

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 689: Busted Play



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

It's that time of year again, by which of course we mean the time for buying idiotic holiday presents for your junior loved ones. Really True Loser Andrew Hoenig of Rockville called the Empress's attention to a patent, publicized by Lawhaha.com and many other Web sites, for a "toy gas-fired missile" that is prepared for takeoff by the operator's placing "the inlet tube with its valve open adjacent to his anal region from which a colonic gas is discharged." Who could possibly come up with a more objectionable or stupid toy than a working fart-powered toy rocket? And that's not a rhetorical question, but the answer is still obvious: You can, Loser. Right?

Winner receives not a fart-powered rocket, alas, but the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up gets an exceedingly tacky and super-lame Mistletoe Belt ("for men & woman"), donated by veteran loser Kevin Mellema, which contains genuine plastic mistletoe that can be positioned in whatever place you would like your loved one to kiss you under. It is no more than a conventional-looking men's belt with some little plastic greenery on it. We guarantee that, were you to win this priceless item, it will be delivered to you for Christmas Eve installation, unless you live in the far-off reaches of, say, Lilongwe, Malawi, or Valley City, N.D., or Falls Church, Va. Anyone who thinks it'll be clever to suggest a toy Mistletoe Belt is, sorry, not clever.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable Mentions (or whatever they're called this week) get one of the all-new lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Nov. 27. Put "Week 689" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published Dec. 17. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Tom Witte. The Honorable Mentions name is by Roy Ashley of Washington.

REPORT FROM WEEK 686

(a.k.a. Week 685), in which we asked you to offer up some things to be thankful for. Some people supplied notes of thanks especially suited to the Thanksgiving table; others espoused more generally ridiculous/nasty/cynical sentiments. Most everyone expressed heartfelt thanks for the 22nd Amendment.

4 I'm thankful that Kim Jong Il doesn't have an evil twin. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

3 That someone found my grandmother attractive. (Tim Vanderlee, Austin)

2 The winner of the the bobblehead of President Bush in his "Mission Accomplished" flight suit: That I'm tall enough that I can't smell my own feet. (Eric Murphy, Ann Arbor, Mich.)

WE'RE ALSO MILDLY APPRECIATIVE ...

That my daughter has not yet pierced her other eyeball. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

That here in the Washington area we have many wonderful cultural attractions, some of which I might get to one of these days if my relatives come to visit. (Dennis Lindsay, Seabrook)

That dogs don't know everyone else hates you. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

For the sophistication of French cuisine, especially their fries. (Bob Dalton, Arlington)

That I learned that $x = 3$ and $y = 4$, so now I'll be able to help my son with his algebra homework. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

That they don't allow remote controls at the movie theater. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

That O.J. likes to play golf so much — otherwise he might still be looking for me. — T.R. Killer, Brentwood, Calif. (Jeff Brechlin)

That zombies can be stopped by a sharp blow to the head. (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

That it's bags of spinach that kill you and not bags of M&M's. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

That you have to admit you have a problem before going through all the other steps. Man, did that save me a lot of time! (Drew Bennett, Alexandria)

I'm thankful yo mama so easy. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

That everyone realized Helen Keller was playing up her handicaps for effect. — R.L., West Palm Beach, Fla. (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

That GM doesn't make Hondas. (Rick Peterson, Bethesda)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER
We should all be thankful that bald eagles taste terrible. Their eggs, too. (Bruce Alter, Fairfax Station)

I'm thankful that Uncle Billy finally croaked and I get a chance to sit at the big table. (Rich Carlson, Bowie)

I am thankful for this squash from our garden, which cost about \$75 to grow. (Peter Metrisko, Chantilly)

That NFL halftimes are only 15 minutes, so we don't have to waste lots of time sitting around the dinner table on Thanksgiving Day. (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

That Steve Wynn is not a museum curator or an eye surgeon. (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)

That Mark Foley was thoughtful enough to put his feelings in writing. (David Kleinbard)

That it turns out Ben Cardin ALSO loves puppies — whew!! (Ron Jackson, Chevy Chase)

That I don't understand Portuguese, because that's what the nasty voices in my head speak. (Bird Waring, New York)

That there were no wild emu in 1621 New England. (Ben Aronin, Washington)

That I don't yet know which aisle of the supermarket has the Depends. (Patrick Mattimore, San Francisco)

That my class president elections didn't use Diebold machines. (Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)

I'm thankful for women who love short, cheap, egomaniacal guys. (David Kleinbard)

That it actually does get better than this. (Art Grinath)

And Last: I'm thankful that for one more week, I don't own that butt-ugly painting. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Next Week: Return of the Butt-Ugly Painting, or How Grate Thou Art

That changing their name from Bullets to Wizards did so much to reduce gun violence in Washington. (Thad Humphries, Castleton, Va.)

That Tibet and Somalia probably still don't have nuclear weapons. (Jeannie Kunkel, Fairfax)

That no one on my kid's soccer team knows that I'm a doctor, because when the coach's kid broke his leg and people were shouting for a doctor, I was making a run for high score in Tetris on my cellphone. (Jeff Brechlin)

That your pets can't testify against you. (Bob Dalton)

That old age doesn't last forever. (Dave Kelsey, Fairfax)



It's all a blur: The Bush bobblehead in motion.

BY JULIA EWAN — THE WASHINGTON POST

Brian Mitchell on the Skins: He Hurts Because He Loves

MITCHELL, From D1

about anything about anyone, you can't say that about the sainted Joe Gibbs. At least without being accused of blasphemy.

But the 38-year-old Mitchell, himself a beloved former Redskin, does so, over and over. And he's been doing it since August, since that ugly 0-4 preseason, when the rest of Redskins Nation and its camp followers in the news media were still talking Super Bowl — and still in thrall to the coach.

