

EVERY SLUG HAS ITS DAY

Banana Slug

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HISTORY OF A MASCOT: UCSC celebrates 25 years as banana slugs

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SANTA CRUZ — Often the value of something isn't revealed until someone attempts to replace it.

Such was the case with UC Santa Cruz's mascot, the banana slug.

On Tuesday, the campus celebrated its beloved yellow mollusk, now in its 25th year as the school's official representative.

The Santa Cruz City Council declared Tuesday UCSC Banana Slug Day.

Sammy the Slug, the costumed incarnation of the mascot, mingled with students in Quarry Plaza, handing out slug-shaped cookies. Students filled out the bottom portion of a poster that was titled "I like the banana slug because ...," and the answers provided insight into why a grass-roots movement of students selected the slug and made it one of the most recognizable mascots in the country.

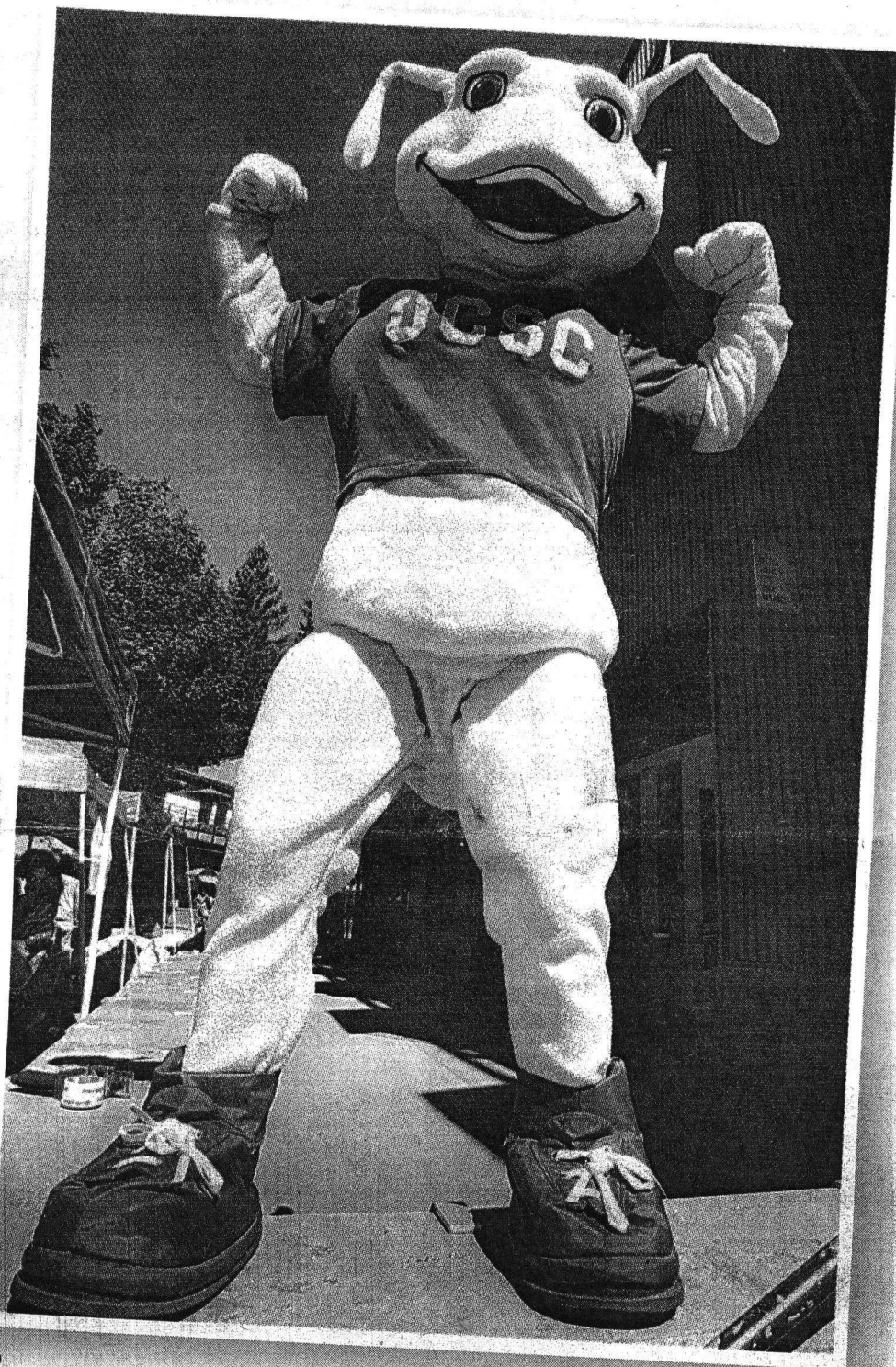
The answers: "Total babe;" "He is original;" "There are no known predators;" "Cause it's unique like UCSC;" "It's cute, slimy and nonaggressive, just like me;" and "It recycles."

The way students feel today is much like the students felt in 1980, when the UCSC administration announced the school had chosen the sea lion to represent its sports teams.

"The more typical, aggressive mascots are all so lame," said UCSC junior Erik Wright. "Nobody else is the banana slugs, and I don't think any school will ever have a mascot as cool as the slug. It's unique, it's vibrant, it's a little subversive and it represents UC Santa Cruz well."

The banana slug, which is the second-largest land slug in the world and varies in color from bright yellow to the brownish-black color of an overripe banana, is native to the forests of Santa Cruz.

For years, the slug served as the



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

UC Santa Cruz mascot the Sammy the Slug has gone through a number of body changes in 25 years.

