

Hopelessly DEVOTED

Three Clark County residents personify
what it means to be a sports team's biggest fan

By **MAIT WASTRADOWSKI**
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To know Washougal's Kelly Ritter is to know that she is proud of her alma mater, Washington State University.

Her laptop is emblazoned with the Cougar logo. She proudly displays an 8-foot inflatable Butch — the Cougars' mascot — in her front yard. Her cell phone ring tone is the WSU fight song.

The Washougal High School teacher hangs a stuffed husky — the mascot for WSU's biggest rival, the University of Washington — from a noose in her classroom during the week leading up to the football game between the teams each year.

Then there is Ritter's Cougar room. One of the spare bedrooms in Ritter's home has been converted to a shrine in honor of WSU.

"When people come over and see my Cougar room and all my Cougar stuff, I think they get this realization of what a huge thing this is to me," she said. "They start to think I'm loony." Crimson and gray — WSU's official colors — fill up Ritter's room, literally from ceiling to floor. Hand-painted Cougar logos make up a border along the top of the room's walls, and a Cougars doormat sits at the foot of the bed, itself adorned with WSU blankets and pillows.

"It's become a hobby in some ways," she said. "Some people collect model cars or whatever. I collect Cougar stuff."

And she's not alone. Sports fanatics around the globe take their passions to levels that most casual fans don't always comprehend. They chant at games, spend hours debating lineups and trades on online message boards and, yes, devote entire rooms to their favorite team.

With the NFL's Super Bowl a week away, we wanted to know what makes a die-hard fan so different.

"Fan' is a shortened version of 'fanatic,' and that's where it comes from," said Lee Brand, who studied sports psychology at the University of Utah and is a professor of health and physical education at Clark College.

"Once you find something you're passionate about, you go above and beyond the call of duty." The feeling of belonging to something bigger and believing that they can help the team are powerful motivators for the most diehard fans, he said. "It's a social element that some people really thrive on," Brand said. "It's a way of showing what they're passionate about. And some people, based on their personalities, take it to the extreme a little bit."

We put out a call to readers to find those fans who have taken it to the extreme. Out of nearly 20 confessions of fandom received, three in particular stood out. They have devoted portions of their homes to their favorite team, traveled to see them play, and have stuck with their teams through the good times and bad.

