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100TH ANNIVERSARY



JOSH BACHMAN/Missourian

The Kewpie mascot cheers on the Hickman football team at the Sept. 12 game against the Hellas Crusaders.

THE KEWPIE CRAZE

It may seem odd to outsiders, but Hickman students, faculty and alumni embrace the naked baby

By **MARK SELIG**
news@ColumbiaMissourian.com

The naked baby wears a football uniform when it cheers from field level during games. Streaking is not permitted at Hickman High School. So the school's mascot, an adult-sized baby named a Kewpie — traditionally nude in the school's logo — comes swaddled in purple.

It's an offbeat mascot for an athletics department, but Kewpie supporters have cradled the name for 100 years now.

"What makes it so special? Because it's the only one," said Charley Blackmore, a 1963 graduate and volunteer historian of all things Kewpies.

There's plenty of history associated with the Kewpie, a naked, cartoon baby doll created by artist Rose O'Neill in 1909 and adopted by Hickman five years later. The Kewpie represented "the innocence and pluck of childhood," according to Shelley Armitage, the author of a 2011 biogra-

phy about O'Neill titled "Kewpies and Beyond."

To the modern-day Kewpies — the athletes, coaches and teachers who have passed through the school — the Kewpie represents individuality. These people ooze Kewpie pride, even if they do not completely understand the name or its origins.

"People always ask where I'm from," quarterback Carter Nicoli said of the teammates he meets playing travel baseball. "I say, 'I go to Hickman. I'm a Hickman Kewpie.' They say, 'What's a Kewpie?' 'It's a naked baby!' ... They're just like, 'Really? How does it feel to be a naked baby?'"

The football team is honoring the century-old mascot this season with an emblem on its helmet.

Formerly known as Columbia High School, the school on the north side of the city, many believe, was nicknamed the Trojans. But that's just so common. And singularity is sexy.

So raise a sippy cup and toast a century-old baby.

MORE INSIDE

ONE OF A KIND?: The Kewpie nickname at Hickman High School was rumored to be the only one in the world. But is that true?

'MR. KEWPIE': Charley Blackmore is the mastermind of Kewpie.net, a website started in 1998. The site has helped alumni maintain close ties to the high school.

POP QUIZ: Test your Kewpie IQ — or I-Kewpie — with these questions.

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FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Theories of Kewpie's origin vary

KEWPIE from page 1A

Embracing the baby

Well before Twitter made the exercise public, kids from rival high schools have traded barbs leading up to big games. The Kewpies, with their baby-faced mascot, are an easy target.

"They make fun until they play us," football coach Arnel Monroe said from the seat of a golf cart the week before Hickman's first football game. His team hasn't exactly backed up that claim this season, still winless through seven games heading into its home finale Friday against Liberty.

But Monroe remembers sunnier days in the crib, when the 1986 Hickman graduate played as a Kewpie and shut out some Jays from Jefferson City.

Like Monroe, many of Hickman's employees are alumni — umbilical cords still tied to home.

Another is David Johnson. He's the coach of the reigning state runner-up basketball team. And sure enough, he played for Hickman, graduating in 1980. He later laced up in Australia, where he would often wear his old Kewpies paraphernalia.

"Everybody looks at me crazy, like, 'What the hell is a Kewpie?'" Johnson recalled.

A Kewpie is a character that O'Neill drew as a comic strip "to teach people to be merry and kind at the same time," she said, according to the State Historical Society of Missouri. It was a cutesy, genderless version of Cupid, with wings on its shoulders, starfish hands and a head that comes to a point called a topknot — apparently the early 20th-century version of a fauxhawk.

O'Neill, who lived near Branson, became a key figure in women's suffrage. The ceramic bisque dolls of her Kewpies, which sold from 25 cents to \$1.25, became ubiquitous after their arrival in 1912.

"They became popular during a time of great regard for motherhood and thus mothering and children, so as icons or toys," said Armitage, the author. "... They could be said to represent the American fascination with childhood."

You can still buy the dolls on Amazon.com for about \$50. Just don't be distracted by the Japanese Kewpie Mayonnaise, another product available online.

It's a crazy Kewpie world out there, but there's a standard learning curve for Kewpie comprehension in Columbia. Young kids don't understand the name at first; by the time they're of age to attend Hickman, they embrace it.

Elijah Crum remembers attending Hickman games as a child. He's a third-generation Kewpie who evolved from confused spectator to junior running back.

He admits the name is a bit odd, but he likes it.

