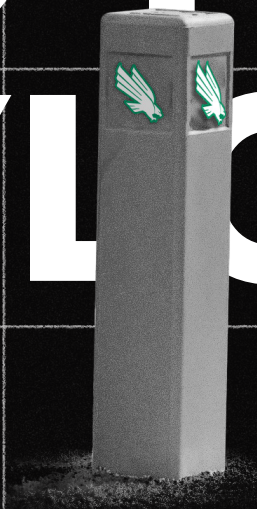


DIVING TO THE PYLON



OR THE DRAWN OUT PROCESS OF DESIGNING COLLEGE FOOTBALL UNIFORMS

Houston Mark



DIVING TO THE PYLON

OR THE DRAWN OUT PROCESS OF DESIGNING COLLEGE FOOTBALL UNIFORMS



Houston Mark



To Brian, Brandon,
my mom, and my dad.

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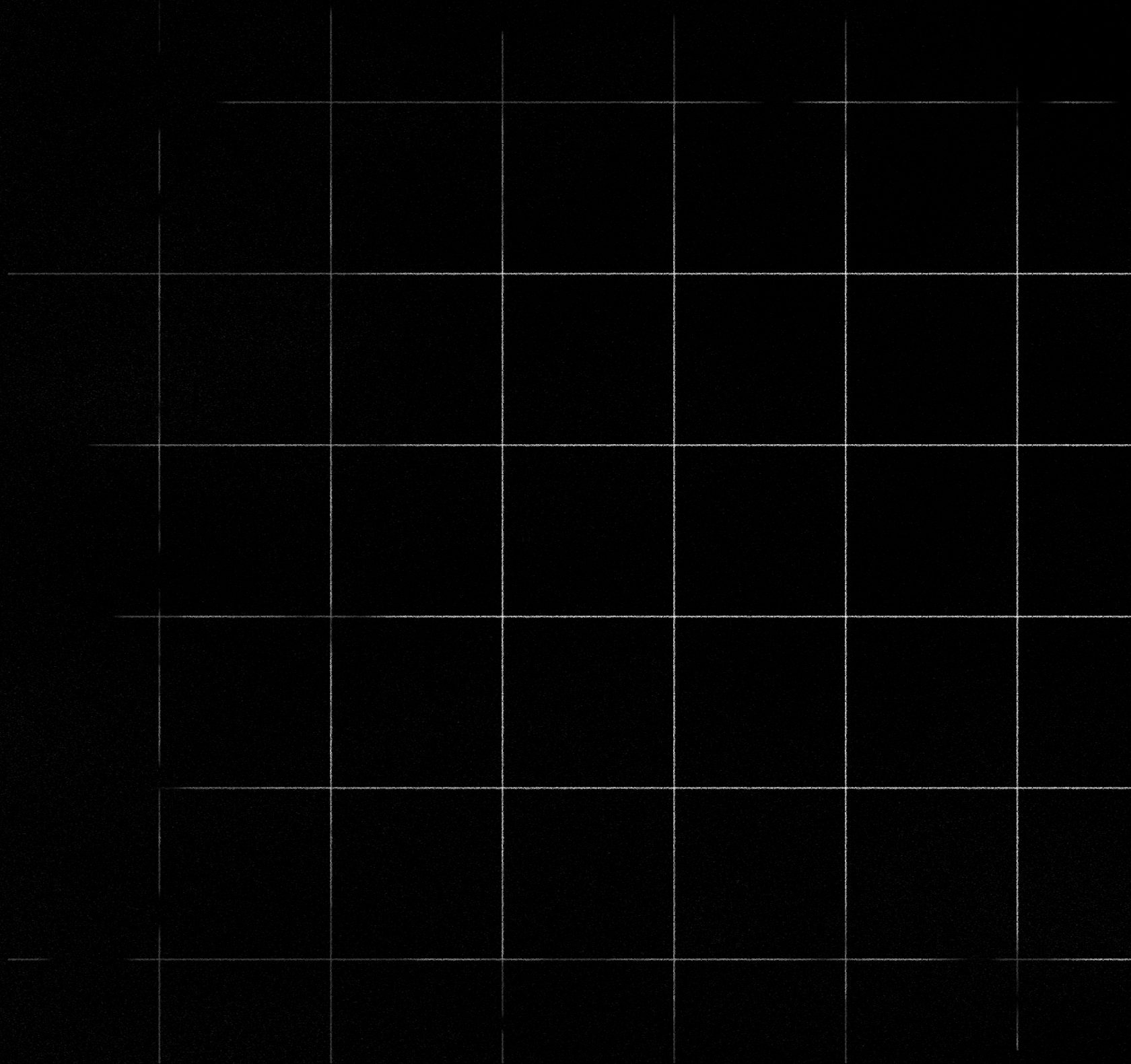
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INTRODUCTION



Why is this a book?

Community fascinates me. The way that people organize and how their values are affirmed and reshaped by organization is what is necessary to understand ourselves. We all pick paths that define our values and the people around us can play a large part in how we construct our identities.

My dad introduced me to football early on. The game is ubiquitous in Texas, reaching from the far flung towns of Laredo and Brownsville and into the tightest urban cities. Where there’s lines, where there’s grass, there’s football. It doesn’t matter if it’s a parking lot where the strip mall encases the ground like a jewel box, or the ranches where the tall grass reaches to your knees and the sky is infinite, downs are always four and points will always come in six. Where I’m from, the people were without their golden calf. No one was a Texans fan while I was growing up in Houston. They were simply too new, with the Oilers leaving a few years before and a prophet who had yet to come. We were all introduced to the game by other means, whether that be another NFL team adored by transplants in town for oil, or in my case, college.

College football is a hellscape at the moment, but there will never be another atmosphere like it in sport. Community, in a very literal sense, comes from pride in futility

for all but the luckiest of fanbases. Nowhere does this reality become more present than College Station, home of Texas A&M University. It seems like every year the hope is extinguished fast, a pariah always to be found, and just enough time for the delusion to set back in. This past year, the school just paid seventy-six million dollars for someone to *not* coach their football team. God just can’t seem to spend enough money to save them.

My story can be written as mythos, as can a lot of Aggies, but as much as many of them it would be a lie. I wasn’t swaddled in maroon, my first words weren’t “Gig ‘Em” or “teasip”, and I wasn’t born with the inherent knowledge of the Revellie or midnight yells. I just grew up watching them on Saturdays, and from there they became community. My attachment grew as unconscious choice after a conscious action of my dad turning on the TV. It simply gave us a couple hours to spend time together. For him, it was his dad and John David Crow. For me, it was him and Johnny.

Before I decided on North Texas, my only thought was that I would go to A&M. I figured that they had a good enough architecture program, and I could have spent my time looking at buildings and infrastructure and things of the sort, but my passion

always lied with football. I see value in how it brings people together and what it represents, and nowhere is that more clear than in its visuals.

