The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 719: We Har the World

The Damme (Germany) Yankees ■ The Havana (Cuba) Nice Days
The Bonn (Germany) Losers

In 1994 — back when people read The Washington Post on real paper (and paid for it with real money), it was pretty hard to find The Post outside Washington — and practically impossible outside the United States, unless you got your mail in a diplomatic pouch. The Style Invitational ran a contest asking readers to create fictional school team names for actual American towns (winner: The Assinippi (Mass.) Guard Dogs, by Karla J. Dickinson of Springfield). Now, the Empress regularly receives entries from Tasmania to Oman to Scotland to New Delhi to Manitoba and even West Virginia, and so, at the suggestion of Awfully Enthusiastic Loser Randy Lee of Burke, she agreed it was time to take this contest global: **This week: Come up with a creative name for a sports team for a town or city anywhere outside the United States;** please include the name of the country. If the joke requires a long explanation of the pronunciation, it won't be much of a joke.

Winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up gets "When You're Smiling," a 2004 CD of Regis Philbin singing old-time pop standards (consensus: Bing Crosby's place in music history is secure).

BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The Perth (Australia) Thnatchers

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions (or whatever they're called that week) get one of the 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, July 2. Put "Week 719" 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 July 22. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. Randy Lee supplied the final example for this week's contest. The revised title for next week's contest is by Tom Witte.

REPORT FROM WEEK 715,

in which we sought ideas for what to put on the new Loser Mug and on the back of the new Loser T-shirt: Lots of nice ideas for both prizes, either of which an Invitational runner-up (or even an Inker winner) may choose. When they finally arrive at Invitational headquarters deep in the bowels — where else? — of the Washington Post newsroom, there should be enough for at least the next two years of runners-up. (The shirts will finally come in both L and XL, rather than just the bedspread size.) And you just may end up seeing some of the other slogans below on future T-shirts, mugs and Honorable Mention magnets.

For the back of the new Loser T-Shirt, whose front is the brain design shown on the mug, designed by cartoonist Bob Staake:

4 **This Mind Intentionally Left Blank** (Steven King, Alexandria)

3 **Last Seen Wearing This Shirt** (Horace LaBadie, Dunnellon, Fla.)

2 **The Style Invitational: Because It Really Gives a Shirt** (Eric Murphy, Ann Arbor, Mich.)

AND THE WINNING T-SHIRT SLOGAN

OBJECT IN T-SHIRT IS BRIGHTER THAN IT APPEARS

(Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf; Russell Beland, Springfield)

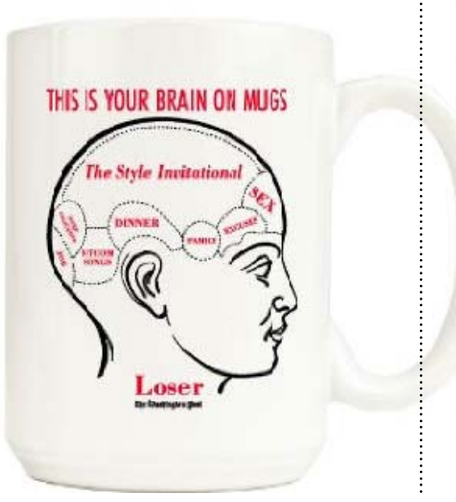
For the formerly pristinely elegant white mug that we are about to deface:

4 **I Won This on Company Time, So I Only Use It at the Office** (Roy Ashley, Private Sector, Washington)

3 **This Is NOT a Urinal** (Walterjervis Sheffield, Fredericksburg, Va.)

2 **The Style Invitational: Good to the Last Dork** (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

AND THE WINNING MUG DESIGN



(Beverley Sharp, Washington; Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

FACTORY SECONDS

FOR THE BACK OF THE T-SHIRT:

The Empress's New Clothes (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village; John Kupiec, Fairfax; Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

Shtick for Brains (Russell Beland)

Fashions come and go, but bad taste never goes out of Style. (Art Grinath)

Cogito ergo desum: I think, therefore I lose. (Ira Goldman, Washington)

If You Think This Shirt Is Dumb, You Should See What I Did to Get It (Lawrence McGuire)

I Got Shirt On by the Empress (John Kupiec)

I May Be a Loser, but at Least I'm Ahead of You (Paul VerNooy, Hockessin, Del.)

How's My Walking? Contact losers@washpost.com (Horace LaBadie)

Future Dust Rag (Larry Pryluck, Amissville, Va.)

Living Proof of Intelligenter Design (Bruce Carlson, Alexandria)

The Style Invitational: Regularly Updating Flatulence Jokes Since 1993 (Steve Liu, North Potomac)

I'm With Pompously Self-Absorbed (Roy Ashley)

Twice the Brainpower of a Chimpanzee With a Typewriter! (Creigh Richert, Aldie)

The Style Invitational: Lacking Only Style. And Invitations. (Susan Thompson, Cary, N.C.)

