

C.J.: The Dish; Doggone It! Where is Stuart Smalley When Franken Needs Him?

BYLINE: CHERYL JOHNSON, Star Tribune

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DFL candidate for U.S. Senate Al Franken didn't exactly leave `em laughing in Northfield.

This month Franken was at Carleton College, where the late Paul Wellstone was a professor, for a student rally related to a special election in state Senate District 25. After the rally, some students crowded around to take photos with the "Saturday Night Live" alum, author, satirist and celebrity.

Franken's spokesman Andy Barr said via e-mail Tuesday that Al "remembers having a spirited convo w/ College GOPer at the urging of some of the kid's College Dem pals. Seemed like everyone was having a good time, or as good a time as you can have debating Reaganomics."

Franken apparently had more fun than senior history major Peter Fritz.

According to Fritz, things started out fine with him taking photos of fellow Carls with Franken. Then Franken's curiosity was raised about why Fritz didn't want to be in a pic.

He's a conservative, another Carl yelled out by way of explanation.

At that point, Franken reportedly began peppering Fritz with questions about supporting President Bush and former President Ronald Reagan's tax increases. Fritz told me that he got tense and, as he does in those situations, started chewing the inside of his mouth, a gesture he said was mimicked by Franken; Fritz said he also thought that Franken mocked his style of speech.

An aide eventually interrupted Franken's act by announcing to the candidate that it was time to go.

Fritz told me Monday that he then stuck out his hand to shake Franken's. "Well, at least it's nice to meet you," the GOPer said he told Franken, who reportedly replied, I can't say the same.

There was no handshake, Fritz said.

Said Barr: "Al doesn't remember saying that, but if the kid does, then OK. ... Al takes enough pictures with people that he doubts he would 'take umbrage' at someone not wanting one."

Although Fritz did not disagree with my use of the word "umbrage," that was how I characterized the moment in my e-mail to Barr.

I asked Barr whether Franken's electrolytes were on the decline, or whether he was in a bad mood, wasting such truculence on somebody who hasn't graduated from college yet.

"So electrolytes-wise I don't know what to tell you," Barr wrote in reply. "Certainly, it was a long, hard day of campaigning on behalf of [DFL Sen.-elect] Kevin Dahle. But Al told me he had a really good time meeting all the students - even the ones who thought he was wrong about everything."

Fritz told me Wednesday that he was stunned by Franken's behavior: "I usually expect politicians to, at least, pretend as though, even in that kind of interaction, that they can convince me or have some kind of reasonable dialogue - the whole Minnesota Nice thing, at least."

Fritz's version of the encounter was backed up by Pablo Kenney, prez of the Carleton Dems.

Sign language

"I guess you could say I vented my frustrations by taking it to the streets," Mike Soricelli said.

A Roepke PR guy, Soricelli got tickets to NBC's "Tonight Show" months ahead of his recent L.A. vacation. Unfortunately his vaca came just before Jay Leno decided to return to work despite the writers' strike.

Because Soricelli sympathizes with the Writers Guild of America, he snatched up a picket sign while his buddy Aaron Rhody snapped away.

Her pregnant moment

That looks like one enormous basketball that former Gophers women coach Brenda Frese has under her blouse in Wednesday's USA Today photo.

Now the coach at Maryland, where she won a NCAA basketball title in 2006, Frese is looking very pregnant because she is expecting twins.

"I feel like I have a 50-pound tire around my waist," Frese told USA Today. "I had four foot surgeries in college. I thought that was one of the hardest things I'd ever

gone through. Being pregnant with twins is way harder than that. This trimester, every day is like walking on a treadmill at level 12. I want my body back."

She is in week 33 of the pregnancy, trying to make it to 38 weeks, when labor would be induced.

Frese, who was married to Steven Oldfield when she lived here and is now married to videographer Mark Thomas, has been more low-key and mellow during the pregnancy, according to one player.

Frese doesn't want to stress the babies by behaving rabidly, as some may remember her on the Barn's sideline.

C.J. is at 612.332.TIPS or cj@startribune.com E-mailers, please state a subject - "Hello" doesn't count. Attachments are not opened, so don't even try. More of her attitude can be seen on Fox 9 Thursday mornings.