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FIGHT

TO THE FINISH

TOBY VS. NATALIE

The inside story of country's
nastiest feud – and who
came out on top when
the Dixie Chicks took
on Toby Keith!

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DANIEL COSTON/RETNA



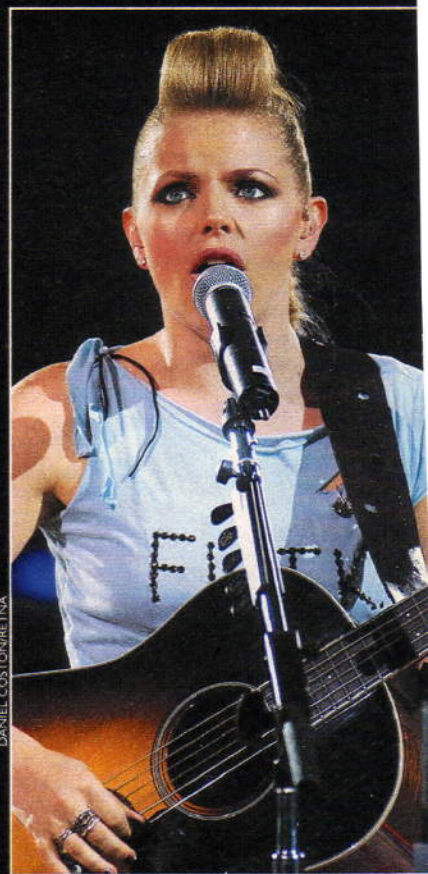
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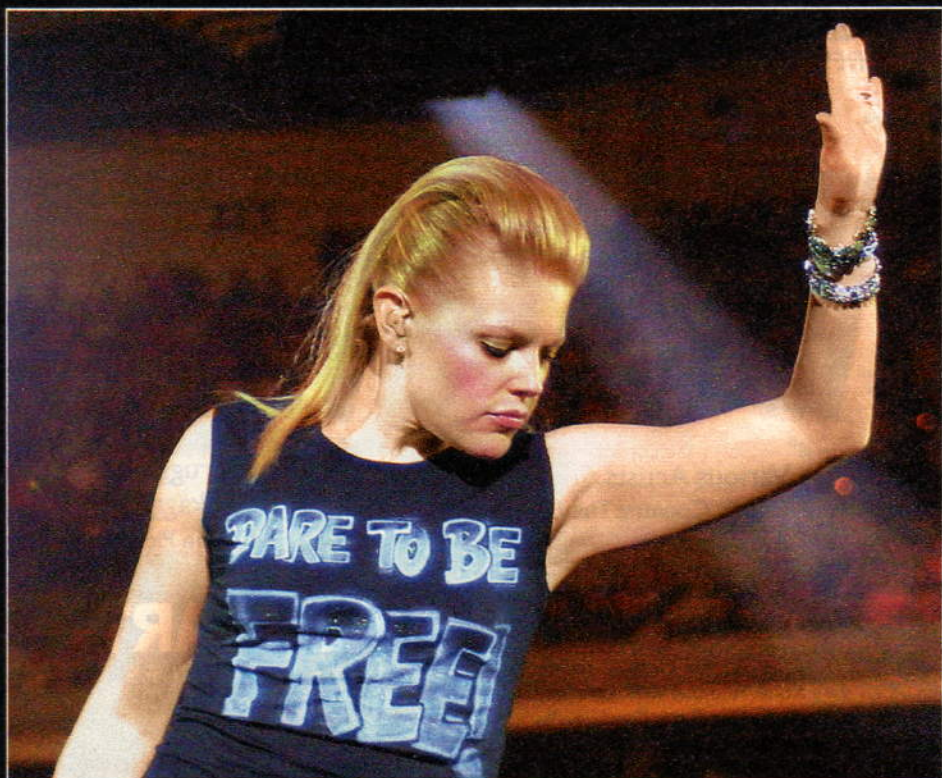


DANIEL COSTON/RETNA



Fans weighed in on both sides of the controversy as Toby and Natalie continued to spar.

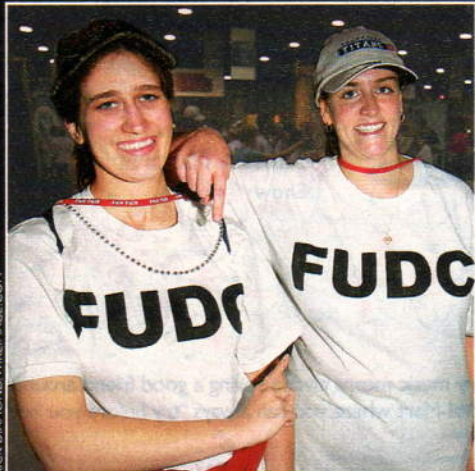
FIGHT



RICK DIAMOND/WIREIMAGE.COM



AP PHOTO/OKNOXVILLE NEWS/JOE ADKINS



CURTIS HILBUN





MARY ANN CHASTAIN/AP PHOTO



The feud between Toby Keith and the Dixie Chicks' Natalie Maines is now more brutal than ever – but has it already gone too far?

