

Sports Entertainment a Lively Business for Latkovski Brothers

BirdZerk! and Z00perstars! perform at venues and special events around the country and the world. Dominic and Brennan Latkovski have plans for much more

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – Apr. 24 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – Dominic and Brennan Latkovski are entertainers at heart. The brothers are the brains behind BirdZerk! and Z00perstars!, both popular traveling sports entertainment shows that perform at venues across the United States and the world. So it was no surprise that they decided to make their afternoon at Wrigley Field one to remember a few years ago.



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The duo, in town for a performance that night, was excited about watching a Cubs-White Sox game. Since they were at Wrigley Field, they brought a costume that fans of the Friendly Confines would truly appreciate. Z00perstars! features a troupe of characters named after famous sports figures. On this day, Dominic went into a bathroom and changed into Harry Canary, a tall and portly singing bird adorned with Coke bottle glasses and cotton-white hair.

*(Photo Caption: – Clammy Sosa (far right front), Harry Canary (far right back) and Cow Ripken (third row, far left) are three of the Z00perstars! 32 characters. Dominic and Brennan Latkovski are the brains behind the

Z00perstars, which is the nation's most popular traveling mascot entertainment show that appears at sports venues and other events.)

As Harry Canary, Dominic took his seat next to Brennan along the right field line, to the delight of fans throughout the ballpark. Cheers soon turned into boos when security guards led Dominic away in handcuffs after they told him no costumes were allowed inside Wrigley Field. A flustered Dominic was held in a holding tank beneath the center field stands until he was released, instructed never to return. Brennan was shown the exit gate as well.

It was the only time Dominic can recall that Harry Canary, or any of the multitude of characters that compose the Z00perstars! and BirdZerk! shows, were not warmly embraced by those who encountered them.

BirdZerk! – an act that includes the feathery namesake character and his sidekicks, the inflatable Zerk! Jr., BallZerk! and BabyZerk! – performs about 60 shows a year. Z00perstars – which feature 32 inflatable characters with amusing names like Tiger Woodschuck, Whale Gretzky, Mia Hammster, Shaquille O'Seal and Clammy Sosa – make more than 200 appearances annually. They perform at Major League and Minor League baseball parks, NBA and minor league basketball games, NHL and minor league hockey matches and an assortment of college sports among other events.

Long before the entrepreneurial brothers were building the nation's most popular sports entertainment company, they developed an interest in performing as mascots. Dominic was his high school's mascot before attending Bellarmine University, where he played soccer and attended a tryout for Billy Bird, the mascot of the Triple-A Louisville Redbirds.

Dominic performed as Billy Bird while continuing his studies at Bellarmine. A class project spurred the idea for the venture that would later become BirdZerk!

Heeding his professor's advice, Dominic pursued the Billy Bird idea, which involved performing at minor league baseball games with Billy Bird and his sidekicks. Billy Bird & Company was born, with Dominic serving as Billy Bird and Brennan filling the role of a sidekick. Brennan, who is 35, played soccer at Mercer University in Macon, Ga. He had performed as a radio station moose and the Kentucky State Fair Bear.

Billy Bird & Company was such a success that, after earning his degree, Dominic decided the group should attend the 1992 baseball winter meetings, which was fortunately held in Louisville. Dominic invested \$6,000 hoping that his presence would result in at least four bookings at \$1,500 per appearance. The first year, they did 48 shows.

In 1993, Billy Bird & Company debuted. To create a character of their own, Dominic and Brennan left Billy Bird behind and debuted BirdZerk! in 1995.

With its hijinks with players and coaches, humorous harassment of umpires and interaction with the crowd, BirdZerk! became a hit. Bookings increased in each of the first three years. Eventually, Dominic and Brennan added an

inflatable character sidekick to BirdZerk!, which led to an idea that transformed the brothers' operation into the country's premiere sports entertainment company.

"My father kept suggesting that we change BirdZerk! to a character he called Harry Canary," Brennan said. "Since BirdZerk! was popular and already established, we didn't want to eliminate him, but we saw an opportunity with Harry Canary," he added. "We decided to make him an inflatable character. At a restaurant one night, we sat down and brainstormed for names of other characters."

Ken Giraffey Jr., Shark McGwire and Cow Ripken resulted from that session, as did the framework for Z00perstars!, which debuted in 1998. Z00perstars! has performed at sporting events and other events throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, Japan and Indonesia. Future plans include performing at festivals and fairs, filming a TV show and producing a DVD.

"We have carved a niche in the sports entertainment industry, and we think we have just barely scratched the surface," Dominic said. "Harry Canary and the rest of us are ready to take the next step."

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