

Mad “Dawg” Jack

In the fall Athenians anticipate a number of occurrences. Stately gingko trees relinquish their classic city green for a golden hue. The air temperature cools and becomes crisp. Early morning walkers and joggers begin wearing gloves and sweats. College students attack the city and move in like the Beverly Hillbillies complete with mattresses, pets, and DVDs. And the city waits for an unveiling of a new Georgia Bulldog billboard fresh with an original Jack Davis theme for the football season. For over 35 years, Jack Davis has not disappointed his fans.

Once in an interview, Jack revealed his formula for the #1 Hairy Dawg. “I make the head a little bigger than it should be, the hind legs are kind of skinny, and the forearms kind of look like a bulldog’s. I’ve changed the bulldog a little over the years. I’ve tried to make him a little more ferocious and, at some point, I started spelling dog “D-A-W-G.” Jack’s art and creativity have made his Dawg the most recognized collegiate mascot in any league.

Stan Lee, creator of Spiderman and the The Hulk, observed that Jack “draws like a house on fire” while another fellow artist remarked that even in his 70’s, Jack’s pen and imagination are as quick as ever. Once relegated to the football field, Davis’ famous Dawgs are into all the SEC sports, namely cross training in tennis, gymnastics, and basketball with special editions for SEC Championships and Sugar Bowl games.

Loran Smith, Executive Secretary of the Bulldog Club, met Jack through a mutual friend, another alum of UGA. Loren asked Jack to draw the first bulldog in the mid-70s before a Georgia vs. Georgia Tech game. His larger than life anthropomorphic bulldog was an instant hit. The original print with the Georgia bulldog stomping a yellow jacket hangs in a prominent spot in Loren’s office. From that point forward, Jack’s drawings have become a staple for the University of Georgia athletic program.

Jack Davis began drawing as a youngster. By twelve years of age, he had won a cartoon drawing contest and had some gags published by Georgia Tech. Throughout his years at North Fulton High, his illustrations were in constant demand by the school paper. Jack illustrated the high school annual in 1943. After graduation Jack spent three years in the Navy cartooning his way from Pensacola, Florida, to Guam.

In 1947 Jack enrolled at the University of Georgia on the G.I. Bill. He illustrated for the Red and Black and other publications on campus. Jack met his future bride, Dena Roquemore, while at UGA.

While still a student, Jack wrote and illustrated a sports column for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and dreamed of creating his own cartoon strip. Ed Dodd, creator of Mark Twain, encouraged him to continue his art training at the Art Student’s League in New York. Two years later when he had saved enough money to buy a car, he moved to New York. By this time, Jack and Dena were engaged to be married. Jack worked at several jobs while attending art school until he answered an ad for The Saint comic strip. When the executives at the Herald Tribune saw his portfolio, they employed him for a year. Dena and he were married in 1951 and she joined him in the big New York adventure.

When he answered an ad for E.C. Comics, they hired him right away. He stayed with E.C. Comics for six years gaining expertise in his profession. While at E.C., Jack illustrated comics featuring horror, war, suspense, humor and science fiction.

With the 50's came a wave of conservatism that affected the comic industry. The Comics Code Authority was instituted in the United States to "guard against any real or imagined excesses on the part of comic book companies." Bill Gaines, publisher of E.C. comics, withdrew all of his comics except one, Mad. Gaines used all his resources to make Mad a full-fledged magazine with Davis as illustrator. Jack began the Davis-style hallmark with Mad Magazine's first issue, which immediately sold out securing its success for years to come.

In 1957 Davis and two of his fellow artists left Mad to develop a humor magazine, Trump, for Hugh Hefner. The magazine lasted only two issues. Jack produced 15 color cartoons for Playboy and worked on Little Annie Fanny with Harvey Kurtzman, Will Elder, and Frank Frazetta.

After Trump, the trio pooled their resources to develop Humbug, another short-lived satirical magazine. After Humbug's demise, Davis drew Beauregard, a comic strip about the exploits of a Confederate soldier. Unfortunately, Davis wasn't able to generate interest in this new venture. Jack worked for Atlas comics and later developed Yak Yak, a humor comic book for Dell.

Jack also kept busy illustrating humor magazines, western magazines, Cavalier magazines, gum cards and greeting cards. He did his first movie poster in 1956, but it was the Jack Davis' movie poster for It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World that changed this art form forever. He did his first album cover in 1957, but in 1958 Davis began a long running association with RCA records. To date, he has done 46 movie posters and 64 record albums.

Firmly entrenched in success, Jack turned to book illustrations and advertising. His illustrations have appeared in every major publication including Life, Esquire, Playboy, Sports Illustrated, Money, Fortune, Ladies Home Journal, TV Guide and Time. His daughter remarked that she believed the Time covers would rate as her father's crowning achievement – 40 to date.

