

The Charlotte Observer

Tuesday, December 31, 2002

page 1A

SOME FIND NO HUMOR IN HALFTIME SHOW

Band's 'hillbilly' antics prompt call for apology

WVU fans, game organizer criticize UVa. students' skit

BY SCOTT DODD
Staff Writer

Once again, the University of Virginia's pep band has managed to spark an interstate incident.

In a repeat of a 1985 halftime show performance that led to a border war of words, the irreverent UVa. pep band performed a skit at Saturday's Continental Tire Bowl that mocked West Virginia students as overall-wearing hillbillies.

The latest spoof prompted

more than 200 complaints to Virginia administrators - from West Virginia fans and the school's own alumni - as well as outraged letters to The Observer and organizers of Charlotte's inaugural bowl, who expressed regrets.

The skit was "unflattering and stereotypical," said Ken Haines, chief executive and president of bowl organizer Raycom Sports. "It was not done with class."

University of Virginia administrators apologized on a West Virginia morning radio show Monday and promised a full review of how the skit was

SEE BOWL | 11A

MORE ON CHARLOTTE'S BOWL
ID | Organizers see ways to improve for next year

Skit prompts calls for apology

Bowl from 1A

approved by the school's athletic department. University President John Casteen is expected to issue a statement today.

West Virginia Gov. Bill Wise demanded an apology in a letter to Casteen on Monday.

"This type of performance merely perpetuates the unfounded stereotypes that we in West Virginia are fighting so hard to overcome," Wise wrote.

The UVa. pep band is known for its cheeky performances and mocking the school's opponents, from lampooning an ex-Maryland governor's felony conviction in 1997 to mock-killing an Elvis impersonator during the 1991 Sugar Bowl against Tennessee.

It's one of about a dozen "scramble bands" in the country, including Stanford and Rice, that eschew traditional marching formations for skits and on-field antics - and sometimes delight in offending great numbers of the other team's fans.

In 1977, Yale band members dropped their pants during a televised halftime show and ran off the field in diapers. A few years later, some of the Stanford band urinated on the field, which earned them banishment from the University of Washington.

But as residents of a state struggling against both poverty and its negative image, West Virginians took extra offense Saturday to a send-up of the TV show "The Bachelor," in which two female band members - one portraying a UVa. student and the other an overall-wearing WVU student - vied for the affections of a male heartthrob.

The Virginia student won, of course, and the announcer exclaimed that the loser was headed "to Beverly Hills, that is," while the band struck up the "Beverly Hillbillies" theme song.

The mostly West Virginia crowd cursed and booed, while the pep band blew mock kisses as it left the field. WVU fans recall a similar skit from 1985 - the last time the two teams met - when a takeoff on the game show "Family

Feud" suggested that West Virginia lacked indoor plumbing, education and birth control. State officials demanded an apology.

The incident led to constraints against Virginia's student-run band, which was required to submit its scripts to a review board of students, faculty and alumni before subsequent performances.

The school still reviews the band's scripts, but they only have to be approved by the athletics promotions department now, Virginia spokeswoman Carol Woods said. The university might go back to a stricter process, she said.

Bowl organizers reviewed a written script, as well, but Haines said it didn't convey what happened during the performance.

Pep band director Adam Lorentson, a third-year student, said Friday in Charlotte that the band planned a funny show but wasn't aiming to offend. "We're always told to stay out of trouble," he said, "but we never do." — STAFF WRITERS TED REED AND CRISTINA GREEN CONTRIBUTED TO THIS ARTICLE.