

# The New Hampshire Touch

A new tradition for freshmen is born

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Wednesday, September 30, 2009

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As a welcoming ceremony, this one had just about everything. There were goose bumps, courtesy of the hundred-member marching band. There was rapt attention for a senior from Cameroon, who quoted his coaches as well as Voltaire as he offered advice to the freshmen packed into the Field House. There was the charming spectacle of uniformed football players shyly singing their locker-room victory song—if you could call it singing. There was cheering from the cheerleaders, and exhortation from the biggest cheerleader of them all, head football coach Sean McDonnell '78. And threaded

throughout the festivities was the irreverent patter of two emcees from the UNH comedy troupe Sketched Out.

At the beginning of the university's first 'Cat Pack Kick-Off on Aug. 29, President Mark Huddleston told the members of the Class of 2013 they would be the first to participate in a new tradition. "You're going to be a part of the legend of UNH," he predicted. "In song and story, you'll be celebrated as the beginners of this great tradition."

The university's best-known freshman tradition from the past was introduced 100 years ago, when "freshmen rules" were issued to the Class of 1913: Boys were required to wear a blue-and-white beanie (girls, a green hair ribbon) until Thanksgiving. With the exception of several years around World War II, the tradition continued, at least at Freshman Camp, for roughly 60 years. To this day, many alumni reminisce about the beanies and even bring them to class reunions.



BASEBALL CAPS, NOT BEANIES: FRESHMEN HEARD THE MARCHING BAND AND STUDENT ATHLETES

KELLY PATON '10 AND RADAR ONGUETOU '10, ABOVE, AT THE FIRST 'CAT PACK RALLY. AT RIGHT, EMCEES

TIM MALLARD '11, LEFT, AND KEVIN FROLEIKS '10 WORK THE NOSE-RUBBING CROWD.

The new event included both the Field House pep rally and a whimsical new ritual—rubbing the nose of the wildcat sculpture for good luck. A high point of the rally was a speech by senior Radar Onguetou from Yaounde, Cameroon. "My name is 'Rah-dahr,'" he said, in a lilting African accent, "but everyone here calls me 'Ray-dar.'" The 6'5" basketball captain, wearing a diamond in each ear and his #32 jersey like a vest over a shirt and tie, proceeded to share some of the lessons he has learned from his coaches and applied in the classroom, and beyond.

Onguetou quoted a line from coach Bill Herrion's pep talk, "You get out of practice what you put into it," adding his own corollary: "You get out of class what you put into it. You're about to embrace something special, but you will get out of it what you put into it." He joked about his lack of knowledge of other sports, remembering how he almost broke his leg when he mistook the Whittemore ice for wood. But he still attends hockey

and football games to meet new people, make connections and have fun, he said, urging the freshmen to "try to just see what's out there." And he paraphrased a famous line from Voltaire's *Candide*: "Work keeps at bay three great evils: boredom, vice and need." He cautioned students to think twice before falling prey to certain freshman-year temptations and, instead, to "take advantage of the positive things campus has to offer. That is my word to you."



*GNARLZ AND WILD E. CAT IN THE KITTY*

*CORNER.*

The rally concluded with a pep talk from McDonnell, who explained how his own recruitment to UNH was clinched by the breathtaking finale of a hockey game in Snively Arena in 1974. He talked about "bleeding blue," and he shared the football team's victory ritual. "We have sung this song in just about every state in the country in the locker room," he told the crowd before leading the team in the song, which begins, "We're New Hampshire born, And New Hampshire bred, And when we die, we'll be New Hampshire dead!"

Then the students streamed out of the building and, one by one, rubbed the wildcat sculpture on the nose. Egged on by emcees Tim Mallard '11 and Kevin Froleiks '10, many performed the ritual with enthusiasm and laughter in spite of the gray weather. Twenty minutes later, the wildcat had received its last pat, and thousands of hungry students descended on the Whitt, where a barbecue provided that last requirement of any ceremonial event: good food. ~

**ALUMNI**



University of New Hampshire

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