



## Dogs as mascots



Although well known for providing unconditional love, dogs have other traits that are to be admired. These include:

- Loyalty
- Bravery
- Tenacity
- Protectiveness
- Teamwork

Is it any wonder that dogs feature as the mascots for many sports teams?

The affiliation of dogs and sports has a rich history rooted in symbolism, tradition, and regional or institutional identity.

Through the 1800s into the early 1900s there was a strong military influence in the choice of dogs used as mascots. The dogs had to be tough breeds, known for strength, and may have featured on the battlefield during wartime.

Yale University, for example, was one of the first US institutions to adopt a live dog mascot, Handsome Dan. A bulldog, the

mascot was introduced in 1889 and set a precedent for bulldogs becoming the most popular mascots in US college sports.

Bulldogs would dominate imagery through the 1940s. Tough, but lovable, the bulldogs symbolised grit and perseverance. The University of Georgia adopted a bulldog in 1920 with the first live mascot, named UGA, appearing in 1956.

Huskies are another breed commonly associated with sports teams, drawing on the imagery of sled dogs and endurance. Husky mascots were often adopted by teams in the northern regions of the United States, known for their deep and severe winters. At Northeastern University in Boston, a bronze statue of the Northeastern Husky is a common point of interest, with the nose of the statue worn down

to a shine from all the nose-rubs it has had over the years (*left top*).

Rugby and football clubs have also adopted bulldogs and greyhounds as team names, appealing to working-class toughness and speed.

Mascots are more than symbols in the modern economy; they are marketable characters appearing on merchandise, at games, and in digital media.

When studying at the University of Tennessee in 2023, for example, a visit to the University bookshop revealed very few books and lots of merchandise featuring the school's insignia and mascot, Smokey the Bluetick Coonhound. Statues of Smokey are dotted around the Knoxville campus to provide photo opportunities and easy-to-identify meeting places (*left bottom, just one of the Smokey statues on the Knoxville campus*).

Coming closer to home, the Greymouth Greyhounds in the West Coast Rugby League proudly refer to the speed of a Greyhound in their motto, Release the Hounds. Members of the team were all too happy to pose with some pet greyhounds on a chance encounter in Christchurch (*below*). 

