

Big Red to take on evil twin, Gabibbo, in Italian court — again

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(Photo: Courier Journal Archives)

Western Kentucky mascot Big Red will be going another round in the legal fight against his evil Italian twin, Gabibbo.

And we here at the Courier Journal could not be any more excited.

[ESPN reported Wednesday](http://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/story/_/id/23716833/court-backs-creator-western-kentucky-hilltoppers-mascot-big-red-plagiarism-case-italian-character-gabibbo) (http://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/story/_/id/23716833/court-backs-creator-western-kentucky-hilltoppers-mascot-big-red-plagiarism-case-italian-character-gabibbo) that the highest court in Italy published a decision "affirming the merits" of a plagiarism suit filed by Big Red's inventor against the Italian media company that owns Gabibbo, sometimes referred to as the "Barney of Italy."

With the decision, the Italian high court not only gives new life to a 15-year-old court battle that essentially ended 11 years ago.

More Tops: [Lamonte Bearden withdraws from NBA draft to stay with WKU basketball](https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/college/kentuckiana/2018/05/30/wku-basketball-lamonte-bearden-withdraws-nba-draft-2018/655589002/) (<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/college/kentuckiana/2018/05/30/wku-basketball-lamonte-bearden-withdraws-nba-draft-2018/655589002/>)

It also gives us back one of the greatest stories in sports business history, one that involves the Italian prime minister, a lawsuit, and two entities separated by roughly 5,000 miles, one of which is a public college in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

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It more importantly involves two nearly identical mascots. Or how Associated Press reporter Tom Rachman put it in a story [published in the Courier Journal back in March 2004](http://courier-journal.newspapers.com/image/180253402) (<http://courier-journal.newspapers.com/image/180253402>):

"Both are giant red characters with gaping mouths, swollen bellies, and dinner-plate white eyes. Big Red serves to excite crowds at university sporting events, while Gabibbo is an on-screen comic who takes up consumer complaints and has spawned a hit album, a book and other material."

Big Red was created in 1979, while Gabibbo was created in 2000.

The legal battle began back in 2003, when Western Kentucky and the companies that license Big Red filed a \$250 million lawsuit against Silvio Berlusconi's Mediaset company, and Antonio Ricci, the creator of Gabibbo. (Yes, the same Silvio Berlusconi that served as the Italian prime minister for nine total years, most recently from 2008 and 2011.)

And it just gets better from there.



Bru Photo

In this file photo, Gabibbo, sometimes referred to as Italian Barney, is shown on Italian TV show "Striscia la Notizia." Western Kentucky University sued his creator because of his resemblance of its mascot, Big Red. (Photo: Courier Journal archives)

As part of the lawsuit, Big Red traveled to Italy and held a press conference ahead of a court hearing. That spawned this gem from an [Associated Press story back in 2004](http://courier-journal.newspapers.com/image/180252273) (<http://courier-journal.newspapers.com/image/180252273>).

"I'm very happy to be in Italy. I've discovered I'm very popular already — some big TV company has copied me," Big Red said, after high-fiving photographers.

The press conference was somewhat derailed when "Striscia (la Notizia)" cast member Valerio Staffelli stormed onto stage with a camera crew and a golden statuette.

Staffelli handed out an award for sarcasm — "because you have a lot of nerve to ask for \$250 million" — and accused Big Red of being a ripoff of a French cartoon character, Barbapapa.

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"After a few minutes of chaos," Staffelli was asked to leave. (Side note: If Big Red and Gabibbo are twins, then [Barbapapa is more like a distant cousin](https://www.barbapapa.com/the-barbapa-family-en/) (<https://www.barbapapa.com/the-barbapa-family-en/>). ... Not gonna give you this one, Staffelli.)

An Italian judge eventually sided with Gabibbo in 2007, saying the mascots are similar but not the same. [According to CNBC](https://www.cnbc.com/id/22451846) (<https://www.cnbc.com/id/22451846>), the summary of the ruling was that the main difference between the two mascots is that Gabibbo talks and Big Red doesn't.

That decision spawned the creator of Big Red, Ralph Carey, to refile the suit, which in turn led to the Wednesday decision. The case will now be refiled and head back to the Milan Court of Appeals.

Related: [Report: Former WKU recruit Mitchell Robinson withdraws from NBA combine](https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/college/basketball/2018/05/16/mitchell-robinson-withdraws-nba-draft-combine/617080002/) (<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/college/basketball/2018/05/16/mitchell-robinson-withdraws-nba-draft-combine/617080002/>)

Also: [Regrouping after NCAA Tournament miss, WKU primed for NIT semifinals](https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/college/basketball/2018/03/26/wku-basketball-nit-semifinals-utah-madison-square-garden/460758002/) (<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/college/basketball/2018/03/26/wku-basketball-nit-semifinals-utah-madison-square-garden/460758002/>)

Phew. Glad we're caught up.

Steven Crossland, who was charged with managing WKU's international licensees — and was the official that asked Stafelli to leave the press conference — told ESPN "we couldn't be more happy with the ruling."

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"It has been obvious from inception that Gabibbo is a copy of Big Red and it's appropriate that the Italian courts acknowledged Antonio Ricci's article admitting that 'he rescued Gabibbo from Kentucky.' We look forward to resolving this case that has dragged on for 15-plus years. Facts are facts and the other side can't hide from them," he said.

"It has been a long journey from a scribble in a spiral notebook," Carey said, laughing, according to ESPN.

Western Kentucky did not respond to a Courier Journal email seeking comment sent Wednesday afternoon.

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