This Hokie Joke No Cheap Shot

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BLACKSBURG — You’ve heard of “The $20,000 Pyramid” and the “$64,000 Question.” But how about the $13,500 Hokie joke?

The Hokie joke, that commodity which creates red faces of embarrassment and anger when Virginia Tech partisans are within earshot, has gotten very expensive.

The latest version of the Hokie joke costs $50 cents.

But the folks at Coke in Dublin aren’t laughing, because the joke’s on them, too.

The large plastic cup, which is more important to college football stadium spectators than an all-American quarterback, tells the latest Hokie joke. You might say it speaks for itself.

At each Tech home game at Lane Stadium—including today’s contest against Clemson—the joke is available at the concession stands. How it got there is a long story, but even longer might be the wait lines for the plastic cup which could easily become a collector’s item.

The cups are produced for almost every college in the nation by Packard Plastics, in Lawrence, Kan. Some schools keep the same cup year in, year out. But Coca-Cola in Dublin, which handles Tech football soft-drink business, orders a new cup each year to keep the spectators happy.

That might not be necessary, because the plastic cup—which sells for 50 cents with 16

ounces of Coke inside—is a staple for those flank carriers who mix a drink or two (or more) when the offense boggs down.

This year, Coke ordered 135,000 Tech cups in late May. And when the cups arrived in late August, Tommy Hughes, the Coke plant manager in Dublin, opened one of the boxes to admire the new cup. What he saw brought a groan.

On the cup is printed “VPI,” the Fighting Gobbler logo, “Fighting Gobbles,” the Virginia Tech school seal and “Go Hokies.”

“I remember they (the cups) arrived the last Thursday in August,” said Hughes. “When we opened them, Hokies was spelled wrong. Every one was the same.

“I guess the best way to put it is that we’re stuck with the cup. Packard Plastics readily admitted it (the “a” in Hokie) was their fault and offered to take the cups back. But we couldn’t get another shipment until November. I’m afraid. We need something to sell Cokes in.”

A Packard Plastics spokesman admits that the company was supposed to send Coke a proof sheet on the cup design. Hughes said the company did that, but only sent proofs of the graphics to be printed—not the words, and obviously not the spelling.

“The problem is that those people in Kansas don’t even know what a Hokie is,” said Hughes, managing a laugh. “And the misspelling on the cup just the sort of thing that hits you right in the eye.”

Packard can be excused for its stupidity on the Tech nickname. The word “Hokie” was born in 1896 when the school’s name was changed from Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College to VPI. With it came a new cheer produced through a campus contest. O.M. Stull, of the Class of 1896, won a prize for his “Hokie” yell. It’s the same Hokie cheer that’s used today.

Hughes is spending his time pushing Coke instead of the cup. “I think a Coke that size for 50 cents is a really good deal,” said Hughes. He’s right. In Texas, those same size Cokes sell in similar cups for $1.

In fact, the cups might now be easier to sell, especially to supporters of Tech’s foes at Lane Stadium. I mean, doesn’t everyone like to tell Hokie jokes?

Then there’s people like VMI Athletic Director Tom Joyner, who pointed out, “Hey Bogaczynski, some of those Pollock friends of yours must be printing cups at Tech!”

The spelling error could be an expensive one for Coke and Tech, but Hughes said the “Go Hokies” cup still will sell because it will carry the popular soft drink.

“How much did the cups cost?” repeated Hughes to a question. “Are you sure you want to know that? Well, they (120,000) were 19 cents apiece.”

That’s $13,500, a lot of Coke, and no joke.

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