

= Sparty =

Sparty is the mascot of Michigan State University . Sparty is usually depicted as a muscular male Spartan warrior / athlete dressed in stylized Greek costume . After changing the team name from " Aggies " to " Spartans " in 1925 , various incarnations of a Spartan warrior with a prominent chin appeared at university events and in university literature . In 1943 , MSU art professor Leonard D. Jungwirth designed a statue for the university , which had to be cast in terra cotta because of World War II rationing . In 2005 , the university replaced Jungwirth 's original statue with a bronze replica , moving the original indoors to protect it from the elements .

Sparty appears in several other incarnations . In printed literature , the university uses a copyrighted cartoon Spartan , usually drawn with a grimace and several days worth of whiskers , lending the nickname of " Gruff " Sparty . Finally , Sparty appears as a foam rubber mascot with an oversized head . The mascot costume , worn by an anonymous student , appears at most university sporting , alumni , and fundraising events ; he is often portrayed in MSU notices and materials .

= = History = =

Though MSU is now a large university , in the 19th century it was a small agricultural college known as the State Agricultural College of Michigan . Thus , when the college fielded its first intercollegiate sports teams in the 1880s , the teams were appropriately named the " Aggies " . By 1925 , the school had expanded beyond agriculture , becoming Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Science . To reduce the emphasis on agriculture , the college held a contest to choose a new team name . The chosen entry was the " Michigan Staters . " George S. Alderton , then sports editor of the Lansing State Journal , and Dale Stafford , sportswriter for the Lansing Capitol News , felt the name was too unwieldy for newspaper headlines and searched the contest entries for a better choice . They settled on the " Spartans " , a name submitted by former Aggie athlete Perry J. Fremont . Alderton and Stafford began using the name in their game accounts , and it soon caught on as the de facto team name . Michigan State 's teams have been the Spartans ever since .

= = Costumed mascot = =

While MSU students and alumni often refer to the Spartan statue as Sparty , the incarnation of Sparty with national visibility is that of a costumed mascot who appears at athletic events and other university @-@ related functions . The costume , with a cartoonishly oversized head , bulging muscles , and a facial expression that treads a fine line between cute and pugnacious , was introduced to MSU fans during the 1989 football season . Sparty was an immediate hit , in part because the foam @-@ rubber body parts , vinyl breastplate , and skirt have a freedom of movement that allow the anonymous student who portrays Sparty to be quite expressive despite the costume 's fixed stare . The student that portrays Sparty is a volunteer , despite rumors of financial compensation or a full scholarship . Early every calendar year , tryouts are held for the student to portray Sparty for the upcoming school year . Sparty represents an ancient Spartan warrior , but wears a late Imperial @-@ style Roman legionary 's helmet , which was not invented until several centuries after Sparta was subdued by the Roman Republic .

Sparty can be found entertaining MSU sporting event crowds with his antics during games . He is even lifted upon the shoulders of cheerleaders and does one @-@ handed push ups . Besides sporting events , Sparty also attends many events around campus , the community , and the country throughout the year : alumni functions , charity events , weddings , bar mitzvahs , parades , and many other university events . Any revenues generated go to the upkeep of the Sparty Mascot Program , which is funded mainly by the MSU Alumni Association with some support from the MSU Department of Athletics .

Sparty came to national prominence in the mid @-@ 1990s with his appearance in a series of television ads promoting ESPN 's SportsCenter . One advertisement depicted Sparty carrying gymnast Kerri Strug in the manner of Beauty and the Beast ? or , more to the point , Béla Károlyi ,

who carried the injured Strug to the medal platform to accept her team gold medal at the 1996 Summer Olympics . He also appeared in ESPN ads with background cameos , such as eating in a diner booth or browsing the shelves of a bookstore . In 2004 , Sparty won the Best Mascot National Championship at the Universal Cheer Association / Universal Dance Association College Nationals , becoming the first Big Ten Conference mascot to do so . He won Best Mascot for the second year in a row after securing the honor again the following year . In addition to his title of " best mascot " , Sparty was voted the " Buffest Mascot " by Muscle and Fitness magazine . Sparty was even found in the refrigerators of local stores and many alumni when Sparty was featured on a series of Jones Soda bottles in late 2004 , and he appeared again in 2005 . Sparty was one of six college mascots nominated for the Mascot Hall of Fame in July 2006 . In the summer of 2006 , Alltel Wireless aired a commercial featuring ESPN 's Lee Corso and Sparty .

