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## How a Hayden Fry idea led to the creation of Iowa's iconic Tigerhawk logo



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Former Iowa football coach Hayden Fry addresses the crowd during a panel discussion with members of the 1985 Rose Bowl team on Friday, Sept. 3, 2010 at the Coralville Marriott Hotel and Conference Center. (The Gazette)

*Editor's note: This story originally ran in The Gazette on Aug. 30, 2009. Hayden Fry died Tuesday at the age of 90.*

It doesn't need to be accompanied by words. It's no exaggeration to call it part of Iowa's landscape.

It's on countless car bumpers and garages, mailboxes and barns.

It's the Tigerhawk logo. If you aren't familiar with it, it might be hard to believe you've stepped foot in the state within the last quarter-century.

'Where I come from, it's called selling the sizzle before the steak.' — Hayden Fry

Fry said that early in his tenure as the University of Iowa's football coach, he wanted to get Hawkeye fans enthused about his program before it began bearing winning fruit on the field. To him, a big part of that was changing the look of the team. He did so shortly after taking the Iowa job in late 1978.

Fry wanted Iowa's uniforms to resemble something that symbolized success. Iowa's school colors happened to match those of the Pittsburgh Steelers, then the NFL's dominant franchise. So Fry tailored the Hawkeyes uniforms to strongly resemble the Steelers'.

But Fry felt something else was needed, a logo, something new and distinctive to give his program an identity.

The Texan who spent 20 years at Iowa building and maintaining a successful football organization and transforming Iowa football into something much larger than what it was when he arrived.

Perhaps an equally enduring part of Fry's [Iowa](#) legacy, though, is his overseeing of the creation and marketing of the Tigerhawk image that is and may always be part of [Hawkeye](#) sports.

Creating a logo was totally Fry's idea. A printing company and an advertising firm, both from Cedar Rapids, executed the concept.

'Hayden wanted to go with black helmets, and he wanted something to put on those helmets,' said Bill Colbert, who was the art director of Three Arts Advertising in Cedar Rapids. 'He wanted the look of a champion.'

A contest was held for [Iowa](#) students to try to come up with a logo for the football team. Former sports information director George Wine showed submitted sketches to Chuck Edwards of Cedar Rapids, whose Pepco Litho firm had printed Hawkeye media guides.

'They were not real good,' Edwards recalled last week. 'So George asked me if I knew anybody who could do something. The rest is history.'

Edwards contacted Colbert. Both big Hawkeye fans, they served as best man in each other's weddings. Colbert accepted Edwards' challenge. He began by making sketches on a cocktail napkin while on a flight to Minneapolis for other business.

'I wanted something impactful and contemporary,' Colbert said. 'A lot of schools had cartoonish-type characters. I felt this one should be stylish, something that would separate it from the rest of the schools.'

So Colbert, who went on to leave his Cedar Rapids hometown to work for 25 years at high-powered Chicago ad agency Leo Burnett, focused on the head, eye and beak of a hawk. The 'Tigerhawk' name came from the striping in the design.

'We got it done in a week,' Colbert said. 'It didn't have an impact on a flat piece of art. So on that Friday night, I called George Wine to see if we could silk-screen it onto a couple of helmets. On Monday morning we had an appointment to see Hayden. We walked in a conference room with no presentation, no buildup. It was a shot in the dark.'

Colbert and Edwards showed Fry the helmets with the logo.

'I like that!' Fry said in the meeting, according to Wine. 'A real splash of sunshine!'

Shortly after Colbert and Edwards returned to Cedar Rapids, they got a call from Wine. Fry had given his approval. The Tigerhawk had taken flight.

'Looking back,' Colbert said, 'schools weren't doing any aggressive marketing at that time. Michigan was the only one selling anything, but that was just because of the sheer numbers of its alumni base.'

Fry and Colbert formed the Hawkeye Marketing Group, which put the Tigerhawk on ball caps, shirts, playing cards and other items sold to promote the school's football program.

When Colbert moved to Chicago in 1982, he and Fry donated the logo to the university.

It may not have been an instant smash in 1979, but the Tigerhawk caught on quickly enough.

'A lot of people in the beginning were asking 'Where did Herky go?'' Colbert said.

But by Fry's third season, when [Iowa](#) shared the Big Ten title in 1981 and went to the Rose Bowl, it was a different story.

'That Rose Bowl year, the university saw the potential of it,' Colbert said. 'Vendors started coming around. The school didn't even have licensing fees yet.'

But before long, the university opened an Iowa Hawk Shop. It now has four locations. And vendors keep paying the school those fees.

'Quite honestly,' Colbert said, 'if the team hadn't won that third year, who knows how far (the logo) would have gone?'

Now it's hard to imagine Hawkeye sports abandoning the Tigerhawk.

'Nobody ever thought 30 years ago that you could design a logo that would last 30 years,' Edwards said. 'I don't think anybody could have predicted how big it would be.'

'It's really an Iowa logo. People associate it with [Iowa](#). You see it all over the state. All over the world, really. It's bigger than life.'

It's always been known that Fry had a major role in designing the logo. Colbert, however, has been an unsung hero. At 71, he is retired and living in Aurora, Ill. He has been asked to appear at FRYfest, appear in a booth there and tell Hawkeye fans about how an iconic image came to be.

'It's neat they're finally recognizing him,' Edwards said.

'I take pride in the authorship, obviously,' Colbert said. 'I worked on Michigan Avenue in Chicago for 25 years, and whenever I'd see someone there wearing the Tigerhawk, I'd get a warm feeling. A feeling of home.'

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