Jack returned to Mad Magazine in 1965 as one of the best-known illustrators in the United States. Since his return to Mad, Jack and Dena have participated in many of the Bill Gaines' legendary Mad trips to Russia, Africa, and Europe. In the January 2001 issue of Mad, Jack is the featured artist. The Mad entourage is photographed in the bullring during the 1973 Mad trip to Mexico.

With all of his fame, Jack never forgot his beloved alma mater. Throughout the years Jack has offered his art to Georgia at no charge. His illustrations have adorned UGA Athletic Association alumni magazines, posters, mini-billboards, books, and postcards.

Coach Dooley said, "We are so grateful for Jack and all he's done. We are always looking for ways to say 'thank you.'" Coach Dooley pointed out that Jack has the uncanny ability to find the dominant characteristic in someone and make his caricature reflect that feature.

On one occasion Coach Dooley gave Davis a pair of Nike® shoes with "Dogs" imprinted on the back. Davis wore them to work when he was still living in New York. He even wore them on his trek to the Matterhorn. Davis is like a child at Christmas with his Nike® Dogs shoes, "Man, aren't these great!" you can hear him say.

On another occasion the Bulldog Club flew Jack and Dena to the Georgia/Florida game -- a special treat for a Georgia couple living in Manhattan and missing their alma mater.

Jack's sense of fun mixed with a southern graciousness and gentility has earned him a place in many Georgian hearts. He is a much beloved artist, illustrator and human being. Jack's friends are many. Loren Smith and Coach Dooley agree, "Jack loves the south in general and the University of Georgia in particular."

Family is all-important to Jack. Katie Davis Lloyd, Jack and Dena's daughter, said that growing up in Scarsdale was quite an experience. She was the only child in her peer group who read Mad magazine, but when her dad began doing Time covers even her friends noticed. When Katie and her brother, Jack III got ready for college, they were headed to Georgia – no discussion.

Katie was at UGA dating Chris Lloyd when Georgia went to the Sugar Bowl against their archrival Notre Dame. Imagine her chagrin seeing her name on the wrist wraps on one arm of Jack Davis' Dawg and Chris' name scribbled on the other. Since that time their names have been replaced with the names of Chris and Katie's two daughters, Sara and Molly. You have to look closely, but they are there enshrined in every bulldog sketch usually on shoestrings or wristbands.

Jack has a wonderful sense of humor. He is not above lampooning himself complete with an ample girth labeled "Poss' Barbecue" or depicting himself fishing on the Hampton River – another favorite pastime. Occasionally, Jack plays golf but he is a self-admitted "terrible golfer." He would prefer to join several retired St. Simons Islanders every weekday from 5-6 p.m. at the Hampton Marina to convene their "Do Nothing Club." "There are about five of us," Jack said. "It's very informal we sit and tell tall tales. If you can, you show up." Sometimes his friend Wendell, a guide and animal rescuer, shows up and entertains them with a story about removing an alligator from a backyard, golf course, or roadway.

In 1989 Dena and Jack left the Big Apple and made St. Simons Island, Georgia their home. Their son, Jack III, designed their house at Hampton Point facing the river and the marshes of Glynn. Unlike when he lived in New York and news of the Bulldogs was rare, now Jack can hear all the bulldog news on radio and television. He and Dena can easily get to Athens for home games and visit their grandchildren. Jack and Dena, a gracious couple, who have just celebrated their 50th anniversary, open their home to Bulldog fans every year. Davis tells every interviewer, "Man, I love the Dogs," a fact he well illustrates.

Recently the University of Georgia endowed a visiting professorship position in honor of Jack Davis at the Lamar Dodd School of Art. "This position is awarded to artists, like Jack, who have put themselves in an upper echelon," reported Loran Smith. The award honors Jack as much for who he is as what he has accomplished. Over and over those who know him use the words: generous, gracious, and gentleman. A man who loves what he does, loves people, and loves the University of Georgia.

In 2002 the New York Art School's Society of Illustrators plan to further honor Jack Davis and his body of work. Many of Jack's paintings will be framed for display at this time. The University of Georgia is proud to be a contributor to make this event possible.

Coach Dooley said that the entire staff looks forward to Avery McClain and Jack Davis unveiling the theme for the Georgia Bulldog Football Team. With a new head coach this season, Mark Reicht, Bulldog fans are especially excited about what Davis will portray. One suggestion is a Dawg wielding brass knuckles symbolizing the hard training regime and a Bible symbolizing Reicht's strong Christian faith. Whatever form it takes, Jack Davis will create a one of a kind Dawg for an exciting inaugural season.

Europe has nothing on Athens in Autumn. Electricity fills the air. Fans can't get enough of the Dawgs whether scrimmaging on the football field, serving on the tennis court, sinking a putt, slamming a basket, or teetering precariously on the balance beam.

Go you Hairy Dawgs. Bring Glory, Glory to Old Georgia! We never tire of saying it, chanting it, or singing it. The legacy of the Dawgs rests in the quick, rapier strokes of Jack Davis while the red and black season never looked brighter.