Uniforms are identity made manifest. The new age of uniform design has proliferated up and down the sport, seen with schools like Texas A&M. Their uniforms received an update right as I was getting into college football, and from there I realized that these sports clothes were used as communication. Indeed, this was the case. The Aggies were moving to a new conference and attempting to shed the perception that followed the program over the previous three quarters of a century. Every alternate and throwback was meant to say to the audience, “we see you, and we’re going to beat everything in our way.”

Whether we like it or not, players move on and buildings look different after a while, but the television will still show me my team in green and white.



My trade, and ultimately this book, is about community. To be more specific, it’s about how to represent community. Uniforms become what we grow attached to. Whether we like it or not, players move on and buildings look different after a while, but the television will still show me my team in green and white. Though the jerseys themselves remain static, the connection that we hold for them is reliant on who is wearing them and that they do while over pads. The uniforms on our favorite players are meant to both inspire themselves and us to be proud of our community. My jobs as a designer is emphasize the values and relationship between the team and fans.



So what is there to prove?

I don't know. Seriously, I don't. I wish I could simply understand the rules of what I'm doing and the manner in which design is structured. There are plenty of people that will narrow things down to hierarchy, scale, color, contrast, line, weight, shape, whatever. It's a fair enough assumption that these things are true, but I can't seem to move away from vibes. The success or failure of a designer is predicated on their ability to move from the nebulous and into the concrete. Concrete concepts lead to a clear visual language, one that is visually sound, present to the viewer and can be easily understood. It's hard as a designer not to be an artist, because there's often so much to say with work that we create. But there is never not an opportunity to use our language to communicate.

That being said, vibes don't make this easy. None of this is easy. If it were easy, just about any random person could design an NFL logo.

Wait. Shit.

None of this is to say that I haven't seen myself evolve over time. The more that I've done this work in particular, I've begun to pick up on the patterns and conventions that can make a design succeed

and fail. The actual principles of design have begun to more clearly present themselves to me, and from there I've been able to adopt them alongside the stories I wish to tell.

My first uniform I can remember was while my dad was recovering from back surgery, and I wanted to kill some time on a laptop that was far too expensive for an 11 year old to handle. This would dovetail into the next project, and the next, and the next, until I eventually had to increase my onedrive storage to compensate for the glut of designs that I had made over the years.

Each design I have made over the last decade has brought me ever closer to understanding concept as an integral portion of the creation process. Without a solid foundation grounded in an idea, the aesthetics of a design are a meaningless visual soup. The proof of a designer's skill comes from their ability to engineer the visuals back to a central idea, as an essay does with its thesis.



None of this is easy. If it were easy, just about any random person could design an NFL logo.

Wait. Shit.

DUNNING -
KRUGER
CURVE

The Dunning-Kruger Effect is psychological phenomenon of someone with extremely little knowledge overestimating their skill level, with the inverse being true for those with extremely high competence in a specific area. A myriad of explanations have been put forth, but it effectively results in a bunch of people doing stupid shit and thinking it's cool.

2013



2015



2018



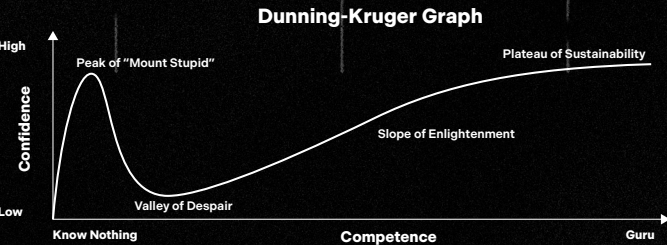
2020



2021



This is a craft, one that takes time and patience to learn. A uniform is a canvas upon which a story is told, and my work is an attempt to create something self-evidently beautiful . The stories I wish to tell should be true and obvious to those who have lived them.



Some Key Terms

Uniforms, like any specialized medium, come with their own vocabulary. Here are some terms that will be used in the book that might prove useful.



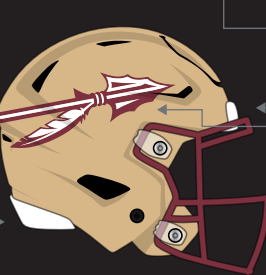
- Collar
- Chest Logo
- Maker's Mark
Nike, Adidas, Under Armour
- Front Numbers



- Nameplate
Usually extra stitched cloth
- Name-on-Back
NOB
- Number-on-Back
#OB



- TV Numbers
Also on sleeve caps
- Sleeve caps
Stripe design on sleeve
- Sleeve cuffs



- Helmet Bumpers
Usually features wordmark
- Helmet Decal
Either logo or branded design
- Facemask

Uniforms shown on Nike Mach Speed Template

A Brief History

For the astute viewer, a uniform template is perhaps the most important basis for design. Greater than any one element, the template is the deciding factor of what is capable to implement. Its seams can offer freedom or limit the designer, whom has to delicately balance the vastness of ideation with the nature of construction. Nike the most important force in uniform design, redefining the medium with the Oregon Ducks in 1998. Over the course of the last 25 years, Nike has made immense strides in both materials and the uniform design itself, pushing what is possible with a jersey. After over 15 years of fiddling, Nike landed on the Pro Combat line in 2010, which pushed the absolute limits of what fans were willing to put up with on a jersey. The gaudy designs were made for the purpose of exploring, and the template offered variety and much-needed ingenuity. The template didn't come without its fair share of problems, however, as it was maligned for a noticable reflective seam on the oversized collar known as 'flywire', and often featured discoloration from sweat on alternating panels due to the different materials used.

The successor in line for Nike, the Mach Speed, incorporated mesh fabric down the center of the chest to hug the player's shoulder pads and new machine-cut perforation on specific cut panels to increase the jersey's breathability. While the Pro Combat was worked on for the pros, with the subsequent Speed Machine, Hypercool, and Elite 51 uniforms becoming mainstays in college football, the Mach speed was a harder sell. Its odd shoulder caps and inadequate pants design left the door open for an heir to the uniform template throne.

Simply Untouchable

When it was debuted with Oregon ahead of the 2015 Valero Alamo Bowl, the Nike Vapor Untouchable immediately set the standard for what a uniform template should be. The jersey felt like a throwback to the days of durenne, the woolen material used before nylon, with its simple silhouette and minimal seams. The collar was once again back to a normal size, with a new connecting mesh that offered the player breathability. The template would catch on early in the college ranks, with most major programs making the switch in 2016. Nike created a modified version later that year for lower-level programs, with under-the-jersey stitching and larger flatter sleeve caps to help the uniform stay onto the shoulder pads while being made with lower quality materials. The NFL adopted the template in 2017, making it the undisputed king of football uniform templates.

