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GTHCGTH: The License Plate That Has Basketball Fans Lying to the DMV

Die-hard Duke fans will do almost anything to secure the tag that expresses dislike of their Tar Heel rivals; ‘Go to hell, Carolina, Go to hell’



Kenny Dennard with his GTHCGTH license plate. PHOTO: MORRIS JONES

By

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Kenny Dennard knew exactly what he wanted his vanity license plate to say: GTHCGTH. He also knew exactly why he might not get it.

GTHCGTH doesn't mean much in Houston, where Mr. Dennard lives and works as the managing partner of an investor relations firm. In North Carolina, where he once played college basketball for Duke, everyone knows what those seven letters mean:

Go to hell, Carolina, go to hell.



Kenny Dennard's plate

Duke basketball fans will scream those words over and over on Saturday in the next edition of one of college basketball's fiercest rivalries: Duke University against University of North Carolina. Most states don't allow plates that could be deemed offensive or insulting, and Mr. Dennard worried it might get turned down. So when he went to the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, he fibbed.

"I said, 'It's a Dr. Seuss thing,'" he recalled explaining. "Get that hat, cat, get that hat."

The quest among Duke basketball fans across the country to get the license plate says everything about how fans of the two schools—located less than 10 miles apart—loathe each other. And they've come up with creative explanations to get it.

One of college basketball's fiercest rivalries is between Duke and North Carolina, shown here playing in February. PHOTO: BOB DONNAN/USA TODAY/REUTERS

Mr. Dennard boasts he knows of fans from at least 10 states who drive around with GTHCGTH. He adds to a spreadsheet and photo collage every time fans tell him they have secured it.

The Wall Street Journal checked online DMV records for states where available, and found at least 21 instances where GTHC or GTHCGTH were taken.

Some don't allow vanity plates to reach seven characters. In the District of Columbia, a request for the GTHC plate yielded a message that "the requested personalized tag has been deemed unacceptable by the DMV." GTHCGTH was available but "subject to

approval by the DC DMV,” a message on the D.C. DMV website read. (The DMV didn’t respond to requests for comment.)

A Texas DMV spokesman said if it receives a written complaint about a personalized license plate, it would review the plate based on the criteria needed for it to have been originally approved.

Mr. Dennard wasn’t the originator of the movement. He only popularized it. All of this came about because of a big-time bet, an unexpected friendship, and two very large men who crammed themselves into a tiny sports car.

Duke basketball fans team taunt Justin Jackson, of North Carolina, in 2017. PHOTO: LANCE KING/GETTY IMAGES

The rise of the GTHCGTH plate began with Holt Gardiner, a 1991 Duke alum who had a good feeling about the 2010 Duke team. He was so confident before the season he went to Las Vegas and bet on Duke to win it all. If he won, he told himself, he’d buy himself the car he always dreamed about.

Duke made the tournament as a No. 1 seed and played in the Houston regional. Mr. Gardiner traveled to watch the games and hit it off with Mr. Dennard. A week after they met, Duke was cutting down the nets, and Mr. Gardiner had a big pile of money waiting for him.

He knew what he wanted to buy: a Lotus Evora, painted Duke blue. The person selling him the car just so happened to be a North Carolina alum. They became friends, and Mr. Gardiner vowed to get a license plate to appropriately rib him.

But he worried the California DMV might reject GTHCGTH. State law prohibits vanities that include terms of contempt, hostility or ones that can be insulting. So on his form, he wrote that it stood for “Go Together Higher Cameron Go Together Higher”—a mishmash of gibberish but including a reference to Duke’s arena, Cameron Indoor Stadium.

He got the plate and returned to his Carolina friend to show it off on the car he had bought from him. “He started laughing,” Mr. Gardiner said. “And crying.”



Holt Gardiner with his GTHCGTH plate, on his white Spyder. He formerly had GTHCGTH on his blue Lotus. PHOTO:HOLT GARDINER

That summer, Mr. Dennard came to visit. Mr. Gardiner picked him up at Los Angeles International Airport and the two men—Mr. Dennard at 6 foot 8 and Gardiner just 2 inches shorter—squished into a Lotus that barely fits one of them. Mr. Dennard immediately wanted the same plate.

“I think he was on the phone with the Texas DMV as soon as he got in the car,” Mr. Gardiner says.

Now Mr. Gardiner lives in Nevada, and obtained the plate there. As soon as he left California, it was immediately scooped up by someone else. Meanwhile, Duke fans who follow Mr. Dennard on social media have clamored to get their own.

Mac Dyke worked as a doctor in Houston and knew Mr. Dennard had the Texas GTHCGTH. When Dr. Dyke moved to Fargo, N.D., he had two priorities: Get a house. And get that license plate.



Mac Dyke got his plate in North Dakota. PHOTO:THE DYKE FAMILY

He went into the DMV sheepishly. He didn't think they would know what it meant. There aren't many Duke or North Carolina fans in the area.

When asked, "I told them it was my children's names," Dr. Dyke said. "It's not my children's names." He got the plate.

Mark Schill, a 1990 graduate from Duke, lives in Wisconsin and heard about Mr. Dennard's plate. Then Mr. Schill mentioned it to his wife, who graduated in the same class as him. He didn't think much of it.



Mark Schill's license plate. PHOTO: MARK SCHILL

Then Mr. Schill woke up Christmas morning and looked under the tree. There was an envelope containing an application to register the license plate GTHCGTH in Wisconsin. He was ecstatic. He told the DMV it stood for something his mom used to say: "Go to happy, child, go to happy."

The plate arrived in January.

Chuck Landis may be the bravest of all since he owns GTHC tags in North Carolina and has since 1984. Wherever he goes, people take pictures of his car, whether they love it or hate it.

Lying to get it would have been pointless, he says. He didn't think it could be considered offensive. Besides, people know what GTHC means in North Carolina.

A friend of his had GTHC before him, but then moved out of the state. Mr. Landis was waiting to snatch it up. Later, his friend wanted it back. Mr. Landis shook his head. "We weren't that good friends," he says.

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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/gthcgth-the-license-plate-that-has-basketball-fans-lying-to-the-dmv-1519921503>

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