



OREGON WORE YELLOW HELMETS, KELLY GREEN JERSEYS AND YELLOW PANTS OCT. 18, AS SEEN HERE ON QUARTERBACK MARCUS MARIOTA, PAYING HOMAGE TO THE 1994 DESIGN

Perhaps that's why the words on the Moshofsky Center (known as the "Mo") are so important. Oregon may not boast tradition, but when the facility opened in 1998, the football climate in Eugene was about to change.

A STATE OF CHANGE

In 1995, Oregon's nine-win mark matched the previous year's 9-4 record for most wins in a season since 1948. The 1996 Cotton Bowl was only the second time in program history that UO reached postseason play in back-to-back seasons.

"You go east of the Cascades and at that time, not many people knew where UO was or even what the difference was between UO and OSU," says Todd Van Horne, creative director of Nike, who has been with the company for roughly 25 years.

To reach the Rose Bowl in 1995, the Ducks earned a thrilling victory versus rival University of Washington. It was their first trip to the Rose Bowl since 1958, and also marked Oregon's first conference title in almost 40 seasons.

Oregon's victory against UW featured an improbable interception by Oregon defensive back Kenny Wheaton, while the Ducks were wearing among the last uniforms featuring the old "Donald Duck" logo. The highlight is still replayed on the big screen at Autzen Stadium before every game.

Moments like this aside, UO football lacked a history of distinction and thirsted for a national identity, which they found by deserting tradition altogether. Just two days before postseason play in 1998, the UO Department of Intercollegiate Athletics held a press conference to announce a new chapter in its timeline: the debut of a new look for the upcoming season with the now signature Nike influence.

These days, Van Horne says Nike's original goal was to build upon the excitement of Oregon's sudden successes in the mid-1990s. The plan was to define the Ducks as innovators in the NCAA landscape, and the company's reach extended to facilities like the Mo and the new fast-paced uniform cycle.

"The people that came to Oregon were the people that were pioneers and the ones that took the risks," Van Horne says. "They were the ones that were untraditional and they were not afraid of change."

WIN THE DAY

In the midst of mixed reviews for the uniforms from the local community and the national public, Oregon went on to win the Sun Bowl in 1999.

The following season, Oregon had the best record in the conference and won the Holiday Bowl. They won the conference again in 2001, going on to play in the Fiesta Bowl against Colorado — revenge for losses in 1996 and 1998, when opposing fans from Colorado began chanting, "Quack! Quack! Quack!" at the defeated Ducks and their less-than-intimidating Donald Duck gear.

According to *USA Today*, former athletic director Bill Moos remembered thinking that there would be no "quack, quack, quack" the next time they met. UO won the Fiesta Bowl 38-16.

Oregon's appearance in college football's national conversation was now in full swing, and during the 2002 home opener that roar grew louder.

The all-yellow uniforms worn in the home game versus Mississippi State, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, were said to "resemble space suits in a cheap sci-fi movie." They were also described as "a duck caught in an oil spill" and were called the "ugliest uniform ever paraded on a football field" in letters to the *The Register-Guard*.

"I have fond memories of when we first launched it," says Van Horne, who now designs football uniforms for Oregon and many other NCAA and NFL teams. "There were a lot of people saying that those weren't their colors, that wasn't their logo. But with that excitement of change, I've also known that people in Oregon seem to embrace change pretty quickly."

The Ducks kept winning. Oregon was the victor in every bowl game that they played from 1999 until 2003.

For comparison, take the University of Maryland, which has a similar contract with Under Armour that the



KENJON BARNER

'We have ways of telling stories and we see the uniform as a primary storytelling mechanism.'

— TODD VAN HORNE, CREATIVE DIRECTOR FOR NIKE

"The idea is look great, feel great, play great," said head coach Mike Bellotti at the university's 1998 press conference presentation with Nike.

Perhaps the most significant modification was a new logo, still in use today. Rather than the classic looping "U" and "O," in 2001 the logo evolved into a simple, modern "O" graphic designed by Nike that appears only on helmets. At the time, the sole logo to appear on the jersey itself was a small Nike swoosh. The Donald Duck sleeve logo was removed entirely and colors transformed: The old yellow became more neon, or "lightning," the mallard green became metallic and a green-black hue was introduced as "dark spruce."

Twenty seasons after Wheaton's big victory for UO, Oregon announced that they'd wear a nearly exact replica of the one Wheaton wore, recreated by Nike, while playing Washington on Oct. 18, 2014. Oregon's overall record before Wheaton intercepted Washington's quarterback to help the Ducks land a spot in the Rose Bowl was 359-366-34 (.495). But since that game, the Ducks have earned a much more respectable 177-65 (.731) record, including 11 straight wins versus the Huskies.

UO has with Nike. When Maryland came out with their flag design uniform on Labor Day 2011, they won. But the Terps only won one more game that entire season, finishing last in the ACC.

"If you look like a clown and you win, you look like a winner," Lukas of ESPN says. "But if you look like a clown and you lose, you just look like a clown."

And the Ducks have certainly had their "clown" moments. While national attention for state-of-the-art uniforms is a huge boon to the Ducks, it also ushers in greater scrutiny to the athletic program in general. Who can forget the sucker punch heard around the NCAA when Oregon running back LeGarrette Blount knocked out Boise State's defensive end Byron Hout in 2009? Then there's quarterback Jeremiah Masoli, who was kicked off the team in 2010 after receiving a citation for marijuana possession only months after being charged with second-degree burglary for stealing laptops from a fraternity. In 2013, former tight end Colt Lyerla was in headlines for cocaine possession.

The national spotlight shines on more than just players — NCAA recruiting violations unearthed in 2013 took a little luster out of former head coach Chip Kelly's era.