"It is what it is," Crum said before practice this summer. "It's not changing."

Theories behind the mascot

Hickman football might be winless, but its mascot won't reshape its facial expression, a tongue-exposed smile and bright blue eyes with long lashes. OK, maybe the Kewpie is upset beneath the cheery disposition it can't change — a mascot head is an inanimate object, after all. Babies cry, but Kewpies don't frown.

In fact, Hickman might have inherited the Kewpie name because of its players' positive attitude. Might have.

After all, no explanation for the Kewpie adoption is completely, indubitably verified. It happened 100 years ago. You can't just call the school principal from 1914 and ask for an explanation.

Variations of the Kewpie's origin at Hickman range from plausible to outrageous. Everybody's got a theory.

"I think there's a lot of old wives' tales," said former athletics director Doug Mirts, who retired this summer after 17 years in that position and many more as a teacher and student at Hickman. "Depends on what generation you're talking to or whose story is told. Depends on what story you want to believe."

The story Mirts believes is that the football team was being beaten handily, and an announcer remarked that the players were still "smiling like Kewpies."

Monroe believes it was the boys' basketball team that was losing, and doing so with great dignity and a smile. "Evidently that basketball team put up one hell of a fight," he said.

Ask the current cheerleaders, and they offer yet more tales.

"My uncle actually told me ... they had a Friday night football game, and they were losing really bad, and it was raining, and a newspaper article said, 'But their eyes still shone like Kewpie dolls,'" senior Lily Burns said.

Burns' story has made rounds in Columbia, but a search through newspaper archives in the Library of Congress' database yields no mention of Kewpies in this context.

Fellow senior cheerleader Mackenzie Murray offers another legend.

"It was a basketball game, and the secretary always had a Kewpie in the middle of the court, and no one stepped on it, and then they won," she said, admitting her story is mere hearsay.

A Kewpie doll at midcourt? That's patently absurd. Surely a referee would have removed it. Or one of 10 players running up and down the floor would have squashed it. Of all the stories, that one seems the least plausible.



JOSH BACHMAN/Missourian

Although the adult-size baby is naked in the school's logo, the mascot wears a football uniform to games.



T.J. THOMSON/Missourian

Terry Hargrove, an A+ Program secretary at Hickman High School, works in the school's main office. The office is decorated with dozens of Kewpie figures.



Why would you want to be named a Bruin or a Spartan? That's lame. Kewpies. ... Everybody loves a naked baby. Who doesn't want to be a naked baby? Everyone loves those. You come out a naked baby.

DAMARION AVERY, Hickman running back

Except that it might be true. Recently, that story was "verified" by Blackmore, the custodian of the thorough and purple-packed Kewpie.net. The website features an email that Lucy Church sent to Blackmore in 2009. That email tells the story of Church's great-uncle, who played on the famed 1913-14 basketball team — a squad that won the state championship and featured a little Kewpie doll sitting in front of it in the team photo (the first sight of the Kewpie in the school's yearbooks).

This is a portion of Church's email: "He (the great uncle) came to visit us once in the 1960s. During that visit he told us about the Kewpie, which was quite significant to him. Apparently, the school secretary owned a Kewpie doll, as they were popular figurines then, and she kept it on her desk. At one of the basketball games, she placed the Kewpie in the center of the court (I guess for good luck), and the entire game was played around it without its being broken. This was somewhat remarkable since the dolls were very fragile. Because it survived the game and brought a victory, it was thereafter considered the good luck mascot."

That's the story the school uses officially. It's the story Kewpies will celebrate this year — 100 years after that basketball team's title.

A mascot that stands out

On Aug. 29, Hickman was beating Lee's Summit 17-14 at halftime of its first home football game of 2014.

The Kewpie mascot walked toward the bleachers to chat with friends.

A woman, holding an actual baby with a frozen-pop-stained face, approached the Kewpie. The Kewpie reached out to greet the baby. The actual baby cried.

Let's be honest: The mascot is sort of eerie. And that's even before you walk into the school's main office, where you'll feel like the victim of a Chucky movie.

Behind a secretary's desk are two shelves of Kewpie dolls, 17 in total. In the top-right corner of the office is a giant ceramic Kewpie head.

Maybe that's the magic of the Kewpie, a character that doesn't fall into the typical template of team mascot.

Eagles and Panthers are ferocious creatures that many high schools, colleges and professional teams use as mascots. They represent speed and toughness, attributes of great sports teams.