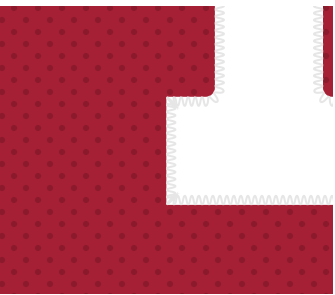
A False Prophet

The Nike Vapor F.U.S.E debuted with Oregon in 2019 to mixed reviews by those in the industry. The streamlined design of the VU was gone, and replacing it was a template that looked to be made specifically for that year's Ducks design. Four large side panels with diagonal stitching replaced the single seam on each side of the untouchable, and the new collar featured an angled and shield-like design for a more armored look. Total overall panels jumped from 8 to 17 with the update, and the collarbone stitch reached into where numbers are traditionally placed. For these reasons, it's widely regarded as a step back in both aesthetics and function. So, I will not use this template for my project and stick with the VU.

Vapor Untouchable — 2022 Oklahoma Sooners Home Jersey



Vapor F.U.S.E. — 2023 Oklahoma Sooners Home Jersey



Perfect Perforation

Nike's practice of innovation was present on the untouchable in a big way, with laser-cut perforation built into the jersey's front panel. The feature created breathability while minimizing seams, letting the jersey move with the athlete.

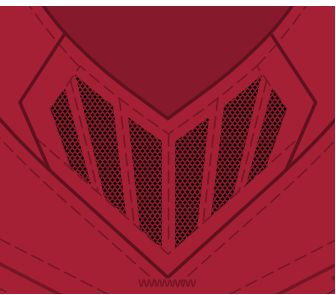


Into The Seams

The Vapor Untouchable has just 2 seams for the entire body, making the cut both versatile in design and player movement. The less restrictive design was adapted to the high-flying style of football entering all levels of the sport.

Looking Sharp

The collar of the Untouchable was replaced with this detailed design for a more aggressive look. However, it also overpowers many elements of actual design and takes focus away from the team's brand identity.



Get Low, Low, Low

The extra seam below the neckline causes problems for placement of both patches and numbers. The patches have to move up near the shoulder while the numbers are moved to an uncomfortably low position, forcing unbalanced space.



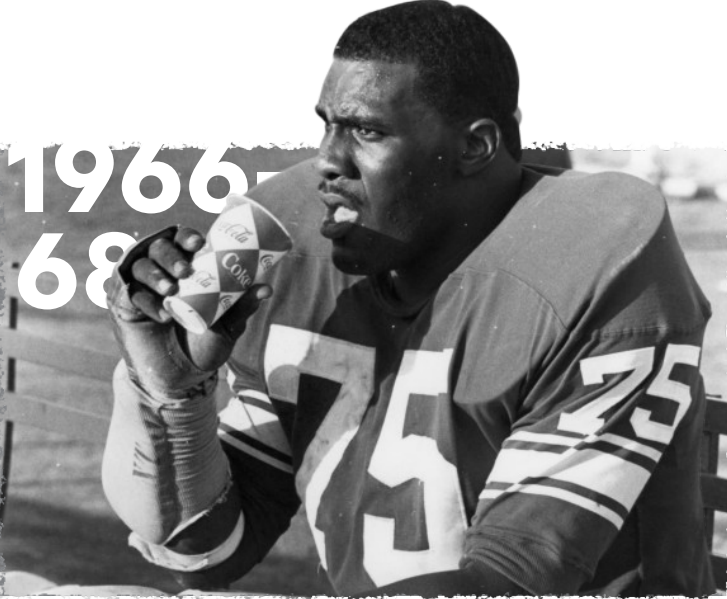
DENTON, TX

FOUNDED 1890

ALL-TIME RECORD: 541-541-33

NORTH TEXAS MEAN GREEN





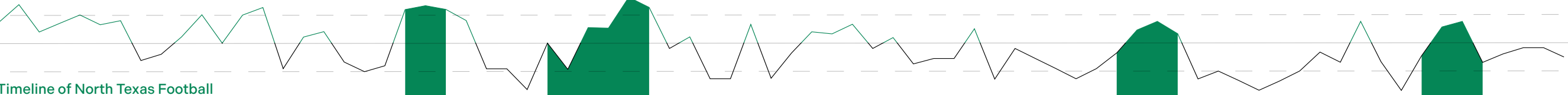
“Mean” Joe Greene

A legend of both the school and football itself, Greene is one of three UNT All-Americans. Drafted 4th overall in the 1969 NFL draft, He went on to earn 4 Super Bowls and 6 All-Pro selections as one of the greatest players ever.



Hayden Fry

The Hall of Fame head coach led North Texas to their only AP top 25 finish and a 9-2 season in 1977, giving life to a program right before their eventual demotion to I-AA a few years later.



Timeline of North Texas Football
1950–Present (Solid line is .500)



Can’t Write a Better Script

The school’s history of helmets often mimicked their logos, except for a peculiar oddity in the early 2000’s. In 1998, coach Darrell Dickey entered Denton inheriting a squad that was desperate to find a sense of identity. Behind their coach, the Eagles went from a team without a bright spot on the field to stellar units on both sides of the ball. Luckily, the change can

be seen visually as well, as their new Eagle logo and branded typeface disappearing completely from their helmet. The “North Texas” script was completely out of left field, but immediately signaled success for the program. During the script logo run, UNT saw four straight conference titles and multiple defenses cracking top 10 in the nation.

Craig Jones

Known as “the Hitman”, Jones was the anchor for a ferocious Mean Green defense in the Sun Belt Conference, ending his tenure as UNT’s career tackle leader, four straight conference titles, and a victory in the 2002 New Orleans Bowl.



Consistent Inconsistency

UNT’s history can only be described as directionless. The original kelly green and white has varied over time, with moniker of “Eagles” replaced not just once but twice over their 113 years of athletics. Even the existing brand identity, introduced in 2005, has featured color oddities over the years, used both with and without black. The existing font is something of an oddity amongst universities. Introduced in their 2005 overhaul, it’s not quite academic nor athletic, and features a lot of ligatures that wouldn’t read naturally out of system. The uniforms vary across eras as well. Coach Hayden Fry, highlighted

in the graphic to the left, changed the school’s colors to a lime and forest green during his run at the school, starting a tradition of each coach trying to make a discernable look for their time in charge of the program. New Head Coach Eric Morris shifted UNT from the winged helmet look from 2017 to a helmet that has numbers on a side and the Diving Eagle contained in a Texas state outline on the other. The lack of consistency in striping and color leads us to today, where the brand lacks focus or love for what makes the school unique.

Mason Fine

A former walk-on, Fine established himself as the greatest ever Quarterback for the program. The all-time school record holder in passing yards and passing touchdowns led them to two conference championships and four bowl games.



