

FOOTBALL

It's about time! Western Kentucky football to debut Big Red helmet against Rice

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One of the most unique mascots in college sports will finally get his just due.

The fans have spoken and Western Kentucky football announced that Big Red, the Hilltoppers' lovable blobby mascot, will be on their football helmets for Saturday's 2 p.m. matchup against Rice.

The university announced Big Red's headgear debut on social media Tuesday, in a video showing the beloved mascot learning from university president Timothy C. Caboni. You can watch that video here:

The debut comes after at least a few weeks of campaigning, including before the Oct. 21 game against UAB when the football team's Twitter account held a fan vote to determine which helmet should be worn for a blackout game. Big Red lost, and the team had a tough conversation with the mascot that week. He didn't take the news well.

A week later, Big Red scheduled a meeting with Caboni to lobby for his helmet.

Since his introduction on Dec. 1, 1979, Big Red has been a staple of Western Kentucky athletics. Ralph Carey, a WKU student who worked at Kings Island in the summer, designed the costume. After days of sketches, Carey was convinced his creation could catch on with the university.

He had no idea that Big Red would become one of college sports most-loved and most-misunderstood figures.

"Originally I thought if this thing can hang around for a couple of years, that could be really cool," Carey told the Courier Journal in 2013. "This many years out, it's kind of shocking."

"It's kind of shocking" The birth of WKU's Big Red

"Ralph Carey was unbelievable," former WKU president Gary Ransdell told the Courier Journal. "He was running up and down the aisles, putting the basketball in his mouth. He was taking ladies' purses and eating them. The crowd just roared. Bingo. We've got ourselves a new mascot."

From gobbling up handbags, to taking on an Italian doppelganger in court, Big Red has seen it all. Now he'll get to send the Hilltoppers out in style.