

# Tribune

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## Bordow: Sparky, Wilbur offer one last toast for Moran

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**Editor's note:** *Sparky and Wilbur conversations were a fixture in Bob Moran's Sunday columns when he worked at the Tribune. As a tribute, the two mascots meet one last time to toast their longtime friend.*

Sparky and Wilbur take a corner booth at the Toltec Village and Café and order a couple of sarsaparillas.

"Man, I wish we weren't here today," Sparky says.

Longtime Tribune sports writer Bob Moran dies [<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/110543>]

Sign guest book for Bob Moran [<http://www.legacy.com/Link.asp?l=GB000105006800>]

Zeiger: Remembering Bob Moran [<http://bloggingwiththedevils.freedomblogging.com/2008/03/04/remembering-bob-moran-2/>]

"I know," Wilbur replies. "I can't even work up a good hate for you Sun Devils. I feel too bad."

"Yeah, it's hard for me to believe that Bob Moran isn't around anymore," Sparky says as he stares into his drink. "Damn cancer."

"He battled it hard," Wilbur says. "I don't know what kept him going, but he hung in there for more than three years after his surgery. I kept hoping he might get better, but he never did. How old was he, Sparky?"

"Fifty-five," Sparky says.

"That's too damn young," Wilbur says.

"Especially when he was so full of life," Sparky says. "He was quite the character. I've never met anybody who was more comfortable in their own skin than Moran."

"What do you mean?" Wilbur says.

"He was just very secure with who he was. Not arrogant or cocky. Just comfortable. Like on Saturday nights during the college football season. Most writers, when they're on the road, want to go have a nice dinner after covering a day game. Not Moran. He'd find the nearest McDonald's, grab a hamburger, fries and drink and head back to his hotel room to watch the Pac-10 night game.

"He wasn't trying to be anti-social. That's just what he wanted to do, so he did it."

"That's great," Wilbur says, laughing. "Man, did he ever love college football. I had a chance to tag along with him one year when he drove to Tucson for the ASU-UA game. You know what he popped in his CD player? The broadcast call of Billy Cannon's 89-yard punt return against Mississippi in 1959. LSU won the game, 7-3. He always did love those Tigers."

"We used to kid him all the time about his allegiances," Sparky says. "He liked LSU, Ohio University, Ohio State, Clemson, Southern University. We'd tell him he couldn't be a fan of so many schools and he'd just give us that high-pitched cackle of his."

The waitress approaches the table and takes their lunch order. As she walks away, Sparky shakes his head.

"You know what really stinks?" he says. "Bob would have been so excited to write about Dennis Erickson. When Erickson was introduced as Arizona State's coach, Bob showed up at the press conference, and Dennis immediately recognized him and said hello even though they hadn't seen each other in years."

"Anyone who's been involved with the Pac-10 the last 25 years knew Bob," Wilbur says. "When he got sick, he got calls from coaches all across the country. Guys like John Cooper, Rich Brooks, Larry Marmie. That tells you about the kind of respect and fondness people had for him."

"What amazed me is that he never lost his enthusiasm for the game," Sparky says. "All those years, and every fall Saturday he was like a kid on Christmas morning. I don't know anyone who loved college football more than he did."

"I mean, how many writers wear suits to every game? We always got a kick out of Bob's outfits. I remember when ASU played Arkansas in the 1985 Holiday Bowl. He showed up wearing some sort of peach suit. I'm still not sure exactly what color it was."

"He was a piece of work, wasn't he?" Wilbur says. "Remember what he'd say when a team made a special teams mistake? I can almost hear him now: '*You've got to be sound in the kicking game?*'"

"How about this one?" Sparky says. "*Somebody's got to be a hero.*"

The two mascots laugh so hard customers at the next table turn their heads to see what's going on.

"I could tell stories about Bob all day," Sparky says. "How about the fact he only drove Chevrolets and cheered for NASCAR drivers that drove Chevys? Or that he was the only person I know who made athlete a three-syllable word: Ath-e-lete."

"Did you hear about his cell phone?" Wilbur says. "He wouldn't tell the Tribune that he had bought his own phone. He didn't want everybody having his number. So he gave it to just one co-worker and made him promise he wouldn't tell anyone else."

"It was nuts, but you couldn't get mad at Bob. It was just one of his quirks."

"You know, even though he wasn't working the last few years, it was great to be able to call him at home and talk about ASU or Arizona," Sparky says. "I learned more about the sport from him than anyone I've ever met."


The mascots raise their glasses in the air.

"To Bob," Sparky says.

"To Coach," Wilbur replies.

"I know one thing," Sparky says. "Saturdays won't be the same without him."



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