An Absolute Brand Travesty

North Texas has had seven primary logos over the last 55 years. Despite the brand landscape evolving over the past half century and scores of rebrands enacted across the country, UNT still found a way to outpace many. No school in their current athletic conference comes close to variety of design save for Rice, whose football program has needed multiple rebrands to demand relevance.

Interlock NT
1967



Circle NT
1968-1972



Flying Worm
1973-1983



I-AA Era
1984-1993



Transition
1994



I-A Rebirth
1995-2004



Diving Eagle
2005-Present



Stepping on Toes

UNT's identity certainly cannot stand out on the gridiron without a serious re-imagining of their brand. Part of this is understandable; North Texas is a mid-tier Group of 5 program fighting for relevancy amongst other mid-tier Group of 5 programs. There's only so much a limited budget can do to when your manufacturer will not set aside time, money, or resources to help differentiate yourself from your competitors. It's not without a lack of trying, however, that UNT has fallen into this situation. In 2017, the Mean Green were the first to use

a custom sleeve pattern retro-fitted from the Oregon Ducks, which soon became a catalog order. After it was abandoned and reintroduced as the number texture, the design element has yet to be used by another FBS program. This, however, does not overshadow the co-opting of design elements from numerous programs and the limited options of a catalog. Nor can a team establish a brand when encroaching on someone else's color space, which UNT has done after seven different changes to their green and addition of secondaries.

From The Machine

ITC Machine is a block typeface that really exploded onto the sports landscape in the 1990s. The Miami Dolphins incorporated it into their 1998 rebrand, while Colorado made it proprietary by slanting it 7°. While the Fins have moved away from their 90's look, the Buffaloes extended the font across all sports. Because of its staying power, designers at Nike have added it to their list of catalog fonts, where it's being used by numerous programs. The typeface's rigidity and ubiquity serves a twofold detriment to the North Texas brand, however, as numbers are the primary identifier on a football uniform. Although its slant creates motion to flow with the bird, its hard corners do nothing to fit with the current wordmark.



The Perfect Number (for confusion)

The number 75 holds great significance to both programs. While the number is retired at UNT in Honor of the great Joe Greene, Marshall dedicates it to the 1970 plane crash that killed all 75 passengers.



Where Did You Go?

At one point in time, North Texas had custom numerals on their uniforms. In 2005 and 2006, the Mean Green wore a set that featured their odd new font. It was replaced by a catalog set in 2007 and they haven't looked back.

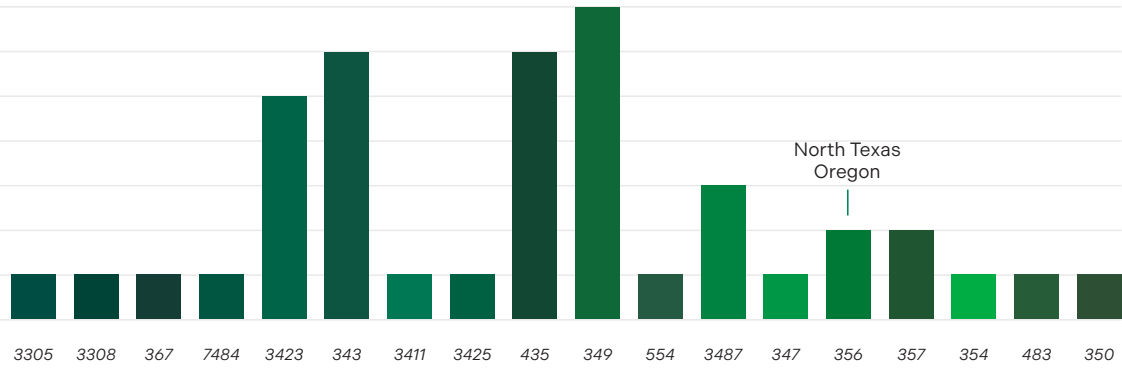


A Herd Mentality

Since the 2005 rebrand reshaped North Texas' visual identity, UNT has incorporated black heavily into their on-field aesthetic. This wouldn't be a problem, save for the Marshall Thundering Herd. They've occupied the Kelly-black-white color space for over 50 years, cementing the combo as the Marshall scheme in college sports. It's truly become the Herd's identity as they've moved up in the sport thanks to the likes of household names like Chad Pennington and Randy Moss. UNT's encroachment has only served the Mean Green's brand harm, as the former conference mates were together for a decade and their records during that time only cemented who was more notable. Many games looked like a scrimmage, and although they've gone separate ways in realignment, the new UNT uniforms' double outline only further puts them into well-sailed waters.



Greens in NCAA Division I



Color Changing Cleats

There are 42 NCAA Division I teams that use green as a primary color, and only one that shares its specific Pantone with UNT. However, it's the University of Oregon. Even those uninitiated with branding know the Ducks to change uniforms, as the pet project for Nike they've been able to create a brand as the "cutting edge apparel team", right down to color changing cleats. However, their apple green has become a fixture of their modern set. Doubling down, the winged helmet became a trend again in college thanks to the Ducks. To get the Mean Green out of the cross-hairs of one of the most powerful brands in college athletics while allowing them to use their signature Diving Eagle, it's necessary to modify the green yet again to something fresh.

356 C



7225 C



Strategy Statement

Assignment

Establish a brand identity for the North Texas football team, rooted in the little historic success that they have, and embrace speed and motion to represent the dynamic nature of UNT.

Key Objective

Focus heavily on typography and classic imagery to build a system that works with the existing logo and wordmark, all while embracing a more pleasing Kelly green.