Mind Over Manners (Phil Frankenfeld, Washington)

Think I'm a Loser? Wait Till You See the Front. (Josh Tucker, Kensington)

I Gave the Empress a Piece of My Mind (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste. But Go Ahead and Enter the Style Invitational anyway. (Larry Yungk, Arlington)

FOR THE MUG:

Wake Up and Smell the Ink (Tom Witte)

For Best Results, Pour Into Top End (Drew Bennett, Alexandria)

Cafe Empresso (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

The words "World's Greatest Grandma" appear in a large "folksy" font, adorned with flowers and songbirds. But the words are scribbled out in red marker, and "Style Invitational Loser Prize" is scrawled crudely below it. (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

My Other Mug Is a Porsche (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

Panhandler Starter Kit (Kevin Dopart)

This Was a Pristinely Elegant Piece of Stoneware Before It Was Defaced. (Bill Coffin, Silver Spring)

Could have been for either:
Wry Not (Tom Witte)

Lose Only as Directed (Mark Eckenwiler, Washington)

No Childishness Left Behind (Tom Witte)

The Style Invitational: You Gotta Play to Lose (Roy Ashley)

Aging Quippie (Tom Witte)

Loser
√ **Loserer**
Loserest
Runner-Up, The Style Invitational (Bob Dalton, Arlington)

The Style Invitational: It's a Dishonor Just Being Nominated (Bruce Carlson)

Next Week: The Hard Spell, *or* **The Bards and the Bee**

Steaming Up the Afternoon Radio Dial

BAISDEN, *From D1*

he's not just the top "late drive-time" (3 to 7 p.m.) personality in Washington — second place isn't even within shouting distance. Baisden attracted 10.5 percent of the region's 25-to-54-year-old listeners — the crowd most valued by radio advertisers — in the most recent quarterly ratings survey. The next ranked stations, all-news WTOP and Spanish-language pop outlet WLZL-FM, attracted barely half as many listeners during the same time period.

Nationwide, Baisden's audience is about two-thirds the size of another African American radio superstar, morning jock Tom Joyner. But Baisden has achieved this in just 28 months, and without benefit of being heard in the morning, when listening peaks, says Darryl Brown, the ABC Radio Networks executive who signed Baisden to his national contract.

What's makes "Love, Lust & Lies" particularly noteworthy is that talk programs have long been a staple of AM radio, not the FM band that Baisden is dominating. What's more, outside of a few well-known names — Joyner, Steve Harvey, Russ Parr, Tavis Smiley — talk radio has few nationally syndicated black personalities.

Baisden, who lives in and broadcasts from Dallas, isn't only about sex. Despite its name, "Love, Lust & Lies" focuses on less titillating topics as well: paying for college, starting a business, adoption, domestic violence, medical disorders, even real estate. A recent Baisden show asked this distinctly unsexy question: "Why are so many degreed people working in unrelated fields?"

"The topics are universal," says Baisden, shortly after hosting a recent evening mixer in Washington that drew 750 people to a Capitol Hill hotel ballroom. "Health, business, relationships — who can't relate to that? The show has a lot of positive energy. And, I like to think, I have my moments of being funny."

But sexual topics are a staple for Baisden, whose on-air promos call him "the bad boy of radio." Recent programs have tackled such matters as "When was the last time you took a shower with your mate?" and "Burned! My partner gave me an STD" (this was on "Feel Good Friday"). There were also "How do you tell your man he's doing it wrong?"; "One-night stands: Does it make you nasty?"; and "Which cities have the sexiest women cops?"

A recurring Baisden topic is "Pimps in the Pulpit," about preachers who cheat, financially and sexually. Church groups have complained, but Baisden won't stop, returning to the subject about once a month. "We've got to talk about it, family!" he declares on the air, using his favorite term for his audience.

Baisden's on-air persona is upbeat, at times almost over-amped. He's a hybrid, blending elements of several personalities. With his messages of empowerment and self-improvement, he's kind of a male Oprah. With his tough-love, check-yourself-fool straight talk, he's a black Dr. Phil. And with his lurid, trashier subject matter, he's a hipper, faster-talking Jerry Springer.

"He knows how to educate his audience on important issues of the day and still have a good time with it," says Suzanne Ffolkes, an association executive in Washington and a Baisden fan. "It's very provocative. It's down-to-earth and fun."

Says Jim Farley, WTOP's top news executive: "He makes you feel good about yourself. . . . You get out of work after a rough day, the news is about more people killed by roadside bombs in Iraq, you may want something uplifting."

Baisden, who will turn 44 on Tuesday, came to radio later in life, and after several career twists.

Growing up poor and fatherless on Chicago's South Side, he was an avid reader and an enthusiastic schemer, dreaming up moneymaking ventures from an early age, including hosting basement music parties. After a stint at community college and a hitch in the Air Force, Baisden landed a job as a train motorman at the Chicago Transit Authority with help from his mother, a longtime CTA employee.

