

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 782: That's the Ticket!



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

What voters want above all else is consistency, and no one else on the ballot can match tapioca pudding in that regard . . .

Sure, a lot of historians say he was bad, but if you look at Buchanan's performance over the last 140 years, he's been quite steady . . .

This week, a twist on a perennial Invitational contest, the ol' List of Random Items: Play Partisan Pundit and explain why any of the items on the list below is qualified to be the president of the United States, as in the examples above by Loser Brendan Beary, who suggested this contest. Alternatively, pair any two of the items and explain why they would form an effective ticket for the general election. Or both. No limit on the number of entries as long as they are brilliantly clever.

- A moss-covered rock
- Krusty the Clown
- A dish of tapioca pudding
- Ex-president James Buchanan
- Bert from "Sesame Street"
- The Orange Line train from New Carrollton
- Vinko Bogataj, the "agony of defeat" ski jumper from "Wide World of Sports"

- Benedict Arnold
- Emily Litella
- Sweeney Todd
- The Firefox browser
- Chuck Smith of Woodbridge
- Britney Spears's hairstylist
- Cartman
- A 49-cent goldfish from Wal-Mart
- Zerbina the Pinhead

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a pair of Obama and McCain gargoyles "designer resin" figurines. We would have thought the McCain one was Gerald Ford were it not for the label, while Obama is kind of a cute, puppyish dragon, if you don't mind enormous horse teeth. In any case, we agree wholeheartedly with the manufacturer, Toscano Design, that they are both "extraordinary sculptures."

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt, classic or current version. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. First Offenders get a smelly tree-shaped air freshener (Fir Stink for their First Ink). 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, Sept. 22. Put "Week 782" 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 Oct. 11. 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 results is by Mike Ostapiej. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Russell Beland.

REPORT FROM WEEK 778

in which we asked you, during the Olympics, to combine any two sports or other activities to come up with a new one. By "other activities," we were thinking along the line of chess, as in the actual new sport of chess boxing. But leave it to the Losers to interpret that a bit more broadly, the way that Vladimir Putin interprets "democracy" a bit more broadly.

4 Running and the limbo: Rush Limbo. The same course as the 110-meter hurdles, with one difference. (Pam Sweeney, St. Paul, Minn.)

3 Beach cricket: Americans won't understand the rules to this kind of cricket either, but it doesn't matter because it is played by hot women in bikinis. (Anne Paris, Arlington)

2 the winner of the collector's-item Eberhard Faber Blackwing 602 pencil: Hockey and boxing: Hockey. (Ned Bent, Oak Hill)

ROBBED BY THE BULGARIAN JUDGE: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Gymnastics and drinking shots: Balance Jim Beam. Athletes must each consume five shots of bourbon a half-hour before performing their routines, which are judged by a panel of state troopers. (Pam Sweeney)

Pommel bronco: Fellas, do those routines on a live bucking horse and we'll stop making fun of your stretch pants and footies. (Pam Sweeney)

Rowing and craps: Scull and bones. (Chris Doyle, Kihei, Hawaii)

Ice dancing and minefield clearing: Finally, a reason for ice dancing. (Ned Bent)

Fast-pitch javelin throw: Each team is allowed 30 catchers. (Bill Moulden, Frederick)

Baseball and TV weather forecasting: A .333 average puts you on the all-star team. (Larry Flynn, Greenbelt)

Synchronized singing, pairs competition: Requires one kid with talent and one with looks. A demonstration sport since a couple of weeks ago. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.; Mike Dailey, Centerville)

Dodge ball shot put: An eight-pound ball; no substitutions. Games tend not to run into overtime. (Mike Dailey)

Rodeyoga: You must maintain a tranquil lotus position for eight seconds on a 2,000-pound bucking steer. Nobody has ever done it, but nobody gets uptight

about it. (Peter Jenkins, Bethesda)

Water polo polo: Seahorses are theoretically the best mounts, but scoreless ties still abound as mallet swings lack zip and the horses appear discomfited by the little ties on the caps. (Bill Cowart, Washington; Matthew Stanfield, London, a First Offender)

Football football: Foreign players play "football" against Americans playing football: Use a good ol' NFL football; see how well they dribble that with their feet. They have to play by regular soccer rules (no hands, etc.) while the Americans get to tackle them. They wear T-shirts and shorts, while Americans wear helmets and shoulder pads. If they score a goal, one point. If we run or pass it over the end line, six points. WE'RE NO. 1!

