did 25 years ago."

Krazy George is a well-known figure at sporting venues, especially in the Bay Area.

Mostly bald with blond curls above his ears, he wears his striped athletic socks pulled up and always has a drum in hand.

He has been featured in national magazines and TV programs and has several upcoming interviews with international publications.

That game in Oakland was the biggest crowd yet for Krazy George, who had tried the cheer a couple of times at high school rallies.

A simpler version originated at San Jose State several years earlier. Krazy George would call for the three student sections to chant - one word for each group - "San!" "Jose!" "State!" He would point to each section signaling those students' turn.

He also did something similar for the former Colorado Rockies hockey team - now the New Jersey Devils - using "Go! Rockies! Go!" But it didn't work so well with only 5,000 fans in the seats many nights.

He knows there are plenty of fans out there who refuse to participate or become grumpy when their view of the game gets briefly blocked.

"There are always a few people," he said.

So, in an era when fads tend to fade quickly in sports, fashion and technology, why has the Wave stood the test of time?

"As a professional cheerleader, I know why I do it: What it does is intensify the energy of the crowd," Krazy George said. "It's almost like an accomplishment. It's their own competition, like a contest or video game. You have to participate to make it work. It takes 95 percent of fans doing it to make it great."

Krazy George says he last got into it with Washington about the Wave before the 20th anniversary. Over the years, he has called the university's athletic director and president, not to mention newspapers and TV stations.

The way things are going, the Wave will carry on long enough for the lore to continue.

"You can start a wave, but nobody can stop one," Krazy George said. "The only way it stops is if something exciting happens on the field."

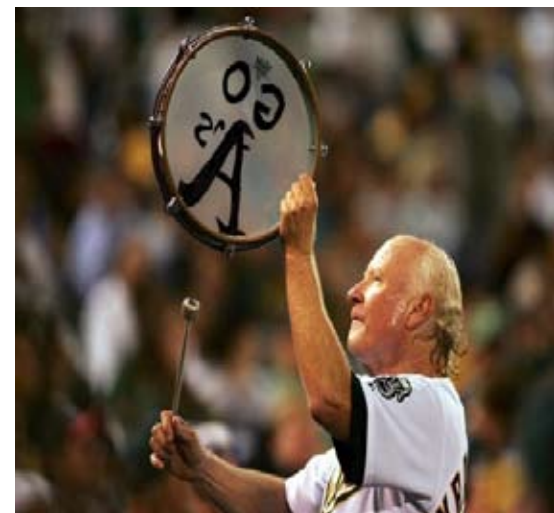


Photo by Nick Schroeder  
"Krazy" George Henderson at the ballpark in Oakland

# Die-hard fans proudly display their true colors

By Ken Burger  
TT Staff Writer

CHARLOTTE - Mike Darden's whole head was blue.

Well, except for the cute little white whiskers and the cat-like fangs that gave him that friendly, yet menacing look.

Which is exactly what the 47-year-old truck driver from Leland, N.C., was going for.

"I do this for every game," said Darden, as he and his wife, Angela, headed into Bank of American Stadium for Monday night's game between the Carolina Panthers and Tampa Bay Buccaneers. "Unless it's raining or 500 degrees. You don't do this in August. It don't stay on real good when it's hot. It gets a little sweaty and messy."

If you're like me, you've often wondered who those crazy people are that you see on television with their faces painted in support of their favorite NFL team.

While most sports fans are content wearing jerseys and hats and other forms of official team paraphernalia, there are certain people who just have to do a little bit more.

So, are they nuts?

Turns out they're actually normal Americans who just feel the need to

exhibit their support in a way that shows a little more personal commitment.

"I think he looks real cute," Angela said with a straight face. "Go Panthers."

Panthers approved

Indeed, people from all walks of life filed into the stadium dressed in

various color combinations designed to show their support and garner a some individual attention.

Another cat-faced fan turned out to be 11-year-old Austin Senter of Charlotte who was attending his very first

Panthers game.

He was pretty excited because he and his father, Mark, had had their faces painted and were

ready for the excitement of Monday Night Football in the Queen City.

Like most people, they thought they might have a better chance of getting on television if they painted their faces.

"It worked," Austin said. "We've already been on an ESPN promo."

Although this was Austin's first face-painting, it will probably not be his last. That first taste of television exposure can be addicting.

Many habitual face painters get hooked young.

But it turns out most of the face painters are not original designs. Like most things around the NFL, even the face painting designs are under the strict control of the teams.

At one of the face-painting stands outside the stadium, Maryanne Daley was busy spray painting faces of fans who waited in line to pay \$10 for a full face job. Panthers or paws on the cheek are just \$5.

"I've done as many as 120 faces at one game," said Daley, whose real job is executive director of a Better Business Bureau for 20 counties in North and South Carolina. "It really gets busy about an hour or so before the game starts."

At one point she was trying to sell a young man on the "power of glitter," but he wasn't buying it. He wanted something custom-made, but that's not allowed.

"They've got to conform to what the Panthers request," she said pointing to a sign with six approved designs. "We have a little bit of latitude, but we have to use the approved stencils."

Sort of normal

But there are always a few guys who don't go for the "approved" look.

Jeffrey Martin of Wilmington, N.C., is one of those guys. He was wearing a wig with spikes sticking out of his head and his face painted black and blue.

"We're just here to support the



Photo by Drew Neitzel

A fired up fan section at Michigan State cheer their Spartans

team and draw attention and you can see the crowd that we've got," said Martin, who owns a car dealership and had a group of people in tow. "We just come out to raise a little cain and have a little fun."

The same for Steven Gillard and his pal Brian Burdette. These two guys had obviously painted their own faces blue and white and there may have been some alcohol involved during the application.

The lines weren't exactly straight, but the intent was intense.

"We do this for every game," said Gillard, a professional landscaper by day and amateur face painter by night. "Even when we don't come to the game and we're in a bar, we're painted up like this in the bar."

Like I said. Just normal people.

Sort of.

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