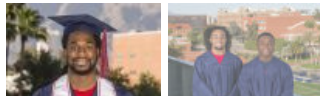




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# Hansen: Caps, gowns trump helmets and shoulder pads

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Arizona athletics

Jonathan McKnight -- Credit: Arizona athletics

December 23, 2014 8:45 pm • By [Greg Hansen](#)

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My favorite photograph of the 2014 football season wasn't Scooby Wright tomahawking the ball from a Sun Devil quarterback or Mickey Baucus caressing the Territorial Cup.

It was a simple image of two UA backup players, safety Blake Brady and tailback Terris Jones-Grigsby, wearing

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cap and gown, not red and blue.

Merry Christmas.

Those who do the finances for the College Football Playoff say Arizona's berth in the Fiesta Bowl is worth \$18 million to the Pac-12, but you cannot put a value on the UA's top football statistic of the season:

Ten Wildcats — boys who became men as part of their UA education — will play as college graduates against Boise State.

Happy New Year's.

Isn't that why they play this game? So that the high school seniors recruited by Arizona in 2010 and 2011 would someday stand on the balcony of the Lowell-Stevens Football Facility, as Brady and Jones-Grigsby did last weekend, diploma in hand?

I don't care if the UA makes two cents at the Fiesta Bowl, but those 10 young men who now have degrees in everything from psychology to finance are proof that it's not about the money or the final statistics.

It's about the cap and gown. It's about life after football.

What a quaint, almost lost, notion.

Here's the stat of the year: Senior cornerback Jonathan McKnight of River Ridge, Louisiana, signed with Arizona in February 2010 and had more staying power than the six men who wanted him to play for their team.

The six who didn't last as long as McKnight: Arkansas' Bobby Petrino was fired. So were Arizona's Mike Stoops, Nebraska's Bo Pelini, Tennessee's Derek Dooley and Ole Miss' Houston Nutt. Washington's Steve Sarkisian left the school at which he asked McKnight to play.

McKnight not only beat the system, he overcame a torn ACL and thrived. He walked across the stage last week to receive his degree in behavioral and human understanding.

How appropriate.

The highlight of Austin Hill's Senior Day at Arizona Stadium wasn't that he was part of a rousing victory over ASU but that he walked on the field having survived a scary concussion and a torn ACL, knowing that sticking it out paid off: He earned a degree in psychology and, more so, was able to cradle his precious 2-year-old daughter in his arms.

Hill Mary?

That play will forever be preserved by a video and by unforgettable memories. What Hill takes away from Arizona is so much more than that.

Jourdon Grandon, who was suspended in the spring of 2012, became a big-play safety, another who survived knee surgery. "He's a good player," UA defensive backs coach David Lockwood said after joining the staff. "But he needs to grow up."



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Indeed, Grandon grew up before Lockwood's eyes. He earned a degree in communications.

More? Brady, a walk-on from Anaheim, California, established an identity on and off the field. He became a special-teams beast. And last week he earned his scholarship in regional development.

Another walk-on, Jones-Grigsby, was academically ineligible when Rich Rodriguez was hired. Jones-Grigsby fought his way back onto the team, survived a position switch and this year scored the deciding touchdown in an epic victory at Oregon.

Try to find a better success story than that.

When the Fiesta Bowl ends next week, Jones-Grigsby will be awarded some Nike gear and his No. 24 game jersey. But the one thing with staying power will be his degree in sports and society.

Until Jared Tevis left Canyon del Oro High School and walked onto campus, paying his own way in hopes of someday getting a chance to play for his hometown school, I didn't think the UA could produce a more inspirational local-boy-makes-good story than Wayne Wyatt.

In 1991, Wyatt departed Mountain View High School intending to play center at Mesa Community College. A week or so before Arizona began workouts, it offered Wyatt a spot on the roster. Five years later, an honorable mention All-Pac-10 center, Wyatt was honored at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City by the National Football Foundation and College Football Hall of Fame. He had already earned a degree in philosophy and four months later completed his UA master's degree in business.

After he got the UA's last available scholarship five years earlier, Wyatt left school with a 3.94 GPA and an \$18,000 NCAA postgraduate scholarship. He used that money to attend dental school in Oklahoma City.

This year, Tevis played as a graduate student. He made 104 tackles. He was, like Wyatt, an honorable mention All-Pac-12 player. Between football practices, Tevis worked toward a master's degree at the Eller College of Management.

I thought of Tevis and his nine fellow graduates — including Fabbians Ebbele, Mickey Baucus and Dan Pettinato — while scrolling through my Facebook account the other day.

On it, Wyatt had posted a holiday photograph of his smiling wife Anita and their six children in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he operates the Wyatt and Flint Orthodontics center.

Wyatt wore jersey No. 61 when Arizona played Miami in the 1994 Fiesta Bowl. I have no recollection of how well Wyatt played in that game, or if he played at all.

But I do remember a 1996 picture of him, in a tuxedo, at the Waldorf-Astoria, a former fourth-stringer who became a team captain and first-team Academic All-American, a success story whose Facebook pictures always seem to involve his happy family.

The Wildcats might lose the Fiesta Bowl next week, but much like Wayne Wyatt, they've already won.

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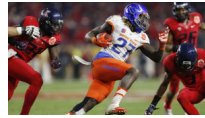
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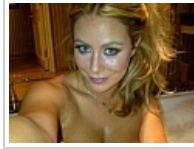


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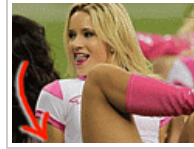
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