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PEOPLE

TigerToons return

Local man documents LSU football season with popular cartoons

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Arthur D. Lauck/The Advocate



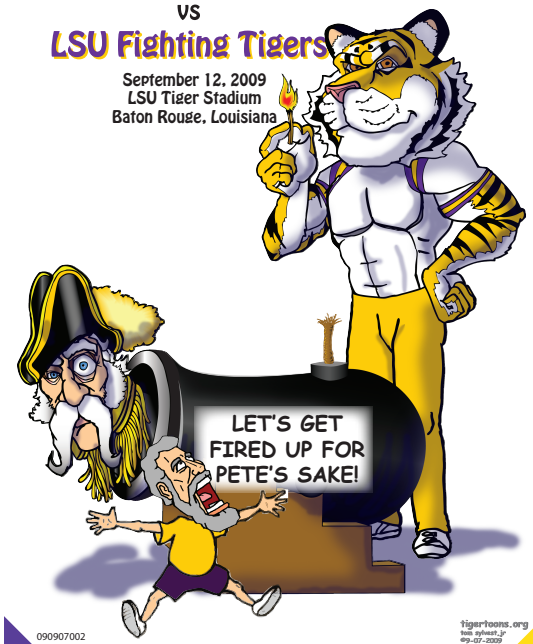
The whistle has blown, the ball's been snapped and the LSU Tigers have posted their first victory. Football season has officially begun, and Tom Sylvest is already documenting the Tigers' season via his TigerToons Web site, <http://www.tigertoons.org>.

Vanderbilt Commodores

vs

LSU Fighting Tigers

September 12, 2009
LSU Tiger Stadium
Baton Rouge, Louisiana



“I’m a very rabid LSU fan,” explains Sylvest on the Web site. “I am also an artist. I combine my love for LSU sports, football in particular, with my art interests. I create cartoons and other pieces about LSU sports. I have come to be known as ‘TigerToon Dude’ or ‘Toon Dude.’”

TigerToons actually started when Sylvest was living in Washington, D.C. “I was out of touch with a lot of people so, one year I sent out these Christmas cards because LSU was going to the Gator Bowl,” he explained. “That’s how this TigerToon stuff really started — people expected these Christmas cards every year.”

Back home in Baton Rouge, working in organizational development and consulting, Sylvest found himself in possession of a bunch of fax numbers “so for the hell of it I started collecting fax numbers and, prior to LSU’s games, I’d send out a TigerToon.”

Those faxes quickly became a much-anticipated hit. And, while he’d learned how to create news groups while working in D.C., faxing hundreds of people was still a bit of a hassle. That problem went away with the advent of e-mail (TigerToons were e-mailed to some 1,500 people on a regular basis.) and got even simpler once Sylvest created his own Web site in 1997.

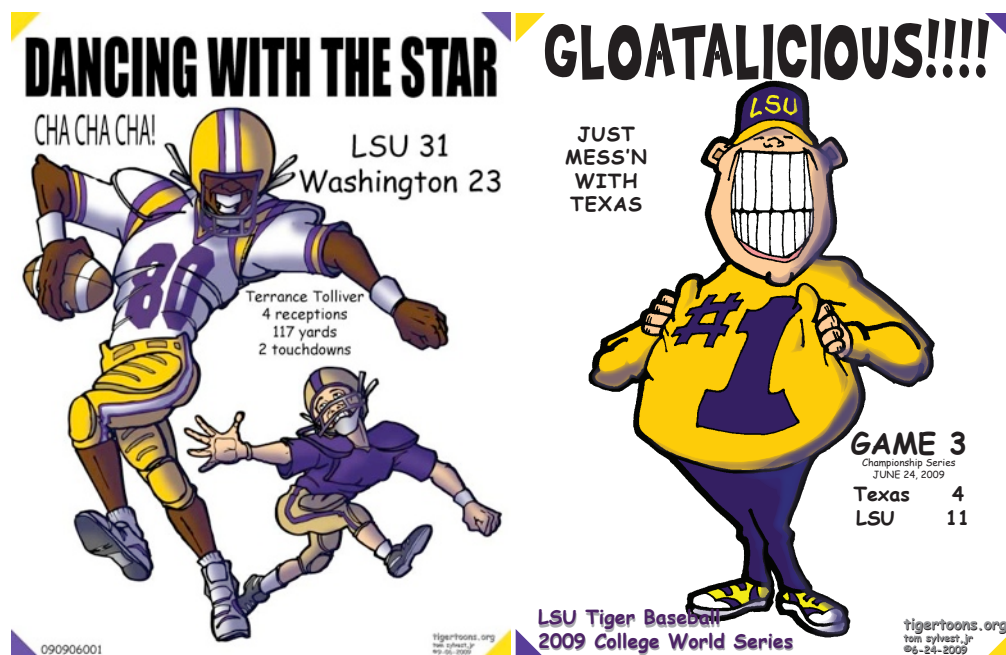
Sylvest said he draws TigerToons to “calm his nerves.” In the beginning, he would draw four or five posters before each game and, on game day, would put them on the side of

