

COMMENTARY

‘Super Fans’ character endures in a long tradition of Chicago sports nuts

BY PAUL SULLIVAN
Chicago Tribune/Tribune Content Agency

CHICAGO

George Wendt didn’t just play a rabid Chicago sports fan on TV. He was one, albeit not nearly as deluded as his “Saturday Night Live” character, Bob Swerski, of the “Super Fans” sketches. Wendt, who died last week at age 76, gained fame for the iconic role of Norm Peterson on the 1982-93 sitcom “Cheers,” before his popular caricature of Swerski, a Chicago sports fan who enjoyed beer and sausages with his friends while lauding “Da Coach” Mike Ditka and the Bears and Bulls franchises.

But Wendt also was an old-school Chicago fan from Beverly who grew up watching the Bears, White Sox and Notre Dame football, the sports pyramid of almost every kid on the South Side or in the south suburbs.

When I was the Sox beat writer back in 1996, I met Wendt at a game at what then was called new Comiskey Park and interviewed him on the team’s attendance woes.

“I wish I could come up with some cute little sound bite that could explain it, but it’s sort of inexplicable,” he said. “Has it ever been a hot ticket, really? ... Maybe you could put it on the free TV versus cable TV thing a few years back (when the Sox moved to pay channel SportsVision in 1982), but now they’re

on WGN, so I don’t know.

“It seems emigres to Chicago, the postgraduates who settled here in the suburbs, north or south, become Cubs fans. It seems like to be a Sox fan, you have to be born and raised on the South Side.”

Wendt starred in a commercial for the Sox in which he huffed and puffed his way to first base, slid headfirst and was handed a beer. He also narrated a documentary on the old ballpark in 1991 called “Eighty Years of Celebration - Old Comiskey Park.”

The Sox honored Wendt with a tribute on the video board Tuesday night at Rate Field, and team executives acknowledge he was perhaps their third-most famous celebrity fan behind former President Barack Obama and the new leader, Pope Leo XIV, aka “Da Pope.”

Wendt never really spoke like his character on “Da Bears” sketches, but his succinct delivery of an exaggerated Chicago accent, along with the funny scripts written by fellow “Super Fan” Robert Smigel, who played Carl Wolarski, have endured for more than three decades.

Many forget that the image of the meatball Chicago sports fan was panned by some cultural elitists at the time. Former Chicago Tribune critic Blair Kamin wrote in 1992 that “the low-brow repartee is bugging Chicago’s high-brow temples of culture, perhaps because they feel it indirectly associates them with the blue-collar argot of Mayor Richard Daley’s



ERIN HOOLEY Chicago Tribune/TNS

George Wendt speaks during an 2019 interview outside Soldier Field while filming a segment with Robert Smigel of “Bill Swerski’s Super Fans.”

Bridgeport.”

“People are going from Al Capone ... to ‘Da Bears’ and ‘Da Bulls,’ “ Susan Lock, deputy director of the Mayor’s Office of Special Events, told Kamin. Lock complained that the success of the Michael Jordan-led Bulls was “eclipsing all these other wonderful programs that are going on in the city.”

Another spokesperson for an organization that promoted Chicago architecture and design complained that “Da Bears and Da Bulls” skits showed “Chicagoans to be really dumb. ... Our point is that there really are a lot of smart people in Chicago.”

Few fan bases from other

cities have been portrayed on screen as much as Chicago’s, including cameos during director John Hughes’ movies, such as Ferris Bueller taking in a few innings of a Cubs game with friends Cameron and Sloane in “Ferris Bueller’s Day Off” or Hughes adorning the bedroom of John Candy’s “Uncle Buck” with a framed Chicago Sun-Times front page from the Cubs’ loss in the 1984 National League Championship Series. The headline simply read: “OUCH!”