In Columbia, Rock Bridge High School calls itself the Bruins, and Battle High School is the Spartans.

"Why would you want to be named a Bruin or a Spartan?" Hickman running back Damarion Avery asked. "That's lame. Kewpies. ... Everybody loves a naked baby. Who doesn't want to be a naked baby? Everyone loves those. You come out a naked baby."

Nearly 100 high schools in America use the name Bruins, according to mascotdb.com. More than 400 are Spartans. There's only one result for "Kewpies."

Bruins and Spartans seem tough. Kewpies probably don't. Unless you ask one.

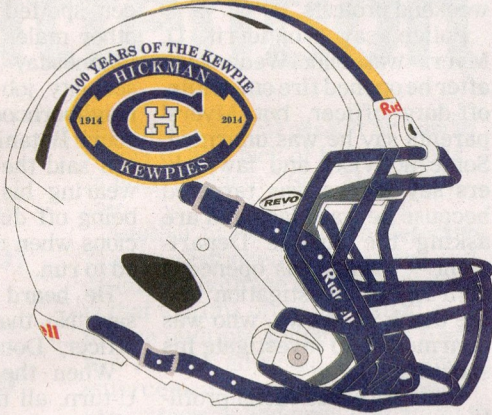
"The Kewpie's a fighter; don't let the baby doll fool ya," Monroe said. "We come to fight, and it's been that way for years."

(Hickman eventually lost 41-17 in that game to Lee's Summit, but the Kewpies did put up a valiant fight against the ferocious Tigers.)

Hickman students embrace the Kewpie's nudity with T-shirts, ironically enough. One senior shirt spoofs Nike: Just Stay Naked. Another references the iconic ad campaign for milk: Got Clothes?

No one at Hickman shies away from the school's funky and iconic nickname. The cheerleaders say it proudly during games. "Strawberry shortcake, gooseberry pie/V-I-C-T-O-R-Y."

Are we it? I guess yes/ We're the Kewpies of HHS."



The Kewpie behind the baby head

After the loss to Lee's Summit, the Kewpie walked into the locker room and removed its head. The Kewpie is a freshman at Hickman, and in addition to just finishing its first-ever game dressed as the mascot, it plays lineman on the junior varsity football team. The Kewpie also plays cello in the school orchestra.

The Kewpie reads Sports Illustrated religiously and wants to become a sports writer. First, it has to explain his experience to one.

"It was stressful at first, because I didn't really know what to do," the Kewpie said after taking off the the large, sweaty baby head. "It was sort of like stepping off an edge, going out there. But after the first quarter, it was pretty fun."

Want to know what it's like in there? A modified hockey helmet anchors the Kewpie's dome when the mascot is hamming for fans. The Kewpie's bright eyes are your only portal to the outside world. It's humid in there, like sticking your head in Texas while the rest of your body's in Missouri. Everything you say echoes when you're a giant baby. You're not supposed to talk much, anyway.

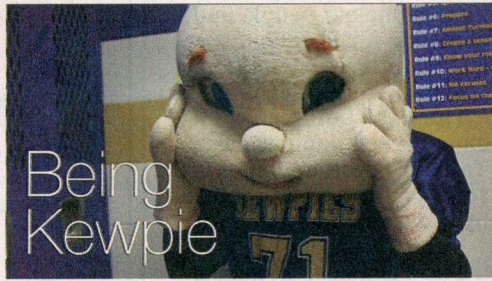
The Kewpie has researched mascot-head maintenance. Google provided a suggestion that helps it clean its cap. It stuffs the head in a bag with baking soda, to which any dirt and grime sticks. The Kewpie then vacuums out the rest.

After the game, the Kewpie planned to check in with its friends and possibly meet them at a restaurant or something. It was as typical as Friday night plans get for teenagers.

To that point, though, the Kewpie's Friday night was anything but ordinary. Unless there's an underground community we're unaware of, it was the only person in the world dressed up like an early 20th-century baby doll.

And judging by the smile on the real kid's face, the kid was awfully proud to be a Kewpie.

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MORE ONLINE

To watch a video about being Hickman's mascot and view an interactive timeline about the Kewpie, go to ColumbiaMissourian.com.

The Kewpie: Not just a Missouri mascot

The naked baby is honored both in the Land Down Under and the Windy City

By KEVIN MODELSKI
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You'd better sit down. There is another team out there that calls itself the Kewpies.