U.S.A.! U.S.A.! (Roy Ashley, Washington)

Caber toss and



Next Week: Gripe for the Picking, or Irritable Howl Syndrome

Maybe if you put lipstick on them: This week's second-place prize.

ASK AMY

Dear Amy:

My 20-year-old son died a few days ago. It has been a devastating loss to my family and me.

I appreciate all the well-wishers coming over and calling to pay their respects, but the questions about the details of his death are overwhelming. We told people that it was an accident, and I think that should be enough said.

We are getting bombarded with questions from people wanting to know where it happened, how it happened, if he was driving, whom he was with, what killed him, etc. People have even asked whether we saw the police report. Several people have told us they have looked on the Internet for details about the accident.

My family and I are grieving and need to be left alone. What difference does it make how, when and where my son died? It is not going to bring back my child. It is a private matter, and I don't understand why people act this way. I would like to ask people to please accept the fact that it is no one's business what the details are of my son's tragic death.

Sad Mother

Let me express sympathy and also apologize for the behavior of people who have compounded your pain. Your loss must be devastating, and surely it is made worse by intrusive questions from people who should know better.

Surely anyone can imagine how terrible it would feel being asked to provide details or answer mindless questions about your son's death. The Internet has made all of this querying worse, as people take it upon themselves to troll for information.

One of the most persistent issues covered in this column is the subject of intrusive questions; people just don't seem to understand that they don't necessarily have a right to know everything.

Dear Amy:

My husband and I are friends with a very intelligent and talented married couple, "John and Mary."

When we get together, it is usually to have dinner with John; Mary sometimes joins us. John loves to tell long stories, and because he has led a pretty interesting life, we don't mind listening to him. When Mary is with us, it's

usually not a comfortable time. As soon as John launches into one of his stories, Mary (who is very dramatic), inevitably reacts by sighing deeply, interrupting him to authoritatively correct things he says, turning her face totally away from him — all with facial expressions that run the gamut from pained tolerance to marked disgust.

The puzzling part of this is that she is generally a very congenial person; when she talks about herself and her life, or asks us about our own lives, she is quite pleasant and seems genuinely interested in us.

We really don't know what to do. Do we continue to ignore her behavior? Should we gently but firmly ask her if she realizes how inappropriate she is being?

Puzzled

I read once that (in public anyway) the Duke and Duchess of Windsor were experts in seeming as if they were fascinated by one another.

One job of a married person is to occasionally pretend that he or she is hearing a spouse's unimpeachable telling of a hoary anecdote as if it were the first and most fascinating time.

"Mary" may think her expressions of intolerance and disgust are all on the inside. You can let her know that her emoting is affecting you. During a restroom break away from the table, say, "I hope everything is all right, 'Mary.' You don't seem happy."

Dear Amy:

I'm responding to the letter from "Betrayed," the man whose wife had a one-night stand 23 years ago, just after they were married.

He should be told to get over it! I suspect that this self-pitying husband is seeking an excuse to dump his wife.

Sally

I suspect that if "Betrayed" could "get over it," he would. There is no statute of limitations on feeling betrayed, and until this couple deals with this issue directly, they won't be able to move on.

Write to Amy Dickinson at askamy@tribune.com or Ask Amy, Chicago Tribune, TT500, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611.

