

‘People have expectations about what each uniform is going to be and sometimes that excitement can generate disappointment if you let it.’

— **KENNY FARR**, OREGON FOOTBALL EQUIPMENT ADMINISTRATOR

In the glistening Pasadena sun, the Ducks went on to defeat Wisconsin and earned their first Rose Bowl victory since 1917. Though still not a national title, the win was a huge leap forward for UO.

THE COST OF WINNING

In 2003, the UO signed a seven-year apparel deal with Nike. When that contract expired in 2010, the UO extended it until 2018, a move worth \$22.7 million.

An uncensored copy of the contract was released to *The Oregonian* under order from the state attorney general in response to a public records request. The deal includes \$2.5 million worth of gear per year as well as \$750,000 in cash and \$200,000 in “extra gear.”

This is trumped by Michigan’s contract with Adidas, which is valued at \$60 million over eight years — or \$6 million per year in cash and products combined. Nike pays University of Texas \$5.76 million per year, more than twice the amount given to the Ducks.

But with help from Nike founder Phil Knight, change at the UO was not limited to uniforms. Between 1996 and today, Knight has reportedly contributed several hundred millions of dollars in donations to the UO athletic department. And after the UO announced a fundraising goal of \$2 billion on Oct. 17, more money is on the way.

Knight has signed off as the principal donor for a laundry list of projects including \$90 million in renovations to the

football stadium, \$10 million for the Athletic Medicine Center, \$227 million for the new Matthew Knight Arena and \$68 million for the Hatfield-Dowlin Complex football operation center. Knight also donated to the John E. Jaqua Center for Student Athletes that reportedly cost \$41.7 million. That’s in addition to the \$15 million to build the Moshofsky Center. Since the center’s opening in 1998, the Ducks have won 10 bowl games — only missing postseason play in 2004.

“There might be kids internationally or on the other side of the country that might not be able to point out Oregon on the map,” Farr says. “But they know Oregon because of flashy uniforms.”

That was certainly the case for star running back LaMichael James, who famously told the *Columbus Dispatch* before the 2010 Rose Bowl that the uniforms “get people’s attention” and that he “loved the uniforms” before he got to know more about Oregon’s offense.

James, a recruit from Texas, went on to become a Heisman Trophy finalist while at the UO. Following a loss in the Rose Bowl, under his leadership the Ducks went undefeated in 2010, earning a trip to the 2011 National Championship for the first time in program history.

The Ducks lost that game and they are still searching for their first title. But the team received even more international attention for their uniforms, which this time included “volt” yellow socks, Nike Zoom Alpha Talon cleats and “Win The Day” letters running down the middle of the carbon-fiber helmet.

WHAT TO WEAR NOW

In 2014, with the introduction of the College Football Playoff — the system that decides the national champion for the NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision — Oregon was a preseason favorite to make the cut as one of the final four teams.

UO won its first game in convincing fashion, 62-13, vs. South Dakota State. Oregon defied traditional color codes and wore white at home with a white helmet, a “Mach Speed” white jersey, green apple pants and cleats with white gloves and socks.

In their next game versus Michigan State, with ESPN College GameDay in town and as the game broadcasted on national television, the Ducks wore a “Sonic Boom” helmet, silver and yellow gloves along with a yellow jersey, pants, socks and cleats. Oregon won the game, 46-27, against the reigning Rose Bowl champions. UO went on to debut a black “Mach Speed” uniform versus Washington State during a narrow victory on the road. Oregon reprised its 2013 efforts to raise awareness for breast cancer and the Kay Yow Foundation this season, but the team diminished championship hopes after losing to Arizona on Oct. 2 while wearing pink uniforms at home.

Now that the Ducks uniforms have been in the national spotlight for a few years, it would be easy to assume challenges in finding new design combinations. But for inspiration about what to do next, Van Horne simply plans to touch base with the Oregon players.

“Players aren’t bound by anything,” Van Horne says. “They want to set the stage of the next great thing at this university.”

“I think more importantly than the uniforms, if you’re winning games, our fans are happy with whatever we’re wearing,” Farr says.

The jury is still out about whether this season will be remembered as the year the Oregon Ducks win their first national championship. With Mariota on the field, it’s certainly possible, regardless of what he’s wearing. ■

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