

David Gardner

THE DUKE, WRANGLERS MASCOT

• Gardner will never forget the first time he donned the suit for The Duke. In particular, he'll never forget the scent of condiments — courtesy of a couple drunken ladies heckling Gardner his first day on the job. "Next thing I know, this crazy lady throws a freaking cheeseburger that seemed to open in the air just perfectly to coat me in ketchup and mustard. That was two seasons ago, yet still, I climb into that giant green suit every home game. I admit, I fell in love with it."

• Climbing into the Wranglers rig requires elaborate choreography. Each piece of the costume has to be put in a specific order — and it can't be done alone. Says Gardner, "With zippers, clips, and buttons almost everywhere, only a contortionist would be able to do it by themselves."

• There's a kinky part to Gardner's job — neck-wise, anyway. The Duke's head piece weighs 20 pounds, and every bit of that heft sits on Gardner's shoulders. "It's a guarantee that the morning after a game I'm gonna have a stiff neck." Fortunately, Gardner gets four 10-minute breaks to work it out.

• Between the food fights, the rigmarole of getting dressed, the pressure to perform and the toll on the body after the last puck is passed, why would Gardner want to be a mascot? "The explosive cheers and chants from over 7,000 spectators is really an adrenaline rush," he says. — *Elisabeth Daniels*

