



## SUPERFANS TRIVIA

» Mike Ditka (left) appeared on two episodes: once in 1993 (along with Joe Mantegna's second appearance as Bill Swerski); and again in 1997 (along with George Wendt as Bob Swerski).



# Ditka vs. God? You can't be serious

The Superfans made a name for themselves with their unabashed love of all things Chicago. Below are a few sample exchanges between the larger-than-life fans:

**BILL SWERSKI (Joe Mantegna):** Now, gentlemen, let me ask you this: What if Da Bears were all 14 inches tall, you know about (gesturing) so high? Now, what's your score of today's game?

**CARL WOLLARSKI (Robert Smigel):** Bears 18, Giants 10. And that would finally be a good game.

**PAT ARNOLD (Mike Myers):** Yeah, it would be a good game. Mini Bears 24, Giants 14.

**TODD O'CONNOR (Chris Farley):** What about Ditka? Would he be mini too?

**BILL:** No, he would be full-grown.

**TODD:** Oh, then, uh . . . Mini Bears 31, Giants 7.

**CARL:** Oh, hold on. Then I change mine too. It thought it was Mini Ditka.



**BILL SWERSKI:** Which building would you rather have: the Empire State Building or Da Sears Tower? Pat?

**PAT ARNOLD:** Sears.

**BILL SWERSKI:** Carl?

**CARL WOLLARSKI:** Sears is taller.

**BILL SWERSKI:** Todd?

**TODD O'CONNOR:** Sears.

**CARL WOLLARSKI:** Sears!

**SUPERFANS:** Da Sears!

**BILL SWERSKI:** All right. Ditka vs. God in a golf match. Now, he's a good golfer.

**PAT ARNOLD:** Ditka.

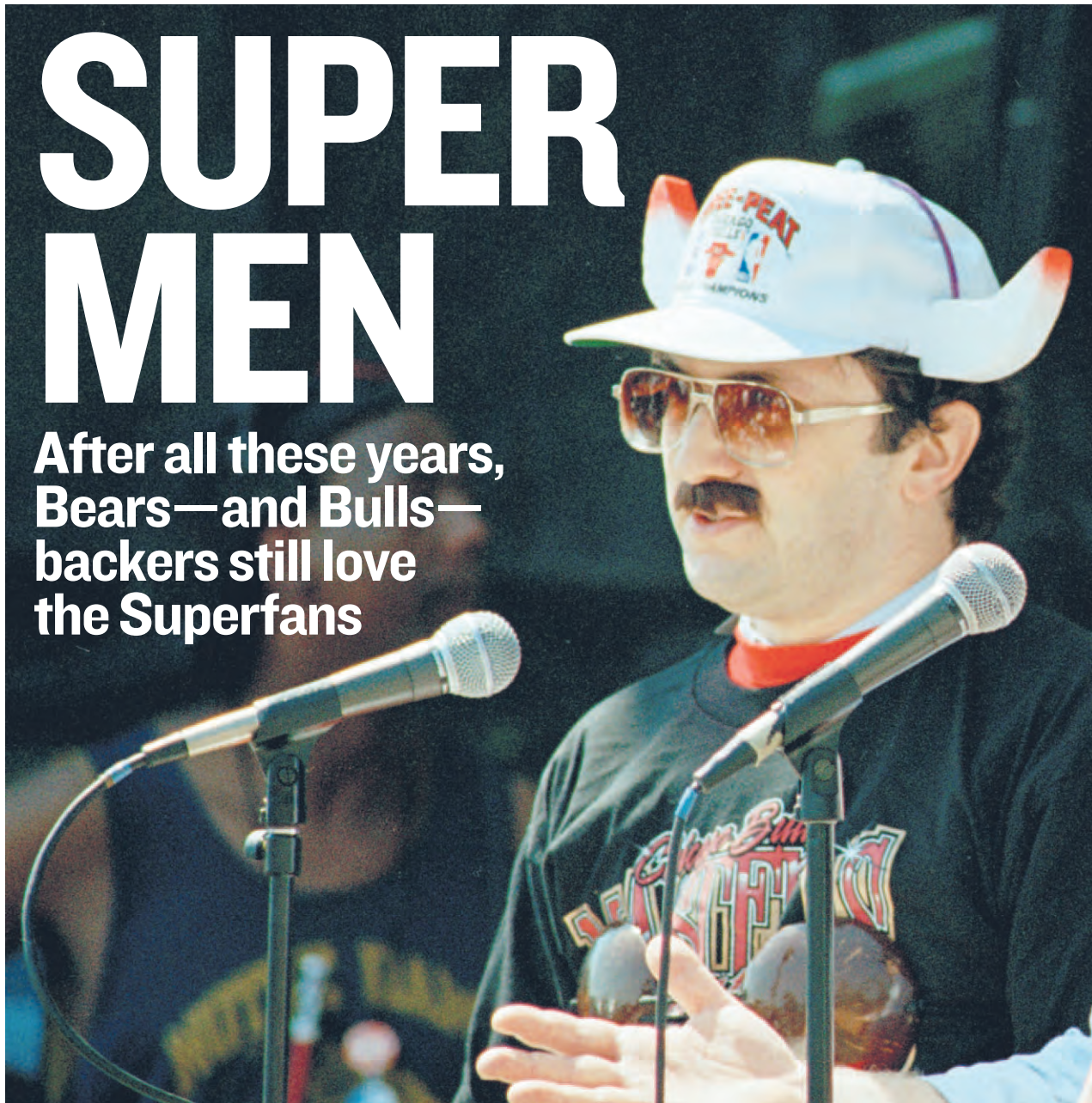
**TODD O'CONNOR:** Dit-ka!

