

Forever 10

CREATIVE RATIONALE · UW ATHLETICS · 2024-25

Iconic athletes and brands get remembered through a singular mark that serves as a retrieval cue for fans and consumers alike. Michael Jordan has the “Jumpman.” Nike has the “Swoosh.” McDonald’s has the “Golden Arches.” These marks are the visual stimuli that prompt remembrance. When UW Athletics retired Kelsey Plum’s number ten ahead of the 2024-25 season, the campaign needed one too, and it had to be built around the numeral itself.

BACKGROUND

Prior to the 2024-25 Washington women’s basketball season I was tasked with developing the visual identity, art and design direction around UW Athletics jersey retirement campaign for Kelsey Plum. Plum was one of the greatest Washington basketball players of all-time and has had a decorated career in the WNBA and internationally in the Olympics as well. The emphasis of this campaign would clearly be on her legendary collegiate career with the Huskies but also showcase that Plum’s four years at UW was just the origin story before cementing herself as one of the best guards in professional women’s basketball. Following her career at Washington, Plum went on to become the number one overall pick in the 2017 WNBA Draft, a two-time WNBA champion with the Las Vegas Aces, and a two-time Olympic gold medalist, winning in 3x3 at Tokyo 2020 and 5x5 at Paris 2024. She is one of only two players ever to take gold in both formats.

The campaign ran from the November 1, 2024, announcement through the January 18, 2025, ceremony and coinciding game. The identity had to hold across social, print, out-of-home, in-venue, broadcast and licensed retail, a span of about eleven weeks and roughly a dozen applications.

I owned the identity and every graphic application built from it: the primary and secondary logos, the wordmark, the numeral, the typeface selection, the key artwork, and the full run of digital and print layouts.

Looking strictly at Plum’s career with Washington, her status as a Husky Basketball icon is undisputed. She became the NCAA’s all-time leading scorer with UW, scoring 3,527 points (stood until 2024) averaging over 25 points per game for her career. During her senior season in 2016-17, Plum swept all three National Player of the Year awards (the Naismith Trophy, the Wade Trophy, and the AP Player of the Year award). She was the first player in Washington Basketball history to win the three aforementioned honors. Furthermore, in her junior season, Plum guided the Huskies to their first ever Final Four appearance. Seven seeded Washington upset two seed Maryland (Plum scored 32 points, recorded seven assists and played all 40 minutes),

three seed Kentucky and four seed Stanford. Throughout the tournament run she averaged over 24 points and five assists per game.

Plum's name is synonymous with greatness in the world of University of Washington athletics and given the nature of the campaign being a jersey number retirement ceremony and celebration and the initiative being dubbed "Forever 10," I wanted to ensure the number ten was treated as an iconic cornerstone throughout the campaign. When you think of icons in basketball the prototype examples are Michael Jordan and LeBron James on the men's side and Diana Taurasi and A'ja Wilson on the women's side. From a personal branding standpoint Air Jordan has to be the most iconic. The "Jumpman" pose became a representation of Jordan's style of play high-flying, flashy, yet dominant simultaneously. The Air Jordan logo communicates athletic superiority reinforced throughout Jordan's illustrious career and more specifically the free throw line dunks in the 1987 and 1988 NBA All-Star Dunk Contests, which earned back-to-back victories.

FINDING THE DEFINING ELEMENTS AND BUILDING THE BRAND TOOLKIT

Using Jordan as an example, I needed to find what defined Kelsey Plum's personality and style of play on the court during her time with the Huskies. Looking at her game, how she scored the bulk of her points, tallied high assist numbers and put pressure on a defense, it was apparent Plum's relentless finishing ability at the rim stood out the most. Whether it was a coast-to-coast drive to the rim followed by scoop-style layup, a drive followed by a pump fake and subsequent finish, or a drive into the paint and dishing to one of her teammates, the intense, rapid, downhill drive to the basket was the foundation of her skillset and what opposing teams and players feared the most when facing her.

The other characteristic that became synonymous with Plum and added to the legend of her iconic downhill drive and finishing ability was her slicked-back ponytail. As quick as Plum was able to get to the basket, the only thing that was separated from her body during the fluid motion of her downhill drive was the thick, braided ponytail that flew behind her like a contrail from a jet.

