



B.J. KELLEY
PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

Casting the net wider, the country is watching the entire athletic department as it still makes headlines for the basketball sex-assault scandal that broke last spring.

On the production end, Nike has made progress, but it's hard to shake a reputation for being, as *Business Insider* put it in 2013, "a global symbol of abusive labor practices."

No matter how slick the packaging, these fumbles are hard to forget.

TEAMWORK

"Obviously, it helps with Mr. Knight being an alumnus and the support that he gives us," says Kenny Farr, football equipment administrator for the Oregon Ducks. "I know that we're a priority for them up there, and they make us feel that with their generosity and with the designs and the uniforms."

According to Farr, who is responsible for facilitating meetings between players and the creative team at Nike to develop uniform concepts, the design process between the UO and Nike is always collaborative. Starting with the early conceptual phase, Nike meets with players to discover their likes and dislikes.

"This goes back to the foundation of Nike. Our mantra is that everything starts and ends with the athlete," Van Horne says. "We really listen to the voice of the athlete."

Once Nike goes to work on the concepts, meetings take place every three to six months over the course of a couple years. Van Horne sends a designer to meet with players every four to six weeks.

Jaison Williams, a former art student who played wide receiver for Oregon from 2004 to 2008, was one of the players involved in the design meetings. Van Horne says Williams enjoyed the design aspect of the uniforms. After graduating, he joined the Nike staff and now works under Van Horne as a football designer.

More recently, Ducks wide receiver B.J. Kelley joined the collaboration. "It was a pretty cool meeting," Kelley says. "You look at a bunch of different options and all of the

customizations that are possible. You can throw your ideas out there and design something and see how it looks." He notes, "We talked about colors and shoe laces and how big everything needed to be, and the location of the 'O' logo."

"You develop a dialogue with them," Van Horne adds. "You get their insights. We always start with performance. Then, we move into attitude and aesthetics."

The Ducks often get to see prototypes of new technologies first and may test seven different versions of a cleat or glove to find out if it's durable, light and comfortable.

If the Ducks are satisfied with the product, it can be rolled out to other college teams, the NFL and the general public.

Oregon, for example, recently played guinea pig for the entire Nike Pro Combat Series. The lightweight padding allows players to protect themselves without sacrificing performance during non-padded drills. Bellotti suggested the idea when he was coaching at the UO.

"The one thing about Oregon that's great is that we're not afraid to push the envelope. We'll entertain any kind of idea, and try it," Farr says. "Nike knows that, and they're willing to partner with us to give us what they feel is their best stuff."

Now various teams across the NCAA are debuting multiple jerseys and helmets in the same season.

"I believe that we are trendsetters with regards to uniforms. We've worn chrome helmets in the Rose Bowl, and now it's pretty popular," Farr says, a reference to uniforms such as the new metallic helmets with chrome facemasks University of Southern California wore versus Colorado on Oct. 18. "You see five or ten teams with some variation of a chrome helmet."

In 2011, then UO head coach Chip Kelly said in a press release that the Nike-Oregon partnership was the "gold standard when it comes to merging science and innovation with athletic performance." The uniforms that his team wore in the Rose Bowl used a breathable "Chainmaille" mesh and 11 different materials in the jersey and pants.

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