Considerations

Keep the Diving Eagle
Promotes Brand Consistency

Keep the Wordmark
Promotes Brand Consistency

Embrace Green & White
Establish Unique Scheme

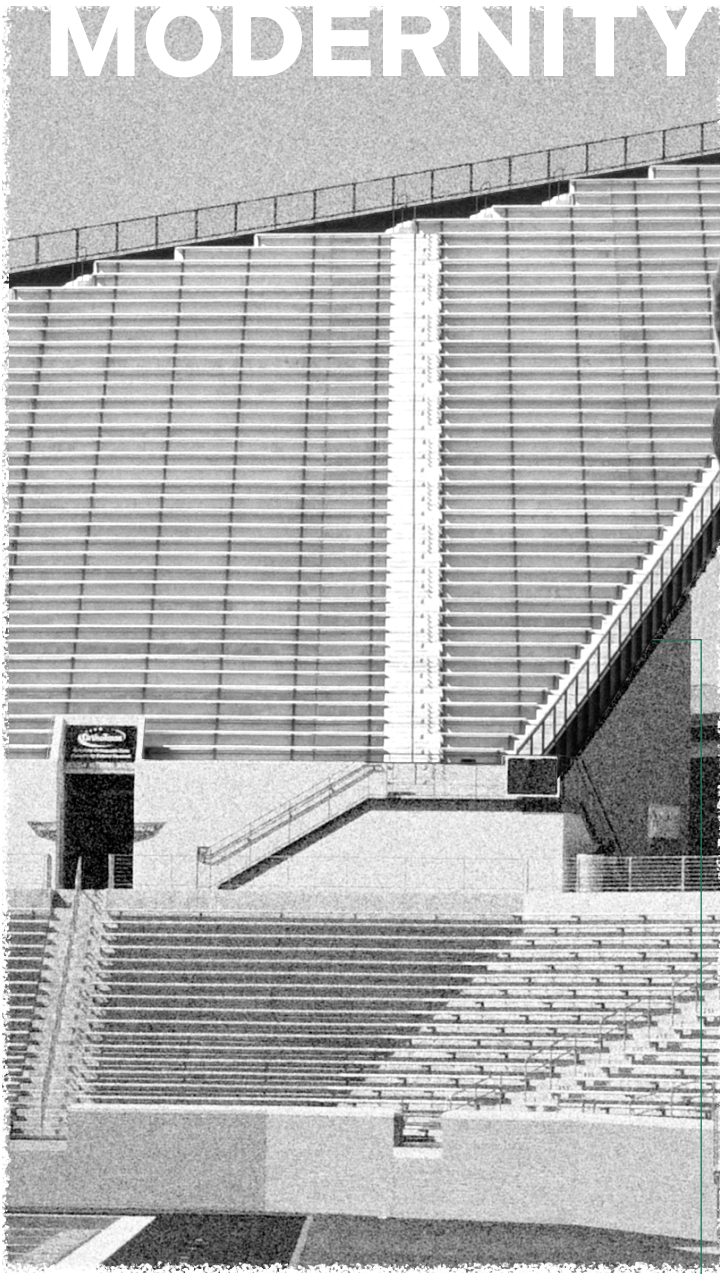
Key Values

Flight
Modernity
Embrace Greatness



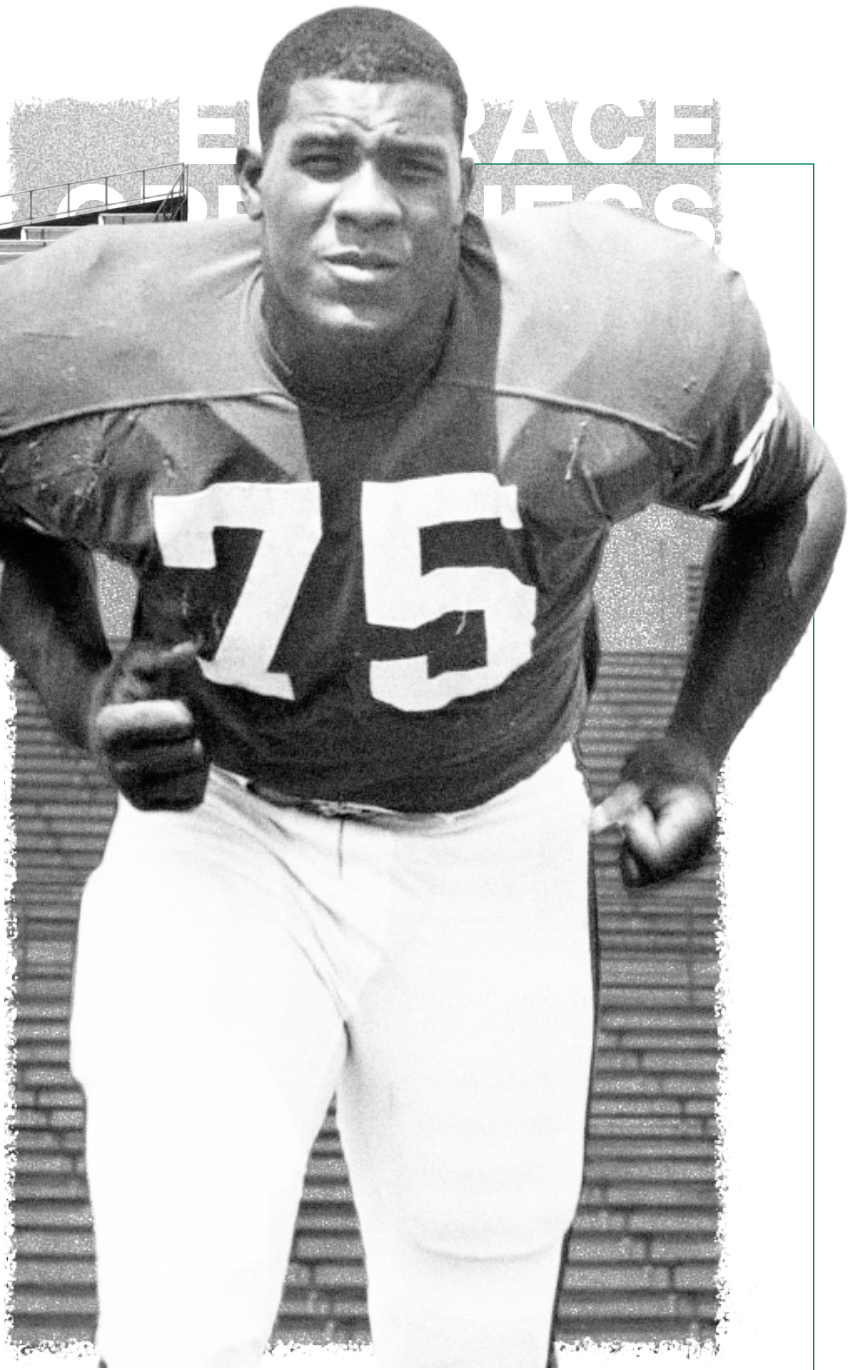
Value 1: Flight

The moniker of “eagles” has been out of the lexicon for most UNT students, but the bird of prey is a constant across campus. It remains the mascot and primary mark of the school, with the statue above, titled “In High Places”, inspires students to soar to new heights.



Value 2: Modernity

Before 2010, the Mean Green played in a stadium on the edge of campus named Fouts Field. They’ve since moved into the brand new DATCU stadium, located across I-35. Their move is emblematic of a new, modern era of UNT, one that needs to embrace its community and unique heritage.