An episode of “The Conners” featured actor John Goodman and the Conner family trying to explain their loyalty to the Bears to a smug Green

Bay Packers fan. Local sports themes are an occasional topic in “The Bear,” the most Chicago show of them all. In one episode Oliver Platt’s Uncle Jimmy character explains to Carmy (Jeremy Allen White) the scapegoating of Steve Bartman during the Cubs’ Game 6 loss to the Florida Marlins in the 2003 NLCS. Bartman was widely ridiculed, but Uncle Jimmy fingered the true culprit: former Cubs short-stop Alex Gonzalez.

Another episode of “The Bear” featured Richie, a White Sox fan, ripping Carmy’s brother-in-law Pete (played by St. Charles’ Chris Witaske) for “probably” being a

Cubs fan. The age-old narrative of Sox fans accusing Cubs fans of being poseurs who don’t know baseball was explored when Richie challenged Pete to name the Cubs first baseman. “Alfonso Rivas,” he correctly replies, to Richie’s chagrin.

The all-time Chicago sports fan on TV was Bob Newhart’s Dr. Bob Hartley in the 1972-78 sitcom “The Bob Newhart Show.” Hartley and his buddy, Jerry the orthodontist, always were trekking to Bulls, Cubs or Loyola basketball games, or driving to Peoria to watch a closed-circuit telecast of a blacked-out Bears-Packers game.

I once referred to Newhart in a 2021 column as “the indisputable godfather of celebrity Chicago sports fans,” a title he did not take lightly.

“I will wear it proudly, until of course it is eclipsed by someone else,” he wrote in a letter.

Wendt followed in Newhart’s footsteps, popularizing the stereotypical loud, opinionated Chicago sports fan who always seemed assured of victory while ignoring the team’s storied failures of the past.

Wendt’s Bob Swerski had nothing in common with Newhart’s brainy psychologist, other than their passion for Chicago’s teams. But you can picture them watching a game together, cocktails in hand, while voicing optimism that things eventually will get better, despite evidence to the contrary.

It’s a Chicago story that never grows old.

Hovland looking for answers at Memorial Tournament

Field Level Media

Viktor Hovland has dealt with very public issues involving his swing, leading some to question whether he’s dealing with mental or physical issues in his game.

Hovland hopes to put that question to bed this week when he competes at the Memorial Tournament in Dublin, Ohio.

The 27-year-old Norwegian has seven victories on the PGA Tour since turning pro in 2019, and that includes The Valspar Championship in late March as well as the 2023 Memorial in a playoff against Denny McCarthy.

Hovland, however, has finished outside the top 20 in three of his last four events -- including The Masters (T21), Trusti Championship (T54) and PGA Championship (T28).

On Tuesday, Hovland shifted gears in his preparation for taking on Muirfield Village Golf Club.



AARON DOSTER Imagn Images

Viktor Hovland has finished outside the top 20 in three of his last four events -- including The Masters (T21), Trusti Championship (T54) and PGA Championship (T28).

“Yeah, it’s really cool. I’ve played here a few times now and every time I was looking forward to trying to conquer the golf course because it’s so hard, and up until 2023 I felt like I had played a lot of good golf but just didn’t quite get the finishes that I wanted,” Hovland said. “So it was really nice to finally get a win there in 2023. First win in the United

States, and it was kind of the first win on a really big-boy golf course and a great field. So that was a big week for me.”

That said, Hovland contends that it won’t be easy given the challenges the course presents.

“I enjoy the challenge, but that’s more so like after the round,” he said. “During the round it’s just so stressful, especially when

it’s blowing. I played 18 holes yesterday and it was kind of a weird wind, a lot of crosswinds, and on those tee shots it gets very difficult to hold the fairways. The rough is probably as thick as I’ve ever seen it, so if you’re not good off the tee, you’re just going to be grinding for pars all day. Yeah, it’s just a really tough golf course.”

Which then lends itself to the age-old question: Is Hovland dealing with mental or physical issues on the golf course?

“It is all mental and it is all physical, but you both have to -- you have to do ‘em both at the same time,” he said. “But at the end of the day if your technique or the physics of your golf swing are not matching up and the ball’s going everywhere, it doesn’t matter how you think. You’ve got to correct some issues in order to see the ball go where you want it to.