"B-Mitch," as everyone calls the former running back, dishes it out behind the mike weekdays from noon to 3. With his witty sidekick, Scott Jackson, they hector and harass the Redskins faithful who still want to believe, despite the team's 3-6 record. The other day, they baited the die-hards by asking how a team that has played so poorly could make it into the postseason.

When the board lit up and the faithful suggested the team could win the remainder of its games, Mitchell and Jackson reacted like parents indulging their children's superhero fantasies. In the control booth at WTEM's studio in Rockville, producer Marc Sterne cued up Patsy Cline's "Crazy" and Aerosmith's "Dream On" to play under the calls.

Mitchell says he's never called for Gibbs to be fired and has never attacked him personally. But there's no mistaking where he assigns the most blame. He ticks off the reasons: Training camp was "too easy"; the starters didn't play enough in the preseason, even as the team was installing a complicated new offense; Gibbs kept Mark Brunell as the starting quarterback for seven games too many.

Mitchell's sharp opinions and "turf cred" — 14 NFL seasons as a record-breaking punt and kickoff returner — have made him a tough-love counselor for the team. When Mitchell finds out that rain has delayed the Redskins practice session Thursday, for example, he asks beat reporter Jerry Coleman, who is on the line from Redskins Park, whether he's seen any lightning.

No, replies Coleman. "Practice then!" Mitchell commands.

Mitchell denies any lingering animosity toward his old team, but there are scars.

A fifth-round draft choice out of the University of Southwest Louisiana, Mitchell became a star and fan favorite in 10 seasons with the team. In 2000, however, he was cut



BY ROBERT A. REEDER — THE WASHINGTON POST

Mitchell (with Scott Jackson) dismisses charges of bitterness. "If they made the playoffs, I'd be very happy."

when the Redskins recruited free agent Deion Sanders.

What stung Mitchell then, he says, were the shifting explanations coming out of Redskins Park. Mitchell enumerates them: He was released because he'd lost a step. Because there was no room for him under the salary cap. And most hurtful, because he was "a bad influence." He left the team, he said, "upset and with an attitude."

Mitchell went on to four mostly productive years with the Philadelphia Eagles and New York Giants, last playing in 2003. But he was still such a Redskin at heart that he signed a one-day contract with his old team in 2004 so he could retire as a Redskin. He said at the time that bygones were bygones.

Then again, maybe they weren't. Mitchell's career numbers — he holds NFL records in eight categories — suggest that he is Hall of Fame material. He might get there, once the mandatory five-year waiting period has passed in 2009. But Mitchell hasn't been inducted into the Redskins own Ring of Fame, which some interpret as the team's payback for Mitchell's mouthiness.

He surely won't win any fans in the Redskins front office with his criticism of Gibbs. Or for observations like "I know more about football in my little finger than Dan Snyder and Vinnie Cerrato know in their entire bodies."

The Redskins declined to fire back. "If you're not winning games, criticism is part of the business," says team spokesman Chris Helein. "Obviously, Coach Gibbs knows that when things are not going well, he's going to be criticized."

Mitchell, whose round, boyish face belies his fiery tongue, says now that he doesn't harbor any grudges.

"When I retired, I didn't regret a thing I said. I was attacked personally by them. Do I feel bitterness toward them now? No. If they made the playoffs, I'd be very happy. I still take pride in the organization."

"Every time I drive home and look at my house" — Mitchell lives on five acres in Centreville with his wife and three daughters — "I say, 'Thank you, Redskins!'"

But he adds, "What you hear on the mike is me. I know what I'm about. When I was playing football, I was telling guys worse stuff than I do now. I've always been that way. When I was a player, people would say he's in your face. If I got here and I became politically correct, people would say that's not Brian."

Which is exactly why WTEM rehired Mitchell in May (he also worked for the station in his playing days), to fill a big hole in its afternoon schedule after Washington Post columnist Tony Kornheiser ended his radio program to concentrate on his "Monday Night Foot-

ball" duties. What's more, starting in July, the station had a new sports-talk competitor: three stations owned by Redskins owner Snyder called Triple X-ESPN Radio.

Although it makes for lively talk radio, Mitchell's opinion of Gibbs apparently isn't widely shared by hard-core Redskins fans. For example, after SportsIllustrated.com named Gibbs to its list of "Ten Guys Who Have Worn Out Their Welcome" last week, fans raced to their computers to defend the Hall of Fame coach at Extremeskins.com, a team-owned chat board.

"To wear out your welcome, the fans have to be fed up with you," wrote one. "I don't think anyone is fed up with Joe Gibbs. In fact, I think we all feel a sense of debt to this man who won us three Super Bowls, always gives it his all, and plays with the fans in mind." E-mailed another, "We would have to be 0-16 for two seasons for Coach Joe to wear out any welcome."

"The thing about Brian is that he's not just saying stuff to say stuff," says Sterne, his producer. "I like the fact that he's honestly speaking his mind. That's the thing about him talking about Gibbs. He respects Gibbs because he played for him. But he sees this team as undisciplined. And he says so."

The youngest of seven children

who grew up in a town outside Baton Rouge, Mitchell credits his late father, Blanche, a career Army officer, with teaching him to stand up for himself, darn the consequences.

As an opinion-slinger, Mitchell's daily radio gig is the center of his budding broadcast career, which includes two Redskins post-game shows (on Comcast SportsNet and

WUSA, Channel 9) and a weekly show in the Philadelphia area for Comcast.

As for Gibbs, Mitchell denies any motives other than tell-it-like-it-is honesty.

"I still say he's the best coach I ever had," he says. "I respect Joe Gibbs. But it's not my job to make Joe Gibbs happy with what I say."



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