Three years after winning top honors for the first time , Sparty was again named best mascot . It was Sparty 's third title in just four years . His skit , " Sparty 's Spectacular " , featured music from many different genres , including rock , country , and Riverdance . To qualify for nationals , Sparty submitted a video showcasing his performances at athletic events and community service events .

Sparty appears on the cover of the Wii version of NCAA Football 09 , the first time a non @-@ athlete has graced the cover . EA Sports had a poll to see which mascot would grace the cover , and Sparty won by over 75 @,@ 000 votes .

= = Statues = =

When John Hannah became president of Michigan State College in 1941 , he commissioned assistant professor of art Leonard D. Jungwirth to design a statue of an athletic Spartan warrior . Jungwirth sculpted a statue known simply as The Spartan , which soon gained the nickname of " Sparty " . Though Jungwirth originally designed The Spartan as a bronze statue , it had to be cast in terra cotta due to World War II rationing of bronze . The terra cotta statue stood on the banks of the Red Cedar River , until 2005 , when the university replaced it with a bronze replica . The original Spartan was moved into the stadium , where it remains on display to this day .

= = = 1945 terra cotta statue = = =

Dedicated on June 9 , 1945 , the terra cotta Spartan is made of five large glazed terra cotta sections fired from red Ohio clay . These pieces were joined by mortar joints , with a poured concrete core over a steel frame . The statue stands 9 ? 7 " high and weighs approximately 3 @,@ 000 pounds . When the statue was erected , popular media claimed that it was the tallest free @-@ standing ceramic sculpture in the world , though that record remains unconfirmed . Though the statue 's pose recalls classic Greek sculpture , Jungwirth 's stylized design is closer to the mid @-@ 20th century modernist design , borrowing heavily from Cubism , Futurism , and depression @-@ era civic art .

= = = 2005 bronze statue = = =

By the late 20th century , Michigan 's harsh winters had taken a toll on the terra cotta statue , as had vandalism by fans of MSU 's rival school , the University of Michigan . While annual repair work helped stem the damage done by precipitation , extreme cold , and vandalism , the statue needed more intensive repair .

In 1989 , the Save Our Sparty ( SOS ) campaign helped restore the statue . When they finished , restorers made fiberglass molds of the refurbished " Sparty " . New molds were made in 2004 , because the 1989 molds had deteriorated , to cast an identical bronze replica that will better stand up to bad weather and vandalism .

The terra cotta Spartan was removed from its base on May 12 , 2005 . During MSU 's 2005 summer semester , the intersection at which the statue stood was completely redesigned to allow for safer traffic interaction with pedestrians . On Thursday , August 25 , 2005 , an unveiling of the new

bronze Spartan took place . In addition , a Sesquicentennial parade on Saturday , October 8 , 2005 , concluded with a dedication ceremony at the statue . Meanwhile , the original terra cotta Spartan was moved to a new Spartan Stadium annex where it could be displayed safely indoors . Though most members of the MSU community agree that the original statue needs to be sheltered , some alumni and faculty have criticized the inaccessibility of the original statue .

= = = Traditions = = =

It is tradition for some alumni and other Spartan fans to have a picture taken with the Spartan statue to mark major life events . During graduation season there is a steady stream of recent graduates and their families posing with the statue . On weekends it is not uncommon to see newlywed couples doing the same . During the week before the annual football game against the University of Michigan Wolverines , members of the marching band take turns each guarding the statue against vandalism by fans of the rival school . The tradition is known as " Sparty Watch " ; a similar vigil takes place at the Michigan Diag , where the inlaid " M " is defended against MSU fans . During the full team walk from Kellogg Center to Spartan Stadium that takes place prior to each home football game , players and coaches toss or place pennies at the statue as they proceed past it . After the final home football game the Spartan Marching Band circles the statue once before heading home to Adams Field .