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At the Pentagon, a Place to Sit and Reflect

ARCHITECTURE, From C1

swooping cantilever of steel, inlaid with panels of granite. Collectively, they seem to have snapped up out of the ground with some kind of primal energy, recalling ancient poetic associations between the earth and both death and rebirth. The water underneath is a mistake, however. Even on opening night, the small pools were filling with gravel, and the reflection from the lighting makes the names of the victims almost impossible to read at night. But water has become the great fetish of every memorial design today, and there was probably no eliminating it.

The designers have borrowed heavily from the memorial to the 1995 domestic terrorism bombing in Oklahoma City, where 168 empty chairs were used to recall those who died. But while the Oklahoma chairs were primarily symbolic — "like an empty chair at a dinner table," said designer Hans Butzer — the benches at the Pentagon Memorial don't recall a larger sense of family. They can easily seat two or three people, however: They are user-friendly for real families.

There is something touching in this practicality. Memorials aren't just about symbolism. They also present pragmatic challenges. How to accommodate the grief-stricken? If you are going to pay homage to each individual who died, how do you organize those references? What do you do if the victims are both civilian and military, as was the case on 9/11? So the benches are arrayed in ranks, like soldiers, and you can slouch on them. And they aren't just seating — they situate the survivors, who have become (in a sociological sense) a whole new class of people with legal and emotional claims on how we deal with tragedy.

The designers have chosen age as their organizing principle, which is both emotionally compelling and democratic. The benches are laid out on lines that correspond to birth year, beginning with Dana Falkenberg, who was 3 years old, and ending with John Yammicky, who was 71. The natural predisposition to protect the very young and the elderly makes this layout emotionally powerful. The swelling of the two-acre park to accommodate the many victims who were in the prime of life gives another emotional jolt. And except for the orientation of the benches, the victims are not categorized. It is both ordered and random at the same time.

The Pentagon has begun to refer to the benches with their little pools of water as "Memorial Units." It is a strange and typically military use of



BY SUSAN BIDDLE — THE WASHINGTON POST



PHOTOS BY BILL O'LEARY — THE WASHINGTON POST

language, and reveals some of the tensions inherent in this, the first major memorial to the tragedy completed since 9/11. The military tends to remember collectively, honoring all the dead for their service to the country. If particular names are used (as on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Mall), they tend to be used small. In part this is a practical decision — major military monuments honor thousands of people — but it also reflects the military's necessary disassociation from the excesses of individual grief.

The cult of memorialization that has gripped our country in recent decades is almost always focused on the individual. This can trip up designers. One team of finalists for a memorial at the World Trade Center proposed a cluttered program of glass columns, one for each of the nearly 3,000 vic-

tims. The emotionality of individual memorialization isn't just a direct challenge to the stiff upper lip of military culture, which isn't immune to grief, it can also be self-defeating.

And so the new memorial presents a very strange meeting ground. The kind of grief that is bewildering to the civilian world — which responds with profusions of teddy bears, candles and poems pinned to the fences outside charred ruins — has met the more stoic face of the Pentagon. If the grief outside ever prevailed inside the building, we would be defenseless. If the mentality that leads to phrases like "Memorial Units" prevailed throughout the society, we would be automatons, or Spartans, or fascists. A necessary line between two different responses to death has been drawn.

Maintaining that line is the pri-

Benches memorializing 184 people killed in the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon are arranged in rows according to the victims' birth years. Sailor Brian Moss's family, left, came from Texas for Thursday's opening of the memorial.



mary challenge presented by terrorism, which doesn't discriminate between military and civilian death, which takes soldiers in the prime of life and 3-year-old girls en route to a vacation in Australia. Terrorism requires the military to fight without ever quite being at war, and it requires civilians to grow up and accept the fact there is always danger and death in the world. It is the ultimate challenge that most democracies will face: to think beyond absolutes without succumbing to either fear or complacency.

The design of a perimeter wall along one side of the new memorial may underscore the idea, rising from a mere three inches high where it intersects the age line of Falkenberg to 71 inches where it intersects the line for Yammicky. One hopes it traces the growth of wisdom.