



Go, Clark, go!

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Original Phillie Phanatic 1978-93
Posted Thursday, January 16th, 2013*

Like a lot of people in the “mascot world,” I watched with interest the rollout of “Clark,” the first mascot in the Chicago Cubs’ 100-year history.

I am, of course, a diehard Phillies fan, but I feel a connection to the long-suffering Cubs fans. Their struggle reminds me of my youth when my father first took me to Connie Mack Stadium in the early 1960s.

Connie Mack was a beautiful ballpark and featured Phillies teams, that if they won, we felt it was a plus. In fact, some of those Phillies teams made it on the top 10 list of the “worst teams of all time”, included in the book “You Stink”, to which I was selected to write the forward. Winning back then was a luxury, but it didn’t make me any less of a fan. Mascots of course had not “Muppeted” into the sports culture yet.

Imagine for a moment, if in 1978 the Philadelphia Phillies had decided to “roll out” the Phanatic the way the Cubs did this week? What would those well-known, “tough” Phillies fans have said if social media was available? If Santa and the Easter bunny hadn’t fared well with them, what chance would a 300-pound green furry Muppet have had?

It wouldn’t have been pretty, that’s for sure! But that is where the genius of Bill Giles came in. He was committed and believed that above all FUN would prevail. He didn’t want the fans to know that the organization was planning on creating a symbol for the team that would represent all the other benefits of being a Phillies fan and coming to the ballpark.

It wasn’t about winning or the commitment to greatness on the field. That was the job of the GM and the baseball operations. It was his vision to, at times, distract the fans from the on-field play and enhance their overall experience, win or lose. It was a brilliant idea that has been copied by every MLB team save for three.

It was four until this week. I, for one, am thrilled to see young Bill Giles-inspired executives like Julian Green, VP of Communications and Community Affairs for the Chicago Cubs! He is smart, savvy and comes from the corporate and political arena. Julian is not fazed by the loud voice of the Funkiller. He is committed to the Power of Fun.

Clark doesn't represent a lack of commitment to winning on the field. He represents the commitment to building new Cubs fans. Nothing could be more important to the development of baseball. Children are not as interested in the "history of the game" as they are to having fun at the ballpark. Once they are captured and distracted by fun then they will become fans for a lifetime.

All I can say is Go, Clark, go! Remember the Phanatic was introduced in 1978 and just two short years later the Phillies won the World Series for the first time in their history! Could it be the same in Chicago? In the words of my 16 year old daughter..."I'm just sayin"!