You thought that Hickman High School in Columbia, which has used the Kewpie nickname since it was known as Columbia High School in 1914, was the only place on the globe to bear the Kewpie nickname.

But a club soccer team in Australia has used the Kewpie as its official mascot since 1919, and a biology classroom in a town outside Chicago once toyed with the Kewpie as a class nickname.

The soccer club, known as the Granville Kewpies, has its team's roots tied to the post-

World War I period in 1918. Soldiers fighting in the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps returned from battle overseas with Kewpie dolls, the smiling naked babies that were popular in Western Europe at the time.

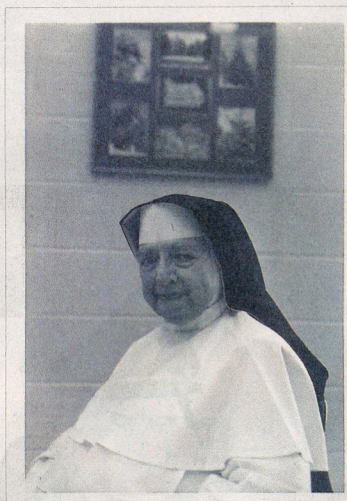
The dolls were meant as gifts for their mothers, wives or girlfriends. But because of the excitement and patriotism of the post-war period in Australia, one town in the Land Down Under saw a different purpose for the Kewpie as a soccer mascot.

In 1919, soccer players who fought in the war and returned to their homes in the industrial town of Granville, a 32-minute drive west of Sydney, were forming a soccer club for teenagers. The souvenir Kewpie dolls the soldiers brought home made a worthy mascot.

However, the Granville Kewpies have not used the baby as its logo since a change in management 10 years ago.

"It kind of looked like Chuckie, the doll from that movie," said Noel Dona, president of the Granville Waratah soccer club, referring to the antagonist in the horror movie series "Child's Play."

Since 1999, Dona, who played for the Granville Kewpies soccer club from ages 10 to 15, has served as the president of Granville Waratah (the New South Wales official flower), a neighboring club of the Granville Kewpies. He said Gran-



LEFT: Sister Claretta, pictured here in 1990, adopted the Kewpie as an unofficial mascot for her biology class.



RIGHT: A Kewpie doll is dressed as a sailor for a deep-sea expedition.



Sister Claretta's Kewpie doll is on display at the Kewpie Museum at the Bonniebrook Historical Society near Branson with some of the outfits Sister Claretta dressed the doll in.

ville is affluent in soccer tradition, thanks to the workers who were building the railway system before the turn of the 20th century.

Immigrants from England, Scotland and Ireland moved to Australia to work for Clyde Industries and Hudson Brothers, two prominent industrial companies based in the Granville area. Their introduction to the town west of Sydney introduced the game of soccer to the country, Dona said.

Unlike the mockery Hickman's athletes sometimes get from opponents for calling themselves naked babies, the Granville team's use of the Kewpie nickname doesn't entice trash talk from other clubs and organizations. But much like Hickman's use of the nickname, the club's athletes honor their naked baby mascot.

For the Granville team, the Kewpie was more than just a gift soldiers brought home to

their mothers, wives and girlfriends. It has transformed into a symbol of patriotism and pride, alive since 1919.

"The community has embraced it for decades," Dona said. "There is a rich, proud history, a well-respected history in Granville."

An unofficial nickname catches on

Although Hickman and the Granville soccer team officially use the Kewpie nickname, one classroom on the southwest side of Chicago in the 1960s made the doll an unofficial mascot, and it all began with Sister Claretta Easter.

Sister Claretta, a nun who taught biology in the mid-1960s at the all-girls Queen of Peace Catholic High School in Burbank, Illinois, possessed a Kewpie doll. They went everywhere together, figuratively.

She pretended to follow the Kewpie to the North Pole with

her biology students on an Arctic adventure. She dressed it up in a sailor's outfit to embark on a deep-sea expedition. She placed a Girl Scout outfit on its small body to roam the forests.

These imaginary excursions with the smiling baby doll were teaching tools for Sister Claretta, and its introduction to the biology classroom derived from a catchy abbreviation.

Some of the students in her class at the high school called themselves "QPs," a shorter way of saying Queen of Peace. The name caught her attention.

"To her ears, it immediately was 'Kewpie,'" said Susan Scott, president of the Bonniebrook Historical Society near Branson. "It was a fun, casual nickname to call themselves."