WORDS

By
Chris
Neal

"F.U.T.K."

Four little letters, emblazoned across Dixie Chicks lead singer Natalie Maines' T-shirt during their ACM Awards performance.

Now, what could those letters possibly mean?

Some charitably guessed "Friends United in Truth and Kindness." A Chicks spokesperson claimed it stood for "Freedom, Understanding, Truth and Knowledge." The night after the show, Toby Keith claimed not to know what it meant. Funny thing, because for most observers, those letters could only mean one thing – an offensive insult from Natalie directed straight at Toby.

The T-shirt message was taken as the latest salvo in a war of words – and pictures, and, now, abbreviations – that's been going on for nearly a year. Politically and philosophically divided, Natalie and Toby have been butting heads since last September, when she shared her unfavorable opinion on his flag-waving, chest-beating smash "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)."

The notorious shirt seems to have been her revenge on Toby for having shown audiences on his spring tour a huge digitally doctored photo depicting Natalie with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. The spunky Chick did not appreciate the suggestion that she sympathized with a murderous villain, and apparently decided to send Toby a message.



AP PHOTO/MARY ANN CHASTAIN





CHARLIE FOMVILLE/RETNA

RON WOLFSON/URW LONDON FEATURES

HEAD 2 HEAD

TOBY: 6 feet, 4 inches

NATALIE: 5 feet, 3 inches

...

TOBY: 42 years old

NATALIE: 28 years old

...

TOBY: Born in Clinton, Okla.

NATALIE: Born in Lubbock, Texas

...

TOBY: Worked in oil fields after high school

NATALIE: Attended Texas Tech and Berklee College of Music after high school

...

TOBY: Enjoys hunting, fishing, golf

NATALIE: Enjoys reading, decorating, watching movies

...

TOBY: Calls himself "the big dog"

NATALIE: Has a pet bulldog

...

TOBY: "Should've Been a Cowboy"

NATALIE: "Cowboy Take Me Away"

...

TOBY: Played himself on *The Dukes of Hazzard* reunion TV movie

NATALIE: Married to an actor

...

TOBY: Tour sponsored by a beer company

NATALIE: Tour sponsored by a tea company

...

TOBY: Loves Mexican food

NATALIE: Loves Mexican food

FIGHTIN' WORDS

Toby's fans immediately responded in kind by creating "F.U.D.C." T-shirts — they've become a staple of his concerts, and many were seen at this year's Fan Fair. Toby himself was dismissive about the T-shirt incident, which some speculated was the reason he left the ACM show too early to accept his Entertainer of the Year trophy. "If y'all think she's done, you're crazy," he said. "Stuff comes out of her blowhole daily."

Even as Toby struck back at Natalie, he 'fessed up to liking the Chicks' tunes. "I think it's too bad for the other two that it has to be what it is," he said, "because they do make great music."

Ironically, the feud began because Natalie *didn't* care for Toby's music — specifically, "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue," with its famous terrorist-baiting line *We'll put a boot in your ass, it's the American way*. "I hate it," she declared last August. "It's ignorant, and it makes country music sound ignorant."

Toby responded by insulting Natalie's

own tunesmithing ability. "You've got to be in my league as a songwriter before I'll even respond to you," he said.

The dispute simmered on a low boil for a while — until March 10. It was on that day that Natalie — who had sung with the Chicks at George W. Bush's gubernatorial inauguration — made her now-infamous remark from a London stage: "Just so you know, we're ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas." That single sentence ignited a furor, with radio stations banning the Chicks' music, fans destroying their CDs and everyone in sight weighing in on the matter — including President Bush himself. "They shouldn't have their feelings hurt just because some people don't want to buy their records when they speak out," he said.

Toby was also ready to offer his two cents. The picture of Natalie and Saddam Hussein, created by some anonymous computer wizard, began circulating around the Internet almost immediately. Toby projected it behind him at a March 23 show while blasting Natalie for



KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM

Since "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)" launched him into the world of politics, Toby has often been asked his opinions on the issues of the day — and of course, he's never been shy about saying what's on his mind. Here are a few samples:

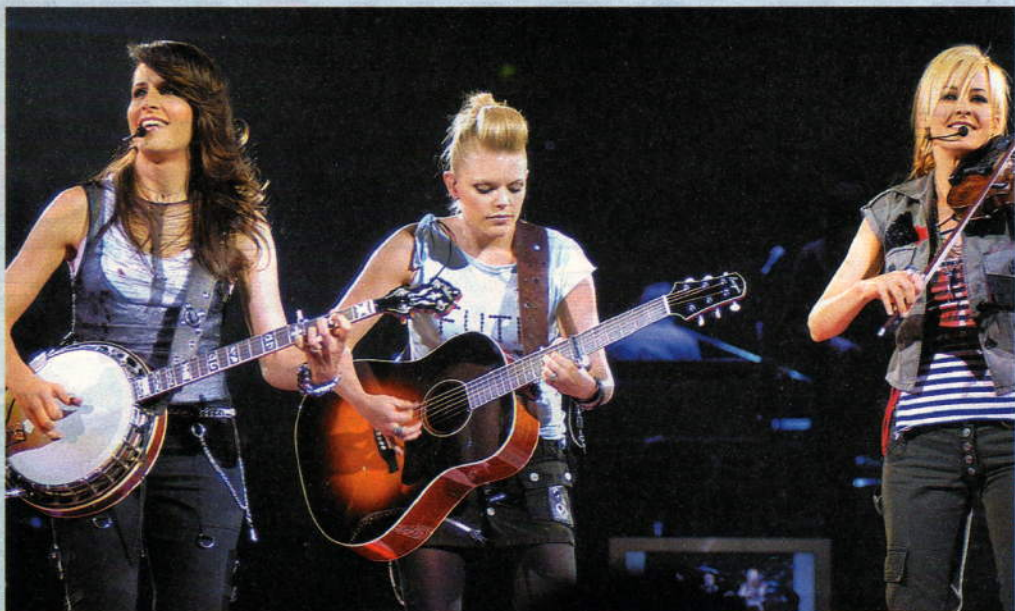
THE OPINIONATED AMERICAN

ON THE IRAQ WAR: "I'm as antiwar as the next guy. I mean, I'm for peace and I wish that my kids never had to ever go fight. But when you do fight, I think the longer you wait and draw it out, it gives your enemy a better chance to prepare for you, and it puts our boys and girls in more danger."

ON AMERICAN JUSTICE: "Justice today tries to take a middle road. If you do the crime, you should have to do the time. But our court system lets criminals off easy. And victims don't feel they get proper justice."

ON HIS POLITICS: "I was raised Democrat, but I vote for the best person for the position. I'm grateful that Bush is in there now. I'm grateful that we don't have Clinton or Gore or somebody [like that] at this time in our life. I have faith that our president and our people that we've got elected will make the right decisions."

ON THE SEPT. 11 ATTACKS: "The terrorists kicked us in the teeth and awakened a sleeping giant. They took us for granted, not realizing we'd be angry from coast to coast — and they'd suffer our wrath."



CHARLIE FOMVILLE/RETNA

QUIET ON THE HOME FRONT

Tensions ran high as the Dixie Chicks prepared to mount their American tour. There had been death threats and promises of protests, massive walkouts and boycotts. Security for the shows was beefed up – metal detectors were installed, personal bodyguards and guard dogs were hired. And then ...

Nothing.

Well, not much. There have been protests, boos and empty seats, but not at the level the Chicks feared and their opponents promised. At a recent Boston show, six lonely souls paraded in front of the

arena carrying signs with phrases like "Deport the Dixie Twits."

Nonetheless, the Chicks have been addressing the controversy with crowds at every stop along the tour, both subtly – playing Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A." just before the show begins, for example – and directly. There's the video montage during their song "Truth No. 2" that shows former fans destroying Chicks CDs, followed by the words SEEK THE TRUTH. And Natalie always has a thing or two to say about it. Here's what she's been telling a few audiences.

Chicago: "If you're here to boo, that's fine. We welcome freedom of speech."

Boston: "If there's one thing I've learned since March 10, it's that nobody tells you guys what to do."

Philadelphia: "We've always appreciated our fans, but we really appreciate you now. You're not just fair-weather fans."

Pittsburgh: "After the whole thing happened, we decided to get involved in politics. I decided to run for president!"

Detroit: "I had absolutely no voice yesterday – and I swear you could hear clapping from the Oval Office!"

denouncing our president on foreign soil."

The Chicks and Toby's opposite political beliefs have now left them at opposite ends of the charts, as mostly pro-Bush, pro-war country fans and radio stations responded to the various uproars. Toby's latest hang-'em-high number, "Beer for My Horses," recently enjoyed a run at No. 1, while the Chicks saw their hit "Travelin' Soldier" – ironically, a song about a wartime tragedy – free-fall from the top of the charts immediately following Natalie's comment.

Their latest, "Godspeed (Sweet Dreams)" – the song Natalie was singing while wearing the "F.U.T.K." shirt – is slowly climbing the chart's lower rungs, indicating a slight thaw in relations between the Chicks and country

radio. But their record sales took a massive hit, falling by about 80,000 a week within a month of Natalie's remarks. Meanwhile, Toby's *Unleashed* CD is still selling as strongly as ever nearly a year after its release.

Both are thriving on the concert trail, however. Toby's concerts are often sellouts, while the Chicks' American tour – threatened by protests and even death threats – has packed houses with barely a hitch.

One exception: the postponement of the trio's planned June 1 show in Cleveland. The reason? Natalie lost her voice.

Natalie Maines, unable to talk?

Somewhere, Toby Keith must have had a good chuckle.

