

Name-dropping: Errors in appellation

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [December 27, 2005](#) issue

Jeff Samardzija's is not the first difficult name on the Notre Dame football roster, nor does one expect to find familiar names—that is, familiar to Anglos—in sports in this cosmopolitan era. Yet his name signals a problem for many. *USA Today* (October 13) took pains to deal with it: “suh-MARR-zhuh.” The story told of how frustrated the Fighting Irish's suh-MARR-zhuh was in his kiddie football days, when no announcer ever got the name right. There is an upside, however. “With a name like that,” he said, “once people know it, it sticks with you.”

Picture Jeff marrying someone with an equally difficult name—and then envision the couple hyphenating their names. I used to worry about what happens when the descendants of two hyphenated families wed. Now I let the Germans do the worrying. Mary Jacoby reported from Luxembourg in the *Wall Street Journal* (October 12) that “Germany Tells Parents to Keep Names Simple.” Achtung!

Here's the problem: “Dr. Eichhoff-Cyrus, who hyphenated her own name after marriage but is not allowed to pass it on to her children, explains that the concern is hyphenation multiplication. If a double-named boy grew up to marry and have children with a double-named woman, those children could have four names, and their children could have eight, and their children could have 16. The bureaucracy shudders.” As would we.

The occasion for the story was the battle over Leonhard Matthias Grunkin-Paul, whose divorced parents both want him to carry the hyphenated name. The courts say no, so he has no last name. His passport reads: “Leonhard Matthias, son of Stefan Grunkin and Dorothee Paul.” Picture how long the security lines will be as these kids open their passports.

Simple names can also bemuse. I've long been sensitive about names, having found my own simple name cited in a *Harper's Magazine* article by Don Asher (August 1994). Reading aloud among the family, as is our wont, we were being amused by Asher's accounts of names like Outerbridge Horsey, only to be brought up short by reading about how “the twin lures of alliteration and duplication generated the late

psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, L.A. police chief Willie Williams, theologian Martin E. Marty, and former Kansas governor John St. John. All overcame their parents' cutesy predilections to achieve celebrity, as did, to our regret, Sirhan Sirhan."

If only Asher had known that I am always called Marty Marty, to compare with William Williams, Thomas Thomas and Richard Richards. Still, no announcer gets our names wrong. And no hyphens.

We Bible-believers cannot help those secularist Germans in their stew over hyphens. All of my biblical dictionaries break long names into hyphenates, but I'll bet that the prophets did not use them in the Hebrew. Still, picture what the German courts would do with a wedding announcement from Mr. and Mrs. Isaiah, who would request the pleasure of your attendance at the wedding of their son "Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz" to someone of the "Abel-Beth-Maachah" family, a union which would need six or seven hyphens. And in the next generation you'd have the Mr. and Mrs. Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz-Abel-Beth-Maachah inviting you to the marriage of . . . Soon the wedding announcement printers would despair and pass the problem off to their colleagues in Germany.

There was some comfort at least for the Maher-Shalal-Hash-Bazes of the world: they did not have to worry about football announcers getting their name wrong.