Bonniebrook is home to the Kewpie Museum and the house of Rose O'Neill, who first drew the Kewpie in 1909. And in the 1980s, while Sister Claretta was living at the St. Clara Convent in Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, she sent Jean Cantwell, the founder of the Bonniebrook estate in southwestern Missouri, small clothing items from her Kewpie doll.

The Kewpie's hat arrived on one day. Then its miniature dress. Then its light green Girl Scout outfit.

On Jan. 1, 1989, the Bonniebrook society received a letter from Sister Claretta. The Kewpie had one final journey. But this time, it wasn't imaginary or in front of a classroom. She wrote:

"Kewpie does not want to go. I don't want Kewpie to go. But Kewpie must go to you. She will be on her last trip of adventure this week via UPS. Lots of our tears have been shed. Her precious smile I won't see first A.M., last P.M."

Sister Claretta's words brought tears to Scott's eyes the first time she read the letter. The nun had finally let her Kewpie go.

A few days later, the vinyl doll arrived at the Kewpie Museum. Cantwell sent Sister Claretta photos of the Kewpie sitting on top of a piano and viewing the surrounding Ozark landscape to reassure her that the doll was in loving hands.

The Kewpie remains in the museum today. In hopes of continuing Sister Claretta's Kewpie tale, the Bonniebrook Historical Society has plans to publish a book about the nun's doll and its many journeys, Scott said.

"With this heartfelt Sister Claretta story, it (the doll) is priceless," Scott said.

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Kewpie website keeps Hickman alumni close

By KEVIN MODELSKI
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A purple flag with a yellow baby doll is displayed on Charley Blackmore's front porch. The doll's hands are thrown into the air, and it has an enthusiastic smile on its infant face.

Inside Blackmore's home, an army of the little yellow babies, known as Kewpies, surrounds his computer desk. They're on T-shirts, school medallions, class rings, banners and more.

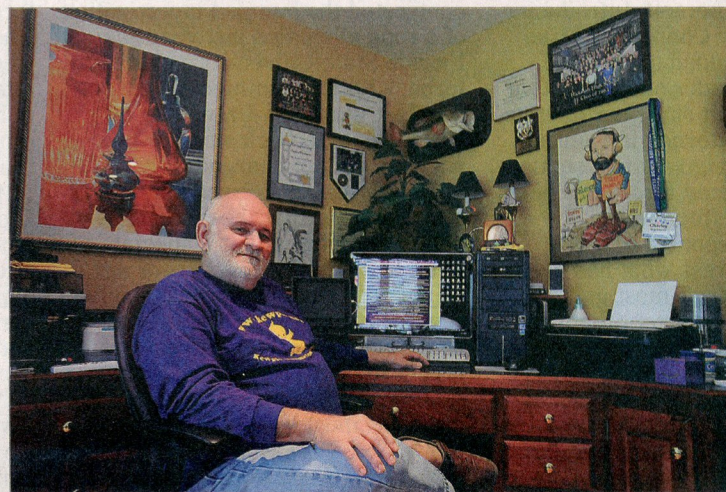
The Kewpie is the official mascot of Hickman High School. Blackmore, a 1963 Hickman graduate who is also known as "Mr. Kewpie," wears the doll proudly.

"When you can have that distinguishing characteristic about yourself when you graduate from that high school ... it's pretty amazing," said Blackmore, 69.

Blackmore is the founder of Kewpie.net, an online database of Hickman history, mascot memories and class memorabilia. The website has morphed the way former Kewpies arrange reunions and reminisce about their high school days.

Although he currently lives in Rock Bridge High School's district, Blackmore's home will always be Kewpie territory, thanks to the popularity of his Web page. According to Blackmore, his online creation has amassed an average of 750 views per day in the past three months, and 650 visitors per day in the past year.

It all began in 1998 when Blackmore was engaged to then-fiancee Debbie Burks and living in a Columbia apartment. Blackmore was preparing for his 35th annual class reunion and was absorbed in his computer.



Charley Blackmore, creator of Kewpie.net and often called "Mr. Kewpie," sits at his desk at his home in Columbia. Blackmore, during a brief argument with his late fiancée, was told that if he spent so much time looking up former Hickman High School students, he should just look them all up; Blackmore did.

As he gathered information about fellow class members on the Internet, Blackmore said Burks grew agitated with his lack of attention toward her.

"She never used any rough language at all, but she told me, 'Why don't you just see if you can find every F-ing person that went to that high school?'" Blackmore recalled.

Ding. The light bulb switched on over his head.

"I said, 'Why not?'" Blackmore laughed.

