

# The Man Behind The Mascot

**C**HRIS ERNEST IS AT HIS BEST WHEN he's not himself. The junior from Michigan's Wayne State U. has played everything from McDonald's "Mac Tonight" to Michigan State U.'s "Sparty" to the Detroit Tigers' "Paws."

Ernest is clawing his way through school as a professional mascot.

The Ferndale, Mich., native got his start in 1989. A ninth grader at the time, Ernest began to shine as the "Mac Tonight" moon man for public appearances in the Detroit area. "My mom worked for the guy who made appearances as Ronald McDonald, and they needed somebody to fill in," he says. "I was just in the right place at the right time."

Then came stints as his high school mascot and later as Michigan State's "Sparty" Spartan. By that time, he says, mascoting was in his blood.

But when Ernest first stepped onto the lush, green grass of Tiger Stadium this summer, he knew his dream had come true. Twirling his orange-and-black-striped tail in his hand, Ernest debuted as the Tigers' first mascot — "Paws."

"I just sent in my résumé," he says. "There were about 100 of us.



**Who is that masked man? Tony the Tiger? No, it's Chris Ernest of Wayne State U., honest.**

There wasn't an actual tryout, just an interview process. They knew my talents ahead of time, I guess."

Ernest's favorite part of the job is playing cat and mouse with the crowd.

"The fans are really starting to like me," he says. "I enjoy being able to get smiles on the kids' faces. It's just the biggest rush. I just love to get people all pumped up."

But getting people pumped up every day has its down side, too.

"I haven't had a day off in, like, three months," Ernest says. "But I love it."

In addition to Tigers games, Ernest appears as Paws for birthdays, weddings and other functions.

"The only thing I won't do is bachelorette parties," Ernest says with as much pride as a man in a tiger suit can have. "That's just something for the reputation of the organization."

Ernest transferred from Michi-

gan State to Wayne State this fall to be closer to his job, but he says he won't try out for the mascot job there. "I'm way too busy with Detroit," Ernest says. "And I'm not even sure Wayne State has a mascot."

Ernest, a broadcast journalism major, says he'd like to be the Tigers' mascot for another five to 10 years before pursuing his ultimate career goal — sports broadcasting.

Ernest doesn't have a long-term contract with the Tigers, and he won't say how much money he makes — not even a ballpark figure. But he's not ruling out the idea of staying in his current field.

"Who knows what will happen," he says. "Maybe I can make the Tiger mascot bigger than life, maybe even bigger than the San Diego Chicken."

**Tony Hansen, Michigan State U./ Photo courtesy Detroit Tigers Inc.**

The court's decision, however, hinged on the fact that the Constitution guarantees protection of individual — not group — rights.

On July 20, the U. of California regents abolished race-based preferences in admissions, hiring and contracting. The vote made UC the first university system in the nation to scale back its affirmative-action programs.

Paul Encinas, director of the U. of Colorado (CU)'s student advocacy center, is worried about the ruling's effect on minorities. "[Minorities will] be more pessimistic about opportunities available in higher education because they won't

see the race-specific scholarships there," he says.

One way CU is trying to increase minority status is by changing admissions standards. "All universities need to find a way around affirmative action," says Loren Sharply, a senior at CU and president of the student body. "We have to find a new way to achieve the same result. Economic standards could be used instead." Approximately 15 percent of CU's student population is minority.

Sharply also is concerned about the ruling's impact on recruiting and retaining minority faculty.



# College Trek: The First Generation

**A**T TENNESSEE TECHNOLOGICAL U., TYPICAL reactions include screaming and tears. That's what Rick Stegall sees from students awarded one of the school's new "first-generation" scholarships.

Stegall is director of the Capital Campaign fund-raising group at TTU, one of a growing number of schools offering special scholarships to students who demonstrate financial need and whose parents do not have bachelor's degrees. Terms of the programs vary from one school to another, but the principle behind them is the same.

"One young lady that we awarded it to last year had already borrowed all the money she could borrow," Stegall says. "She broke down and wept, she was so happy."

Samar Lightfoot, a sophomore at Colorado State U., says his scholarship allowed him to attend CSU rather than a smaller school in his native Cleveland. "It's two less loans I have to take out," he says.

"If I didn't get a pretty big scholarship, I wouldn't be able to go here," says Josh Cooper, a senior at TTU. "I was relieved."

Paul Thayer, director of the center for educational access and outreach at CSU, takes credit for starting the first program of this kind in 1984.

"In Colorado, people have seen how successful it has been in attracting and retaining students," Thayer says. "On a national level, it's probably being looked at as an alternative to other kinds of scholarships — race-based scholarships and the like."

Thayer says he doesn't know an exact number of the schools



**Because his parents did not attend college, Samar Lightfoot can.**

with similar programs, but he thinks CSU's programs is rare. "There's been a lot of interest," he says. "I really do think it's going to be a promising concept for a lot of places."

At CSU, approximately 275 students benefit from the program. In its first year, the TTU program had only eight recipients, even though 60 percent of students were eligible, Stegall says.

"What's surprising is how well the students have done in terms of leadership and performance," Thayer says. "We're serving a different cut of students that isn't otherwise recognized, rewarded and encouraged."

**Feona Huff, Norfolk State U., Va./ Photo by Erica Carlson, Colorado State U.**

Down the road, he says, students could suffer from the lack of minority teachers.

Lorrie Lima, associate director of the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action at the U. of Utah, says the decision and its impact on the U. of Utah is still unclear.

"The court applied a high and strict scrutiny standard to all federal institutions, so it won't be as liberal as it once was," Lima says.

But the ultimate fate of affirmative action is still to be determined, especially since President Clinton is so against ending it.

"This particular decision has definitely perked everybody's ears up," Lima says. He says that affirmative action programs should have ongoing yearly reviews to make sure they're meeting the needs of their communities.

"We need to be more conscious of what we're doing in affirmative action," Butler says. "I don't think our work is done."

**Erica Kalkofen, U. of Wisconsin, Stout/Illustration by Scott Magoon, Northeastern U.**

# Affirmative Action: The Burning Question

**A**FFIRMATIVE ACTION'S 30-YEAR-OLD fire was again stoked this summer by the Supreme Court.

The Court's 5-4 decision made all race- and gender-based programs vulnerable to court challenges. But university admission, scholarship and hiring practices may get burned the worst.

"This [ruling] doesn't mean courts threw out affirmative action," says Andi Butler, director for affirmative action at Northwestern U.

But it does change how universities develop affirmative-action plans, Butler says.

"The programs will be much more narrowly defined in order to survive the scrutiny test," she says.

Under the October, 1972 Higher Education Guidelines, colleges and universities receiving federal funds were required to make additional efforts to recruit, employ and promote qualified members of groups formerly excluded, even if that exclusion cannot be traced to particular discriminatory actions on the part of the employer.