Value 3: Embrace Greatness

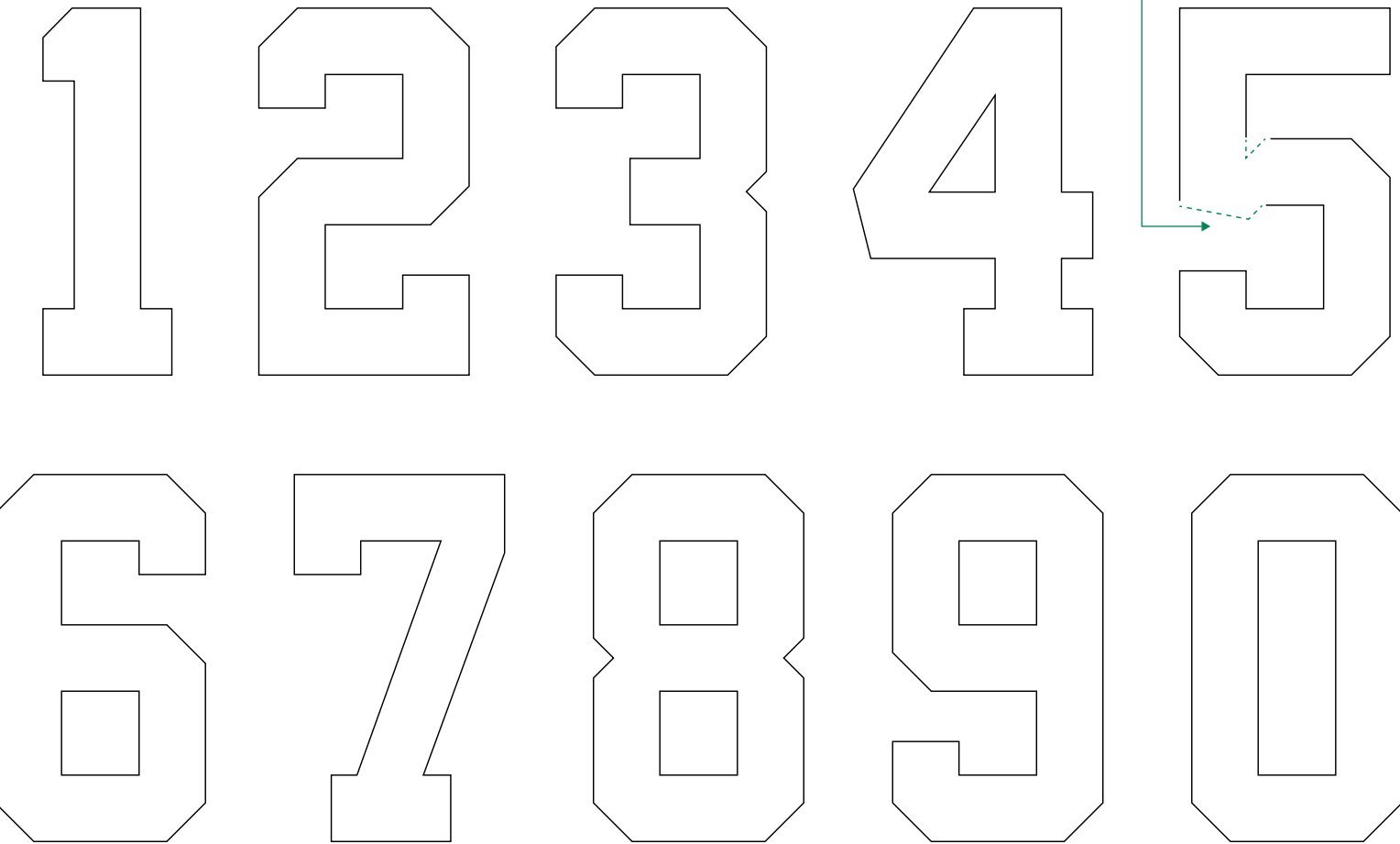
UNT’s rocky football history is littered with great players. The greatest is Joe Greene, the defensive lineman who stands out as one of the great players of all-time. UNT is home to some of the greatest players ever, and the uniforms should inspire those in pads to take pride in the school they play for.

Type for a Change

Neither the current UNT typeface nor vrasity block is a bad solution in a vacuum, but each create problems when on a modern football uniform. The solution is to choose what works from each to create an entirely new set, one that looks towards the future of college athletics and the value of a unified brand system.

Notched 5

The block font to compare against is the set of numerals used from 1960 to 1972. A closer look reveals a notch on the 5. Although common for its time, this quirk was off UNT's uniforms by 1975 and out of fashion in the modern game. Incorporating this hold a direct nod to the past.



Slanted Serifs

Motion and speed are key elements of modernity, and the vertical UNT typeface adds a dimensionality that evokes these feelings with slanted serifs. The additional elements of the set compliment the Diving Eagle logo, where sharp points and smooth curves evoke flight.

Connected Letters

Ligatures are a key component to any solid typeface, but the North Texas wordmark takes this up to 11. The O, R, and T all connect, as do the X, A and S, which creates motion and dynamic composition through type. This won't be possible with numbers, however.

Calligraphic Touch

The sign of a typeface that's well designed is knowledge of pen rules. The font isn't simply designed as a monoweight set, as the spine of the S clearly shows. It's created with a strong basis in classical type, and the final numeral set will merge this with a classic block.

FINAL NUMERAL SET

TO THE 15

1 2 3
4 5 6
7 8 9
0

Angled Serifs

○ Serifs are the most common staple of a textbook football typeface, and that is no different here. However, the serifs are angled with intention of more directly communicating with the existing UNT typeface, making the number set click with the current identity of the school.

Flags

○ The flag is a somewhat common term in typography to delineate the end strokes of a numeral that don't curve inward. The flag is used here on the 2 as a nod to the current typeface used in university functions, as well as the 5, as the un-serifed flag is common amongst traditional block.

Rounded Corners

○ Rounded edges are applied to the numbers to showcase modernity and act as a bridge to the existing UNT typeface. However, it does not exist everywhere, such as on the crossbar of the 2 and in the nook of the 3 and 8, which was intentional to nod back to varsity block.