Burks died in 2000. But in October 1998 after the reunion, Blackmore, who has worked as a postman and disc jockey, started the Kewpie.net Web page. And as the strength and power of the Internet skyrocketed in the early and mid-2000s, so did his website's capabilities.

"I assembled a database of all the people who went to Hickman High School, all the way back to Columbia High School

in 1897, and I put a list of all the names and the year they graduated just so people could look them up," Blackmore said.

His first big step: to upload every page he could of his high school's yearbooks, titled the Cresset, online in 2011.

"The university (MU) would have gladly done it for me for \$25,000," Blackmore said.

Instead, Blackmore bought a \$2,000 scanner and did it himself. Almost every page from the 103 versions of the Cresset since 1912 was scanned and uploaded to a Zenfolio file where they can be read cover to cover.

Other than the yearbooks, Blackmore designed Web pages of Hickman's senior class pictures with song excerpts of Billboard Hot 100 hits that were popular during each graduating class's four years of high school. Click on a link from the late 1960s, and you'll hear a lot

of The Beatles. Click on 2012, and you'll likely hear Rihanna.

The website hosts other features, including pages about Kewpie nickname history, reunion slideshows, an extensive email directory and other links Kewpies looking to reconnect with their high school can click on.

The website's popularity in the past 16 years gave Blackmore an opportunity to start two academic scholarships: The Kewpie.net Scholarship, worth \$1,000 per recipient, and Charley Blackmore's Class of '63 Scholarship, worth \$500 per recipient. Both were created after Blackmore's 45th class reunion in 2008 and are largely funded by alumni and donors wanting to give back to current Kewpies.

"The money just started pouring in," Blackmore said.

The Kewpie.net Scholarship has a \$46,600 balance with \$12,000 awarded over the past six years. The Class of '63 Scholarship has a balance of \$21,600 with \$6,000 awarded over the past six years.

Currently, Blackmore is searching for more. Kewpie memorabilia, photos and high school memories are always of interest to the man who has become defined by his Kewpie commitment.

And his Mr. Kewpie nickname is only a label for the dedication he has sustained with his alma mater.

"I think it (the nickname) doesn't signify anything more than just a person who is very loyal to the school," Blackmore said. "Very loyal to the Kewpie."

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TEST YOUR



HICKMAN HIGH SCHOOL, formerly known as Columbia High School, is celebrating 100 years of using the Kewpie as its official nickname. But how well do you know the mascot?

Test your Kewpie IQ — or your I-Kewpie — with these trivia questions.

1. Who first drew the Kewpie in 1909?

- A) Walt Disney
- B) Rose O'Neill
- C) Charles Schulz
- D) Rube Goldberg

2. The Kewpie nickname at Hickman, then Columbia High School, was introduced by what 1914 athletics team at the high school?

- A) Rowing
- B) Football
- C) Basketball
- D) Boxing

3. A club soccer team goes by the nickname Granville Kewpies. What country does the team play in?

- A) United Kingdom
- B) Spain
- C) South Africa
- D) Australia

4. President Obama once wanted to ban the Kewpie nickname.

- A) True
- B) False

5. What type of condiment bears the Kewpie brand?

- A) Mustard
- B) Mayonnaise
- C) Ketchup
- D) Relish

6. What was the initiation tradition for Hickman students to officially be considered a Kewpie in the 1950s and 1960s?

- A) Wearing a beanie with your class year on it every day of the week except Sunday until the Homecoming game
- B) Dressing up in the Kewpie costume at school until the Homecoming game
- C) Memorizing the Hickman fight song
- D) Carrying a Kewpie doll around the school until the Homecoming game

7. Which pop singer made the song "Kewpie Doll" popular in the 1950s?

- A) Buddy Holly
- B) Sam Cooke
- C) Perry Como
- D) Johnny Cash

8. Which former United States president was made an honorary Hickman Kewpie?

- A) Bill Clinton
- B) George W. Bush
- C) Jimmy Carter
- D) Ronald Reagan

9. The Kewpee (sic) brand of hamburger fast food chain is based in which Ohio town?

- A) Columbus
- B) Lima
- C) Oxford
- D) Dayton

10. What was Hickman's, then Columbia's, mascot before it changed to the Kewpies in 1914?

- A) Bears
- B) Lions
- C) Trojans
- D) Tigers

ANSWERS
1. B; 2. C; 3. D; 4. B; 5. B
6. A; 7. C; 8. D; 9. B; 10. C