

Getting slimed

Santa Cruz ¹⁰⁻²⁻⁸⁶ oozes love for humble banana slug

By JAMIE S. CACKLER

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — Who would think that a slimy, yellow, 6-inch, gastropod without a shell could drive normally reasonable people into such a frenzy? The plain truth is Santa Cruz is going bananas over slugs.

Consider the UCSC basketball team member who returned to school this quarter with his hair dyed a distinct shade of banana-slug yellow. And take a look inside the university bookstore, where a hefty portion of the merchandise in the first-floor general store bears the image of the slimy critter.

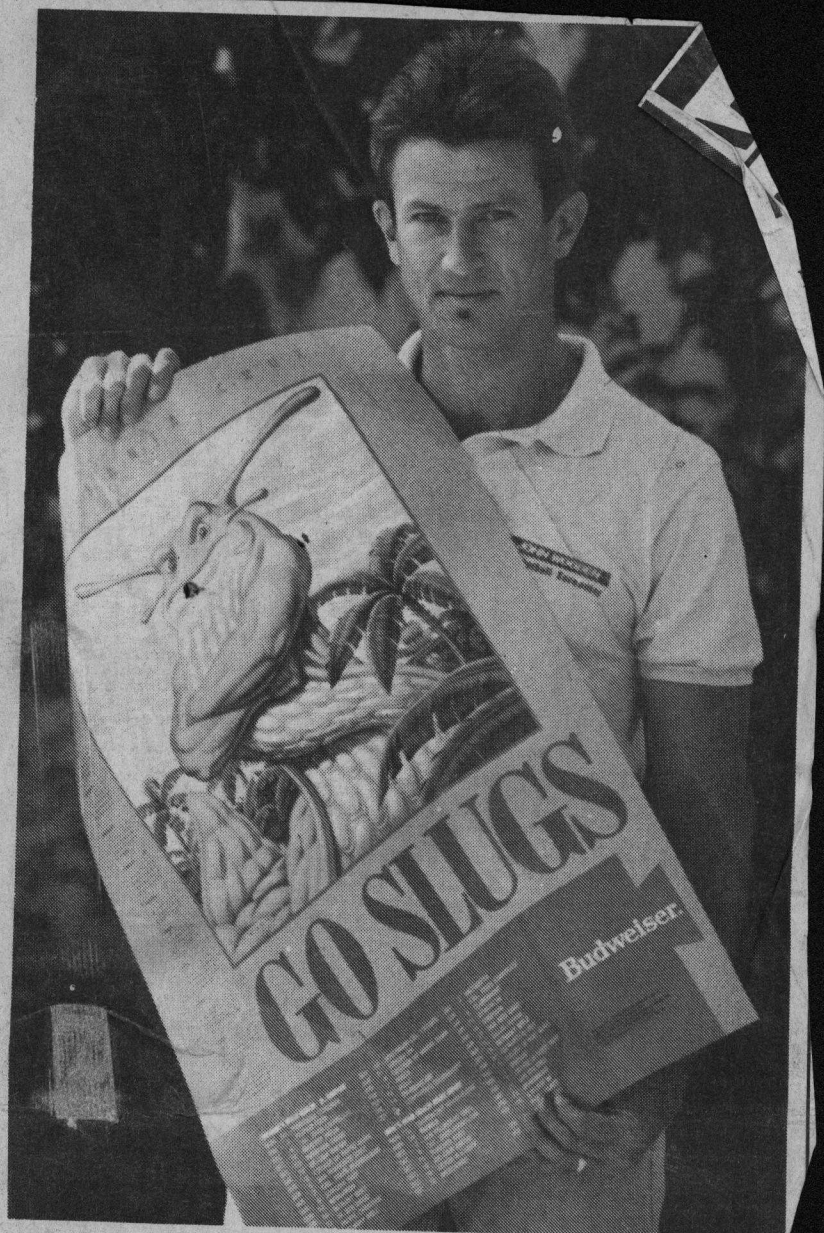
Store windows dedicated to the saffron mascot dot the Pacific Garden Mall, in honor of the city's first four-day "SlugFest," which the Downtown Association hopes to make an annual event. The SlugFest concludes tonight, with music and miscellaneous entertainment in the mall. Merchants will remain open until 8 p.m., offering lines of slug merchandise for sale at a discount.

The men's basketball coach says his team is considering yellow warm-up suits — with antennae attached to the hoods. The team may suit up and slither in, leaving a cellophane-induced slime trail at the season-opening game, Coach Mark Henry said. But they'll do it only if Audubon magazine makes good on threats to photograph the less-than-grand entrance as a humorous aside to an upcoming article on the real, live inspirational creatures.

Henry also revealed he has ordered a prototype banana slug baseball cap from the company that makes caps adorned with antlers, horns, gadgets and creatures of all kinds. His cap, he said, would feature a slug coming up over the top of the cap, looking straight ahead. "It would look like a yellow mohawk, and I want it to have a strip of plastic hanging down the back like a slime trail," Henry said.

Perhaps the ultimate status symbol is a stunning four-color poster created, printed and donated by the Anheuser-Busch brewing company in St. Louis. The 5,000 posters bear the image of a bellicose slug

Please see back of section



UCSC basketball coach Mark Henry with poster.

Pete Amos/Sentinel

Slimed—

Continued from Page A1

mascot, the 1986-'87 game schedules of the UCSC men's and women's basketball teams and a giant "Go Slugs" salute.

The Budweiser beer logo at the bottom right was the focus of a momentary fuss when UCSC Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer hesitated to sanction the release of a poster linking the university with an alcoholic beverage. But art and fun won over caution and Sinsheimer approved release of the posters — provided they are not sold.

Not wanting to let a golden fund-raising effort slip away, the athletic department is "gratefully accepting donations" from poster recipients. Henry said the athletic department has been concerned about getting a copyright on the mascot and its name. "Here we are, a seriously underfunded athletic program," Henry said. UCSC has "one of the least-funded programs in the whole country, and this is a way we could help ourselves."

In 1981, the National Collegiate Athletic Association did a study of athletic program funding, Henry said. It showed that such funding at the nation's colleges and universities ranged from \$5,000 to \$60,000. "Last year our basketball budget was \$4,800 — and that's five years later," Henry said.

But the slug has been very, very good to them. "We're certainly reaping benefits from the mascot name change" from the Sea Lions to the Banana Slugs, Henry said. National media coverage and unprecedented community attention have glided onto campus on the slug's slime tracks.