**CARL WOLLARSKI:** Ditka.

[SOURCE: SNLTRANSCRIPTS.JT.ORG]

# SUPER MEN

## After all these years, Bears—and Bulls—backers still love the Superfans



**By Jerry Soverinsky**  
FOR REDEYE

It's hard to believe that any performance sharing a stage with Vanilla Ice singing "Ice, Ice Baby" could ever achieve broadcast distinction, much less a cult following. But such has been the case with "Saturday Night Live's" Superfans sketch, first performed Jan. 12, 1991.

It has endured as one of the show's most popular recurring sketches, and its trademark lexicon has come to define the stereotypical Chicago sports fan. The 1991 "SNL" episode, created by Chicago-trained comedian Robert Smigel, featured guest host and Chicago native Joe Mantegna.

As a longtime Chicago sports fan, Mantegna loved the Superfan role; 16 years later, he's still reminded of its significance.

"It's everywhere you look," he told RedEye recently, while discussing the sketch's popularity. "It's become part of the personality of the Bears and the city too. Da Bears. Da Coach. Da Paul. It is Chicago."

"Everyone knows the Superfans, if not by name, then at least by personality," he said.

The clamor seems to be picking up again, Mantegna said, and he's been contacted by others for news sto-

ries leading up to Sunday's big game.

The Superfans sketches featured Mike Ditka clones—thick mustaches, sunglasses and heavy Grabowski accents—feasting on huge slabs of red meat, kielbasa and fried foods, and washing them down with mugs of beer. The Superfans sat around a table predicting the outcomes of Bears (and later Bulls) games—with the "Da Bears" or "Da Bulls" winning by some ridiculous margin.

Smigel, a New Yorker who did improv training in Chicago in the early '80s and later became an "SNL" writer, told RedEye he developed the Superfans idea from his own experiences with Chicago's passionate sports fans.

While he grew up a huge Knicks fan, he developed an immediate attachment and appreciation for Chicago sports and its fans while working here.

"One of my first weekends in Chicago, I went to Wrigley Field," he said. "I couldn't believe how much fun everyone was having. And everything was so uniform—everyone was wearing oxfords with a T-shirt over it. And of course, everywhere you looked, people had their Ditka mustaches, baseball hats and these aviator glasses that were at least four years outdated. »



>> Wendt appeared in nine “SNL” Superfans sketches between 1991-2003, the most of any Superfans performer.

>> The Superfans, namely Wendt’s Swerski and Robert Smigel’s Carl Wollarski, appeared at Michael Jordan’s 1994 United Center jersey retirement ceremony.

>> Chris Farley’s character, Todd O’Connor, was known for having suffered 13 heart attacks (and for a chunk of polish sausage stuck in his heart lining).

