

# The man behind the Duck

By Paul Halvorson  
Emerald Contributor

For the most part, sophomore Scott Sobel is a typical University student. He's taking 14 credits this fall and is still unsure of his major. He lives in the dorms and likes to party. His interests include playing the piano and watching sunsets.

And like many University students, he has a part-time job.

But Sobel's job is the part that separates him from the other 17,000 plus University students. Last May he beat out 10 other want-to-be Ducks, who answered an ad in the *Oregon Daily Emerald*, for a job that requires dressing up in a heavy, hard-to-breathe-in duck outfit, and mascoting at the University's football and men's basketball games for free.

Sobel applied for the job because he felt it would allow him to do what he likes best: making people laugh. "I was voted class clown in high school," Sobel said. "I like to entertain."

Sobel spent part of his summer attending mascot school. There he was taught the importance of keeping his Duck-identity a secret. Sobel adhered to this code for a while, but says he now freely reveals his other identity to friends and family. "My parents think it's neat, and my friends think it's cool."

The Duck's personality parallels Sobel's approach to life. "That's one reason why I like my job, it definitely portrays some of my characteristics in life. I don't care what other people think ... I like to consider myself as one who advocates individualism."

Getting to travel around the country for free with the cheerleaders is another bonus that keeps Sobel a happy duck.

As is his light practicing schedule. "The cheerleaders really practice a lot, like three hours a night, (but) what can I practice?"

But Sobel is quick to point out that playing the Duck is harder than students imagine.

"A lot of people think, 'Hey, I can do that — just get in there and act like a fool,'" he said. "(But) it takes an enormous amount of physical stamina and energy to be creative for three or four hours ... they don't know what it's like."

"It's kinda like you're in your own world. You know a lot of people are looking at you and your just sweating and smelling ... (and sometimes asking) 'Why am I doing this?'"

Unlike the football and basketball teams, Sobel has no set plays. "You just try to be spur of the moment ... keep your mind open and creative, make kids happy, hug 'em."

The Duck's number one fans are the children, and Sobel appreciates their allegiance.

"It's fun to see little kids smile, and go crazy, and call you Donald or whatever," Sobel said. "But at promotional things ... it can be a nightmare. Like one

time in Bend, Oregon I did this Rotary-Duck race and it was at a park, and I had no one with me. I was just on my own and there were literally 40 kids following me, pulling my tail, getting in my way ... that was a tough little gig."

Sobel's had some rough on-the-field experiences as well. Like the football game at University of Washington.

"I totally taunted their fans. I walked by their student section when I really shouldn't have, and I had this dog-catching outfit, and I was just really antagonizing them bad," Sobel said. "(But) it was a great feeling to have like 45,000 people boo at me ... I was just going 'This is neat.'"

That same game, Sobel got tackled by five members of the University of Washington's band, after he accidentally hit a member on the chin with the Oregon flag.

Autzen stadium is the Duck's territory of delight. There he doesn't have to worry about excessive verbal abuse or physical mangling, he said. Adding that the only danger in Autzen is the drunken fans who tend to unnecessarily rough him up, but never too bad.

In fact, Sobel says he enjoyed it when bored University students hoisted the Duck all the way up the steep stands of Autzen Stadium—a good 50 yard boost.

A self-professed sports fanatic, Sobel said being a mascot has taught him the business-side of sports.

"I've always been a spectator and it's really neat to be behind the scenes and really see what goes on, and how serious athletics is ... to some people Oregon is just like tittle-winks, but the one thing I've learned is the media is just amazing, they just never stop," he said.

After graduation, Sobel said he might want to get a job in sports administration.

"I think being the mascot would look good on a resume."



Photo by Steve Carl

The Duck cheers on an already elated crowd at the Civil War game.



Photo by Martin Thiel

The Duck sets up his own shot during a basketball game.



Photo by Martin Thiel

Scott Sobel, as the Duck, enjoys mixing things up with spectators.

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