In 1993, Baisden, then working as a sales rep for a clothing manufacturer, decided to write a book about a subject he admits he has some personal acquaintance with: infidelity. He collected stories from his friends and added his own anecdotes ("Research? I didn't need research. I was the biggest playah in the world!" he says). The result was "Never Satisfied: How and Why Men Cheat," which Baisden self-published in 1995.

For the next two years, Baisden put his sales experience and considerable verbal skills to work selling his book — and, in essence, himself. He made the rounds of small radio stations, most of them oriented to black audiences. He talked about infidelity and promoted weekend "seminars" on the topic, starring himself. "I'd get on the radio for two hours on a Friday and just challenge women to come out," he says. "I'd say, 'I dare you to show up.' They'd never heard of me before. The next day, there would be a thousand people there."

Baisden was a one-man band; he made all of his own arrangements, from booking hotel ballrooms to hosting the seminar discussions to hustling copies of the book. To this day, he still carries books in his car, just in case a customer might be around.

Three more self-published books followed. His novels "Men Cry in the Dark" (1997) and "The Maintenance Man" (1999) became stage plays, the first starring Richard ("Shaft") Roundtree, the latter with Billy Dee Williams. Baisden's fourth book, "God's Gift to Women" (2002), is a semi-autobiographical novel about a radio talk show host who is a widower, has a young daughter and is stalked by an obsessed fan.

BY JAMES M. THRESHER — THE WASHINGTON POST

A fan gives radio host Michael Baisden some love during a book signing in Washington. Baisden is the author of four books, including his most recent, "God's Gift to Women."

In real life, Baisden has never been married; he has a daughter, Michaé, 16, from a "relationship that didn't work out." As for his own romantic history, Baisden says: "I believe in a committed relationship, but I don't promise monogamy. I don't lie. To me, commitment and monogamy aren't the same thing. I think most women would prefer that to me pretending otherwise or being dishonest."

Baisden got his first full-time hosting gig in television, not radio. In 2001, Tribune Broadcasting, an arm of the Chicago television and newspaper company, signed him to host a syndicated show called "Talk or Walk." The program was essentially a game show in which couples or friends described their problems and left it to the audience to vote on whether they should end their relationship. Debuting a week after the 2001 terrorist attacks, it lasted one season.

"Nothing about it worked," Baisden says today. "But I learned I have to control my image, my content and my production. I know who I am and what works for me."

Baisden eventually landed back on the radio, as an unpaid afternoon drive-time host on a New York station, Kiss FM. In due course, he developed a formula — lighter topics on Mondays and Fridays, heavier subjects on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, sex and relationships on Thursdays. Classic R&B tunes selected by Baisden tie in with the day's discussion topic. To keep his energy level up, Baisden picked up the habit of standing in front of the microphone throughout his four-hour shift.

Something clicked. Baisden's ratings began to soar, eventually earning him national distribution.

"When I first listened to him, I thought it was completely different than anything that urban stations put on the air," said Jim Watkins, WHUR's general manager. "A lot of people thought we were taking an unnecessary risk [in airing his show]. The typical urban station plays music. They don't address issues. But this was a no-brainer. It's a forum for all kinds of people to talk about all kinds of things."

For all the frank sex talk, Baisden can sound like a social conservative, at times even downright old-fashioned. He regularly warns listeners that a "mature" discussion is coming up and that children shouldn't listen. He also typically invites experts — psychologists and the like — to offer comment and to guide the wilder callers back to something like the straight and narrow.

On a program about women who won't let their former mates see their children, for example, Baisden was all about nuclear family values: "There's a lack of support, understanding and respect for fatherhood in this country," he declared, then addressed black women in a way that Dan Quayle never could have dreamed of in his "Murphy Brown"-bashing days: "You better never say you don't need a man to raise your children. 'I don't need a man'? You're out of your mind! . . . These children need their fathers." On another program, he railed against deadbeat dads.

Baisden says his frequent references to "family" are more than just patter. Depending on the topic, he says, "if I'm talking to women, I can be the supportive brother. If I'm talking to young people, I'm the daddy. If it's business, then I'm the leader with experience. To the older men, I'm the son."

He goes on: "What other men are talking to women about their relationships? Not their fathers, because the fathers aren't there. And the men aren't challenging women to think — they just want some booty."

Baisden confesses, however, that he can't see himself in radio much longer. "I feel like this is a starting point to touch people, but at the same time, I feel I can have impact in other arenas," he says. "Anytime you have to show up five days a week to get paid, that's a job, and I'm just not a 9-to-5 guy. I'm not okay with that."

So maybe he'll write another book, or start a business or get back into television (he drops vague hints about the latter). Baisden doesn't know yet, or at least he isn't saying. He does say, "I'm not interested in doing this for 20 years. Radio is like college. At some point you graduate. I'm not a radio person. Tom Joyner is a radio person. Someone else will have to step into these shoes."

Someday. Maybe soon. In the meantime, he's having a pretty good ride.