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The newest Sammy the Slug mascot — with a considerably shortened tail — hands out cookies with his likeness Tuesday on campus. DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

SLUGS

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unofficial mascot, and students yelled "Go Slugs!" and "Slime 'em!" at athletic events.

Before 1980 though, UCSC only had unofficial sports clubs. That year, then-Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer moved the school into NCAA Division III athletics, and each school was required to have a nickname like falcons, sparrows or grizzlies.

Sinsheimer backed a faction of student-athletes who picked the sea lion. But the banana slug would not simply sink away into the night on a trail of slime.

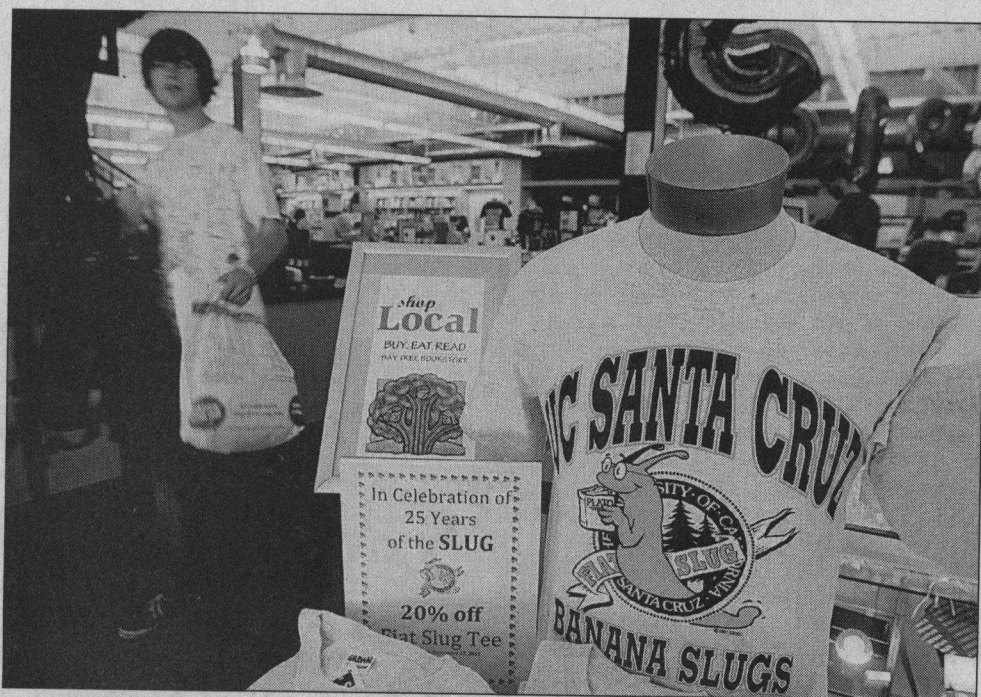
"UCSC has always been a very special institution," said Eric Satzman, who was chair of the Student Union Assembly during the movement to select the banana slug. "There was always a noncompetitive nature to school. We weren't engaged in national sports and at the time we didn't have grades. The slug represented the hearts and the minds of the students and the way they perceived UCSC as a unique institution."

In 1986, with a wave of student support behind it, the Student Union Assembly put a nonbinding resolution on the slug to a vote.

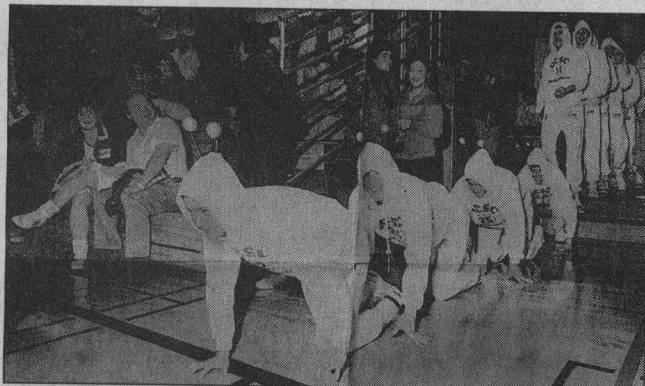
The movement got national attention, and Satzman was interviewed on national television and featured in magazines.

"For the students it was personal, and for the rest of the country it was a novelty," Satzman said.

A song that Satzman wrote with fellow students John Sulmeyer and Jon Spivak called



It all started with the 'Fiat Slug' T-shirt. DAN COYRO/SENTINEL



For its home opener on Nov. 26, 1986, the UC Santa Cruz men's basketball team crawled onto the court in yellow sweats and yellow antennae in a tribute to the newly elected banana slug mascot. DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

"The Slugs are Back" got air play on radio stations in the Bay Area.

Students Marc Ratner and Peter Blackshaw developed a banana slug logo to help the cause. The result was the "Fiat Slug" logo that shows a slug

wearing glasses and reading Plato — the slogan "Fiat Slug" [let there be slug] came from the University of California motto "Fiat Lux" [let there be light].

The logo still adorns UCSC memorabilia and T-shirts, one of which was famously

donned by a hit man played by John Travolta in the film "Pulp Fiction."

The vote was 5-to-1 in favor of the banana slug.

"I knew, hands down, people would vote for the slug," Ratner said. "I wasn't even aware of the sea lion. I was just giving a face to what people were supporting. There's nothing wrong with sea lions, they're a great animal. I would have been bummed if we were the sea lions though."

Sinsheimer did not rush to adopt the slug, and even wrote in the campus newspaper that the sea lion has "spirit and vigor" while the banana slug is "spineless, yellow, sluggish and slimy."

Yet, with the national media watching, he eventually bowed to student will and UCSC has slithered proudly as the banana slugs ever since.