the family RV while tailgating. Pretty soon, people would come by to see what Sylvest had to say about that week's game.

"My mother-in-law (Gloria Breaux) said she could sell them but I told her, no, we can't sell them," said Sylvest, a self-taught artist who's been drawing since he was a youngster. "But folks could make 'a donation' if they wanted one."

By 1999, Sylvest was getting requests for other art projects and soon found himself making enough money to quit his day job, so to speak. At the time he was serving as president of the Federation of Churches & Synagogues as well as president of Sunrise Rotary.

Sylvest's process: He listens to sports shows and reads to see what is the topic of the week.



Sometimes TigerToons are related to something political that's going on in the area. He keeps a notebook to write captions as they come to him. "Then I sit down with my pencil and pad," he added. "There's a lot of material out there."

Sylvest's focus is primarily LSU football, but he did commemorate the baseball team's big win in Omaha this summer. "I don't do other sports because they have so many games," he added. "With football, the most you'll have is 12."

And, while most Toons deal with LSU, all SEC teams are fair game. When Florida won the National Championship last year, Sylvest drew up a few for some Florida fans who are friends (yes, LSU fans have friends who are Florida fans). "When an SEC team does good, they need to be recognized."

With his own Web site and the added appeal of Facebook and YouTube, Sylvest now creates somewhere between 140-160 TigerToons during football season. "I'll do anywhere from three to 12 per game — it depends on what the issues are," he said.

Sylvest starts off with a pencil sketch, then he fills the drawing in with ink. Next, he scans the image in, adds a bit more color and, finally, posts the latest creation.

"I make people heroes in their offices," he said, with an infectious smile creeping across his bearded face. "They print it out and put it on their wall; they make copies and hand them out to folks."

TigerToons have even been spotted in Iraq. Solider Ed Taylor sent Sylvest photos of his tent decorated with Toons from the Tigers' 2004-2005 seasons.

While Sylvest is excited about LSU's 2009 season ("The cloud of Perrilloux has passed with renewed confidence in the quarterback corps. The stable of running backs is led by Charles Scott with Williams, Murphy and Holliday offering differing styles. Sure-handed receivers intend to balance the offensive game plan. The two-headed defensive monster has been replaced with a veteran coordinator in John 'Chief' Chavis. New faces step into the breach left by departing stars," he stated on his Web site), 2008 was anything but sunny. Hurricane Gustav left a tree in the middle of Sylvest and wife Kathleen's home.

"I couldn't do anything," he said. "We're not in the house yet, but I hope to come roaring back this season."

Since he couldn't draw (his studio took the brunt of the damage), Sylvest has been writing a book about the devastation and rebuilding process. "I tried to quit smoking right before the storm, so I hadn't bought any cigarettes, and I couldn't get to the pharmacy to get the medicine (to help him not smoke)," recalled Sylvest, adding that he thought he was doing pretty well under the circumstances.

But when neighbors asked if they could get anything for the Sylvests, who were camping under their carport, Sylvest said no. But his wife of 21 years quickly requested "some damn cigarettes" for her husband.

"I draw the way I see something or a person," Sylvest explained. "There's a certain edge to everything I draw, but I don't try to be controversial. The general goal is to entertain, and if it makes people think, that's good."

"I love their questions: What did you mean by that? That gives me the opportunity to explain myself sometimes," he said. "It's been fun being me — way too much fun being me."