84.78°

Home Uniform Strategy

Helmet	Jersey	Pants	Socks
Green/White	Green	White/Green*	Green



FLIGHT
MODERNITY
EMBRACE GREATNESS

HOME UNIFORM SET
TO THE 10

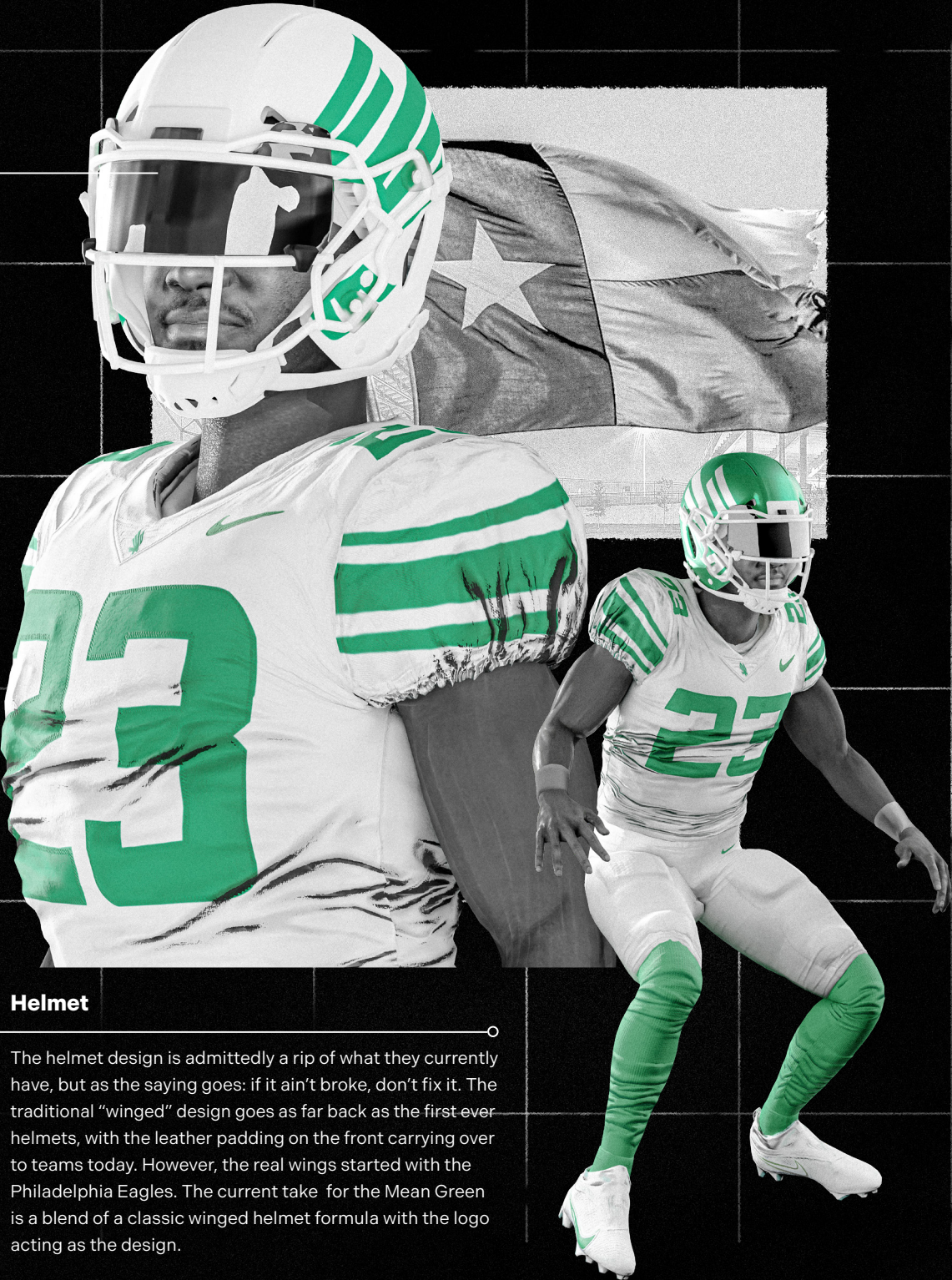


Sleeve Stripe
The sleeve stripe is another modification of a classic football design trope. The Northwestern stripe, named for its place of origin, was used during the Mean Green's run of 1960's success and is featured on many teams uniforms to this very day. This design pairs it with the flight of the modern eagle, conceptually tying back to the original inspiration of a classic uniform and the speed and motion of the existing brand.

FLIGHT
MODERNITY
EMBRACE GREATNESS

AWAY UNIFORM SET

TO THE 5

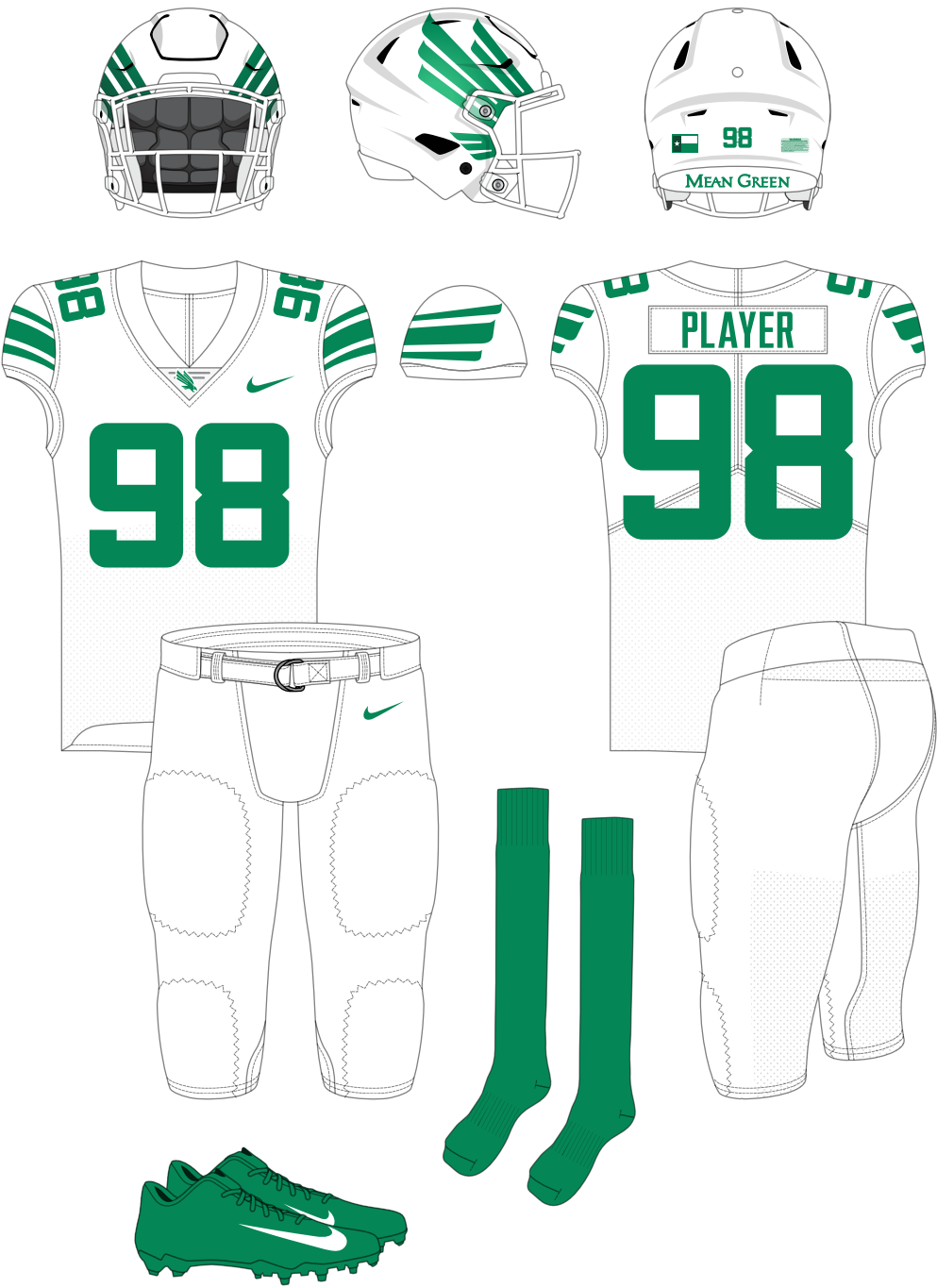


Helmet

The helmet design is admittedly a rip of what they currently have, but as the saying goes: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. The traditional "winged" design goes as far back as the first ever helmets, with the leather padding on the front carrying over to teams today. However, the real wings started with the Philadelphia Eagles. The current take for the Mean Green is a blend of a classic winged helmet formula with the first acting as the design.

