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'Girls & Sports' comic strip debuts today

By Jessica Berthold
Of The Morning Call

Lots of people have a cause. For Miss America contestants, it's world peace. For Homer Simpson, it's beer.

And for Justin Borus and Andrew Feinstein, it's representing

the Average Young Guy on the comics page.

Borus and Feinstein are the creators of the comic strip "Girls & Sports," which debuts today in The Morning Call, replacing Dilbert on the comic pages.

Dilbert has a new home Monday through Saturday on The

Morning Call's business pages and will continue to appear in the Sunday comics.

The new comic, "Girls & Sports," focuses on the day-to-day life of best friends Bradley and Marshall, young All-Ameri-

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can men whose main interests are, well, girls and sports.

"You see a lot of comic strips about married couples and pets and families, but there's nothing that talks to people in their late teens through early 30s," says Borus, 28, during a phone interview. "We talk about things younger people can relate to, like dating, the bar scene, sports and going to the gym."

Borus' middle name is Bradley, and that character is loosely based on him: laid back,

with a girlfriend and a penchant for giving bad romantic advice. Marshall, meanwhile, is neurotic, perpetually single, and always on the prowl. He's based on strip illustrator Feinstein, 29.

"A lot of what goes on is Bradley and Marshall complaining about things in sports they see wrong and would fix, or about Marshall going into bars, making mistakes, and taking advice from Bradley about it," says Borus, who writes the strip's dialogue and also owns an investment management business.

Friends since high school, Feinstein and Borus say the

strip pretty much reflects their own lives.

"It's funny. When we first started this, Justin was the only one who'd ever had a serious girlfriend, and my character, Marshall, was always the single guy. Several years later, nothing has changed," Feinstein says.

Once Upon a Time In Denmark

Naturally, there's a woman to blame for how "Girls & Sports" started.

In 1997, Borus and Feinstein studied business in Denmark together for a college semester. Borus would often hit the nightclubs to meet women and tell Feinstein about his exploits the next day. It was on one such occasion, as the young men were riding a bus to a class field trip, that a female classmate turned around in her seat and interrupted Borus' story to remark: "All you guys talk about is girls and sports!"

Feinstein realized she was right. An avid cartoon fan in childhood, he immediately started doodling comic strips about experiences he and his friends had had in clubs and bars. Justin added in humorous dialogue, and they passed the strip around among their peers. It was a hit.

When the two returned to their respective colleges — Emory University for Feinstein and Williams College for Borus — they got the strip running in their school newspapers. During subsequent Christmas and summer breaks, friends saw the papers lying around and decided to get "Girls & Sports" in their school publications, too.

"Before we knew it, we were in 25-30 college or university papers, so we decided to see if we could get into some bigger schools," Borus says. "We're in about 75 at this point."

A couple years after the comic strip stormed college



Photo by Audrey Gilden

'GIRLS & SPORTS' CREATORS Justin Borus (left) and Andrew Feinstein combined their two passions to create their comic strip. The strip debuts on today's Morning Call comics pages.

campuses, a funny thing happened. Borus and Feinstein began getting e-mail from graduating seniors wanting to know if they could read "Girls & Sports" in any city newspapers. The duo decided to see if they could expand their reach.

Last spring, Feinstein quit his job producing cartoon shorts for Warner Brothers in Los Angeles so he could work full time to promote the strip. The gamble paid off: "Girls & Sports" is now carried in more than 100 papers, from the New York Daily News to the Tucson (Ariz.) Citizen.

Not bad for two guys who never went to art school and majored in economics and business during college.

Girls Against Boys

The battle of the sexes crops up often in "Girls & Sports," mainly through the relationship between Bradley and his girlfriend, JoAnn.

JoAnn's character was originally modeled after the woman Borus was dating when the strip was created. His current girlfriend, who finds JoAnn annoying, has taken over the mantle, Bbrus says.

"Lots of times she'll read the strip and say it's funny, but that it has nothing to do with her," Borus says. "Little does she know, she's the inspiration."

In one strip, JoAnn tells Bradley they should go hiking because "It's a great sport." With full-on Guy Logic, Bradley shoots back that "Anything without a ball is not a sport." The final panel shows the two characters on a mountain, hiking, with Bradley cradling a football in the crook of his arm.

Although "Girls & Sports" aims to appeal to young men, guys don't always win arguments or come out looking better in the strip, Borus says.

"It comes out about even. We're equal opportunity offenders," Borus says.

Another recurring character, Harris, is friends with Marshall and Bradley ... but they're not sure why. He's the kind of guy who always wears the wrong clothes, says the wrong thing to women, and strikes out, yet never realizes any of this is his fault.

"He's a little bit of the loser friend, but he hasn't gotten the memo on that yet," Borus says.

All of the characters' ages, jobs, and towns are kept purposely vague, so as not to date them or make them less accessible. Besides, it doesn't make much difference whether the characters live in Los Angeles (as Feinstein does), Denver (as Borus does), New York or Allentown, Feinstein says.

"Young adults everywhere live a similar lifestyle, so why be specific about those kinds of details?" he says.

Bases Loaded

Now that "Girls & Sports" appears on comics pages around the country, the creators are hard at work finishing a book. It will include humorous and serious commentary mixed with a selection of comics, and should be finished in about five weeks, they say.

The pair also plan to work on beefing up their Web site, which currently includes a weekly advice column by Bradley and a "Character of the Week." One example of the latter is "The Uninvited Guy," whom no one knows but who shows up at parties, drinks all the free alcohol, and skews the male-female ratio by bringing along all his Uninvited Guy friends.

"I think the advice column and the characters will be regular things, but we are going to try to add other things to make the Web site more interactive," Borus says.

One thing that won't happen, the guys agree, is that they will run out of ideas to use in the strip.

"It's such a big world we are talking about, when you look at dating and sports and relationships — all those topics," Borus says. "We really believe we've just scratched the surface."

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