“And then I think the mental part becomes more and more important as your game starts to become better, when you’re really close to posting a really good score, maybe you’re just kind of letting a couple bad swings really upset you or you’re maybe not that confident yet. So that’s where I feel like the mental side of it. If you can kind of push that and just believe, even though the

results aren’t quite there yet, I think that’s where it’s really important. But at the end of the day you can’t think your way around to a

65 out there at Muirfield. You’re going to have to hit the shots and if you don’t have ‘em, then, well, you got to work on it.”

Legals

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE
PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD NOTICE
A virtual public hearing will be held Tuesday, June 3rd, 2025, at 10:00 AM EST to obtain public input for the 2025 - 2029 Consolidated Plan and Analysis of Impediments for Kentucky's Block Grant Housing Programs. Following the hearing, the 2025 - 2029 Consolidated Plan and Analysis of Impediments will be available for public comment June 4th, 2025, through July 7th, 2025.

The Consolidated Plan is the Commonwealth's application and distribution plan for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Office of Community Planning and Development (CPD) Programs (CDBG, ESG, HOME, HOPWA, and HTF). Kentucky Housing Corporation (KHC) and the Department for Local Government (DLG) are the agencies responsible for submission of the plan to HUD.

The Analysis of Impediments (AI) certifies that KHC will affirmatively further fair housing in the administration of HUD programs. The AI document is a comprehensive analysis of public and private sector policies that impact fair housing choice for members of the protected classes in Kentucky. KHC and DLG are the agencies responsible for submission of the AI to HUD.

Kentucky has drafted the 2025 - 2029 Consolidated Plan and Analysis of Impediments, and a virtual public hearing is being held for the purpose of obtaining public input. Both written and oral comments will be accepted, and where applicable, will be incorporated into the document. The hearing is available virtually via zoom at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85702281367?pwd=bREGqC5f2njL4oRskYuaClj8OrzB1d.1> | Meeting ID: 857 0228 1367 | Passcode: 502910, and live streamed on KHC's YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSEECsSB1rM>.

The Consolidated Plan and Analysis of Impediments will be available for review online from June 4th, 2025 to July 7th, 2025 at the KHC Web page: <https://www.kyhousing.org/Planning-Documents/Pages/Consolidated-Plan.aspx>. Please send written comments to Ben Livingston, KHC, 1231 Louisville Road, Frankfort, Kentucky 40601 or by email to corpplanreport@kyhousing.org.

VIRTUAL PUBLIC HEARING
Tuesday, June 3, 2025, 10:00AM EST
Consolidated Plan and Analysis of Impediments Public Hearing

Join Zoom Meeting
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85702281367?pwd=bREGqC5f2njL4oRskYuaClj8OrzB1d.1>

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Rory McIlroy to skip Memorial Tournament

Field Level Media

Reigning Masters champion Rory McIlroy will skip this week’s Memorial Tournament in Dublin, Ohio.

McIlroy is not on the list of competitors for the event, marking the first

time since 2017 that he will not participate in the tournament.

Eighteen of the 20 top-ranked golfers in the world are expected to take part in the event. McIlroy currently is ranked No. 2, while No. 10 Bryson DeChambeau competes on the LIV Tour.

No. 1 Scottie Scheffler will defend his 2024 title at the Muirfield Village Golf Club.

Since he completed the career Grand Slam at Augusta National on April 13, McIlroy has managed two top-12 finishes, placing tied for 12th at the Zurich Classic (April 24-27) and sev-

enth at the Trusti Championship (May 8-11).

McIlroy, 36, struggled at this month’s PGA Championship, finishing at plus-3 and tied for 47th place. Scheffler captured his third career major at Quail Hollow in Charlotte, N.C.

Jack Nicklaus founded The Memorial Tournament in 1976 and continues to serve as the tournament host. Patrick Cantlay, the 15th-ranked player, has won two championships in the past six years (2019, 2021).