Away Uniform Strategy

Helmet	Jersey	Pants	Socks
Green/White	Green	White/Green*	Green



FLIGHT
MODERNITY
EMBRACE GREATNESS

DISPLAY CASE

ENDZONE

Diving Eagle on the uniform

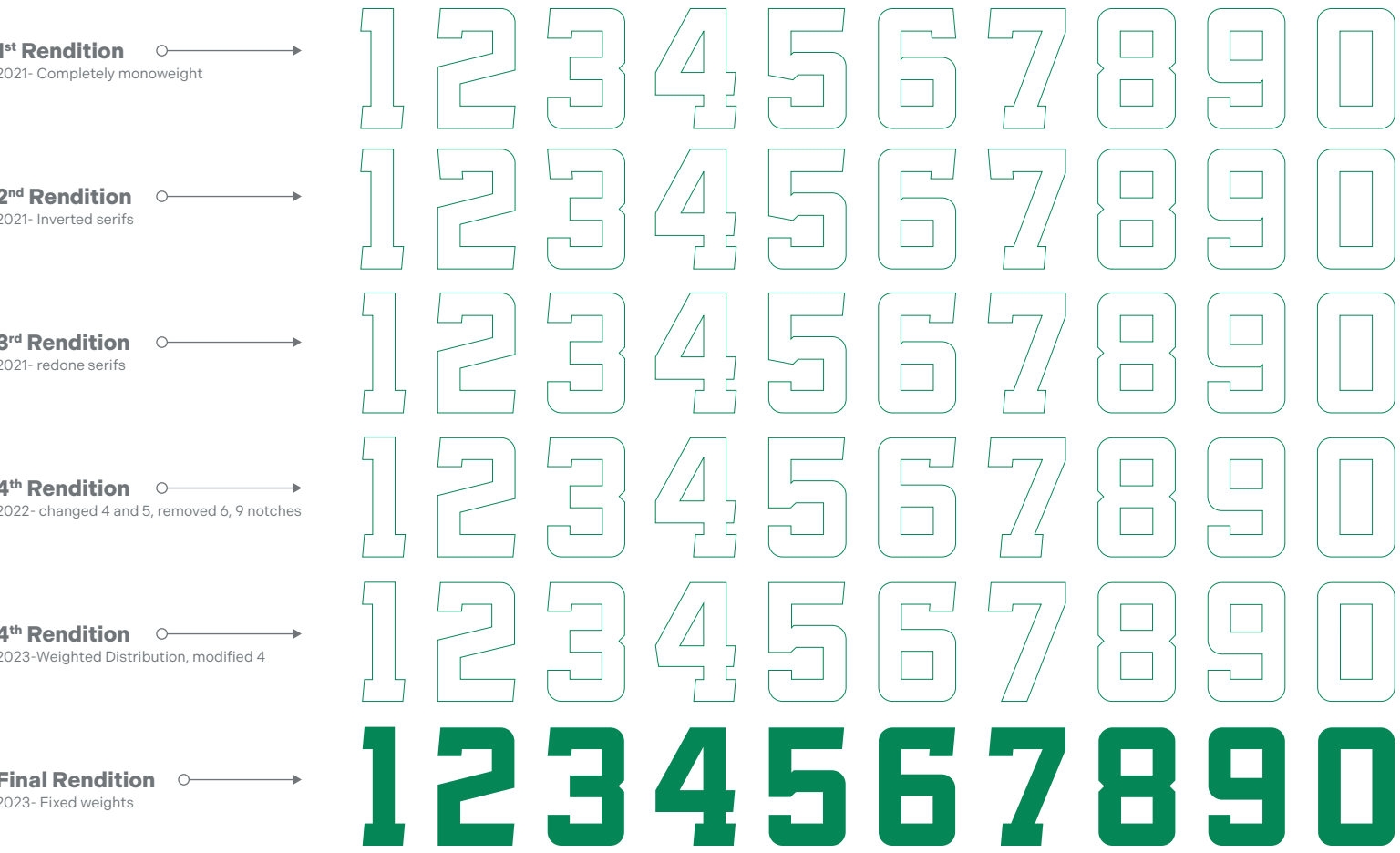
a positive aspect of modern uniform templates comes from the ability to highlight all your brand elements. North Texas has a strong diving eagle logo, and it was important to add this to ensure brand consistency and elevation. For a school without much consistency, it is best to build equity by using your brand elements in prominent places. It also creates a direct connection between helmet and the sleeve stripe without coming across as derivative of another idea.

Back of Helmet

Starting in the 1980's, the North Texas battle flag is a prominent symbol of the school. The recolored Texas flag uses two shades of green, either forest and Kelly or Kelly and lime depending on the version. The former is featured on the back of the helmet, as is the player's number for identification and the "Mean Green" wordmark used by the existing brand. These elements remind players of the traditions they fight for.

CONCLUSION





Iterate or Die

In 2021, I was went through the Sophomore Communication Design review process at UNT. In 2022, I had to do it again.

There were a lot of reasons that I failed the first time, some real and some entirely imaginary, but something that I remember most was the lack of iteration.

Early in a concept, it's important to explore a bunch of angles on approaching a problem. I've had trouble with this from the jump, as when it makes itself apparent, I tend to run with my first concept. Even then, after key concepts are settled upon, it's still important to iterate even more. Just as the first concept isn't the best, neither is your first tight pencil nor vector.

Design is a completely iterative process, and it all starts with the pencil. Sadly, none of my pencil sketches made it into my files, but it's still vital to show that this look evolved from its first iteration. This number set originated as an extended block set inspired by North Carolina and developed into its own combination of both modern and classic aesthetics. The stripe was an initial idea in 2020, then evolving as I iterated, and communicated concept after the project was completed.

This process ultimately could have been more explorative in its helmet and pants treatments, but its top-heavy look ultimately lends itself to the idea of flight, and focuses on the modern nature of the set.

But most importantly, iteration created a unique identity for the Mean Green, as every program deserves to create a brand.

