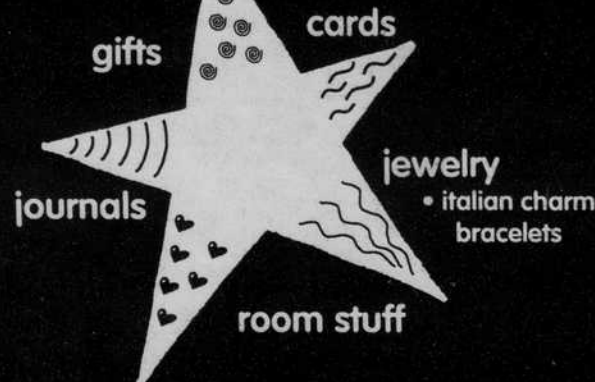


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Team reactions

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State in Pullman, Wash.

After the game, as Knight congratulated the team, quarterback Joey Harrington assumed that the WRC-Phil Knight issue was nearing an end.

"Oh I'm sure things are being taken care of away from our football team," Harrington said Nov. 4. "They'll take care of it. But there was no mending that needed to be done between [the players and Knight]."

Nearly 11 months later, Harrington's hunch came true. The players hold no grudges toward Knight for leaving the team and the school for a few months.

"I don't blame him for what we did," Amundson said. "It felt like we bit the hand that fed us [when the University joined the WRC]."

Bellotti, who said he was "overjoyed" by the announcement, has kept in contact with Knight throughout the past months to let him know that whenever he's ready to return, his team will gladly accept him.

"I'm pleased that he feels comfortable enough to come back," Bellotti said. "He's one of the most avid and involved fans. Sometimes he knows the players better than I do."

Maybe so, but Bellotti knows better than anyone the significance of Knight's announcement — for both athletics and academics.

"This benefits not only football, but every program in the Athletic Department and the University," Bellotti said. "Everybody should be jumping up and down and doing cartwheels."

Coaches

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Oregon soccer head coach Bill Steffen also glowed over Knight's decision.

"The revenue generated by the expansion benefits us all," Steffen said. "It all floats the boat."

The coach said his players will also benefit from the donated money.

"They understand that football doesn't just raise money for football," Steffen said.

Oregon Athletic Director Bill Moos gave his first good-news press conference in awhile Wednesday, and the leader of the Athletic Department was thrilled about a resurgence for the entire program.

"All our sports will be able to benefit from the revenue created, every day of the year," Moos said.

The exact figures of Knight's donations will not be made public,

but coaches like Nosler said they understand any donation affects their teams in the long run. Small Oregon teams could start seeing an increase in operating budgets as early as next season, when the expansion project at Autzen should be done.

Nosler said he was most excited about how Knight came back.

"The way he handled it shows how he really cares about the program," Nosler said, referring to Knight's opinion piece in The Oregonian.

The coaches noted the influence Knight's donation could have on academics.

"Obviously, academically and athletically, this will make an impact," Baumgartner said.

Baumgartner, who now has the task of perhaps adding another sport, said Knight and the University were meant for each other.

"He loves sports, and he loves academics," Baumgartner said. "It's a natural fit."

Smith

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mayer said.

Anybody that has had the chance to witness Knight's love for the Ducks can only imagine how tough the past year-and-a-half must have been.

I'll never forget seeing Knight get absolutely trampled on by the student section at McArthur Court as students stormed the floor after the "Miracle at Mac" on March 2, 2000. He was warned to leave his court-side seat, but wouldn't budge.

And after the Ducks scored six points in the final six seconds to pick up the improbable win against Arizona State, Knight acted like he actually enjoyed getting

run over by crazed fans.

"It was well worth it," he said. "That was one of the great games in Mac Court history. Absolutely fabulous."

Later that month, Knight was seen in Buffalo, N.Y., to watch Oregon play Seton Hall in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. Nothing special there, right? Well, after cheering hard in the men's heartbreaking overtime loss that morning, he joined Moos on a cross-country flight back to Eugene just in time for the Oregon women's hoops team's NCAA Tournament contest that same evening.

That's literally going the extra mile for your school. Knight could very well just write the fancy checks and stay distant, but he loves to get involved.

Which is why on Nov. 4, 2000, when Knight attended his first Oregon football game of the season in the coldness of Pullman, Wash., I knew that this day would come eventually. That was the first day that he had returned as a fan and was the first important baby step in winning him back.

He attended the next week's game at home against California as well as the Civil War game in Corvallis. And there was no happier man on the field of Qualcomm Stadium on Dec. 29 in San Diego than Phil Knight when Oregon beat Texas.

"We beat Texas! We beat Texas!" he screamed as he hugged everyone in sight.

And now, he's officially back. For good, this time, I'd imagine. The issues with the University have been worked out and the bonds of trust, which Knight had said were shredded, are now mended.

"It's been an interesting 18 months," Moos said.

Ones that few people will ever forget.

Jeff Smith is the assistant sports editor of the Emerald. He can be reached at jeffsmith@dailyemerald.com.

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