>> Dan Aykroyd and John Goodman also have appeared. >> On YouTube, one of the sketches has been watched more than 53,000 times in the last three months. [ J.S., AP ]



**Superfans Robert Smigel (far left) and George Wendt join in the 1993 rally after the Bulls won their third straight NBA title.** [ AP FILE PHOTO ]

>> “That was [the basis for] the Superfans sketch. And I always tried to make them as outrageous as possible. I think we had one where they were debating who would win, Ditka or a hurricane.” (The verdict: Ditka—unless the hurricane was named Hurricane Ditka).

Smigel originally wrote the sketch with Bob Odenkirk and Dave Reynolds for the “Happy Happy Good Show,” a 1988 Chicago improv revue that also featured Smigel, Conan O’Brien and Greg Daniels. He revived the sketch a few years later specifically for Mantegna.

“It became popular, and they always asked me to [reprise] the role, too, but it was difficult,” Mantegna said. “I was in L.A.”

Smigel and other “SNL” writers then introduced another Chicagoan, George Wendt, as Bob Swerski, Bill’s brother.

“George had just finished with ‘Cheers’ and was happy to break out of his Norm persona, so he did many of the later sketches. He explained my [Bill Swerski’s] absence as owing to recovering from a heart attack,” Mantegna said.

Mantegna, whose popular works include “Searching for Bobby Fischer” not to mention a recurring role as

the voice of Fat Tony on “The Simpsons,” grew up on Chicago’s West Side, moving to Cicero while in high school. He counts Brian Urlacher among his favorites on this year’s squad.

“He’s a throwback to the great linebackers,” he said.

He’s followed the Bears closely this year, mostly at his Burbank, Calif., restaurant, Taste Chicago.

“We’ll have a huge tent there for the Super Bowl with hundreds of guests,” he said. “There’ll be plenty of Italian beef sandwiches and other Chicago food specialties.”

As for the Superfans characters, they were last seen in a brief TV cameo before last year’s Super Bowl (the 20th reunion of the Bears’ last championship), when Wendt appeared alongside Ditka and engaged in their trademark banter. Whether “SNL” will revive Superfans for this weekend’s airing is anyone’s guess, though; the producers couldn’t say when asked by RedEye.

But regardless, any Superfan would say the outcome of Super Bowl XLI has never been in doubt.

As Smigel’s Carl Wollarski might very well predict: “I tell you who’s gonna be riding high, my friend. A certain team from a certain town. Starts with a ‘C’ and ends with an ‘O.’ And in the middle is ‘hicag.’”

## Meet da real fans



### Robert Smigel

**Played:** Carl Wollarski

Wollarski’s alter ego went on to be head writer for Conan O’Brien’s late-night talk show and co-wrote the “Saturday TV Funhouse” cartoons on “SNL.” He’s also Triumph the Insult Comic Dog.



### Joe Mantegna

**Played:** Bill Swerski

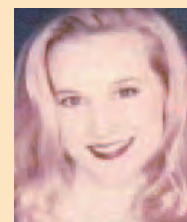
The “Godfather III” star voices a character in the much-anticipated “The Simpsons Movie” due out in July and is following it up with three more movies expected this year. Look for him in the thriller “Naked Fear.”



### George Wendt

**Played:** Bob Swerski (Bill’s brother)

He made appearances on the small screen during the past year and has roles in the movies “Saturday Morning” and “Brian Loves You,” due out later this year. He’s also in the play “12 Angry Men” in Chicago.



### Beth Cahill

**Played:** Denise Swerski (Bob’s daughter)

She was last seen in 2006 on the TV series “Cheap Seats: Without Ron Parker.”



### Horatio Sanz

**Played:** Bart Swerski (Bob’s nephew)

Since his “Saturday Night Live” stint, the “Fillmore!” series star has cultivated his bad-boy persona in films such as “School for Scoundrels” and the gambling movie “Lucky You,” set to debut later this year.



### Mike Myers

**Played:** Pat Arnold

The international man of mystery has voiced three “Shrek” films and a holiday short. He’s also slated to take on the title role in the Keith Moon biopic, planned for release in 2009.



### Kevin Nealon

**Played:** Danny Sheridan

The “Daddy Day Care” star has been keeping up his TV appearances with stints on “Campus Ladies” and “Fat Actress.” The plot thickens this year when his top-billed role in “Remarkable Power” comes out.



### Chris Farley

**Played:** Todd O’Connor

The “Tommy Boy” star died of a drug overdose in 1997.

[ VICTORIA FINE/REDEYE ]