With these two foundational visual pieces in mind, the hard downhill drive to the basket and the slicked back, braided ponytail, the direction I knew I wanted to go visually married the iconic nature of her number ten jersey with a silhouette that accurately portrayed the drive with the ponytail. The basketball example consistently in my head throughout the process was Jerry West's silhouette in the NBA logo, though I knew that the number ten had to feel just as if not more prominent given the premise of the campaign as a jersey retirement and the emphasis on the number in the name "Forever 10."

The numeral came from Plum's own era

After experimenting with different athletic-style numerals and sorting through imagery of Plum driving to the hoop, there was one last element that defined the era in which Plum played during her collegiate career. In the mid 2000s the Huskies debuted a more rounded “bubble” variation of their numerals, rather than the traditional sharp block font that exists today. The rounded variation stood out and was controversial among fans, contrasting heavily with the primary “Block W” logo. After abandoning it for a traditional, more angular typeface in 2009, the mid to late 2010s, including Plum's era from 2013-17, were defined by a sleek compromise between sharp and bubble style numbers. The tall, thin numerals were strictly geometric in the angular style inside the number while the outside edges featured rounded corners, giving the typeface both a traditional and modern, aerodynamic feel. The font was a part of Nike's “Hyper Elite” basketball line and accurately represented Plum as an athlete.

The ten in the mark is that numeral itself, pulled directly from the uniform set rather than redrawn. The cornerstone of the campaign is a piece of the jersey being retired. Everything else in the logo was built on top of it and around it.

Although the mid 2000s bubble style felt too cartoon-like for fans, the rounded outer caps of Nike's “Hyper Elite” basketball line unveiled in the mid 2010s still provided a glimpse of that visual contrast with Washington's “Block W” logo that became a visual identifier during Plum's era at UW. Instead of fearing that visual contrast, I wanted to lean into it so that I could create an identity where the ten could stand alone as a visual retrieval cue but also contrast with the downhill angular nature of Plum's downhill style of play.

What I ruled out

The first drafts pulled the numeral from the uniform set Washington redesigned in 2019, paired with Gotham Condensed Bold for “Forever.” Both were wrong for the same reason. The 2019 numerals are strictly geometric with hard corners, and nothing in them softens into the silhouette the way the rounded outer caps of Plum's era do. More than that, putting a current numeral on a retirement for someone who played in a different era mixes the two. If the number was going to be the cornerstone of the campaign, it had to come from her time at Washington rather than from the uniform hanging in the locker room now.

The silhouette had the opposite problem. In the early version she sat over the numeral at nearly full height, and the two fought: her body ran straight through the zero and the ten stopped reading as a number. Scaling her down and moving her off the numeral resolved it. The silhouette brings the drive to life, and the ten keeps the job it was built for.

I wanted the numeral ten with the geometric inner corners and sleek rounded outer corners to stand alone in all logos, marks, and as a design element in campaign artwork. With the slight round in the corners in the numeral, I wanted to choose a font

that could contrast heavily to the roman-like numeral and create an angular feel, creating movement and accurately represent Plum's downhill drive. That typeface was Legacy, which carries its own slant, with the Industry family running underneath it for subheads and body copy.

Palette

The color palette decision was less around what colors to use as primary and secondary. Those were already set, and have been set, by UW Athletics branding: Husky purple and gold. My focus was creating an aesthetic that would complement purple and gold and allow the focus to be on the repeated player composition of photography used in the hero graphics and beyond.

That to me meant building the primary palette for the hero artwork on white, to allow each of the photos of Plum to stand out, primarily the biggest one in the composition of her looking off camera to the right in her purple uniform. That contrast of the vibrant purple on a white background draws the viewer's eye, and from there the full-color photography from the Olympics, the Las Vegas Aces and WNBA Draft night complements the purple hero photo. Then the iconic downhill drive photo, which the silhouette was built from, breaks the clustered composition and angles towards the main verbiage or logo. In the hero image's case it points towards the Forever 10 logo, and sometimes overlaps it depending on the dimensions.

The white primary background also allowed me to repeat the numeral ten large and in light grey behind the player composition, which reinforces the numeral more so. After that placement the number ten appears four times: once in gold on the large photo of Plum in the purple uniform, twice in purple on the smaller driving silhouette and large within the Forever 10 logo, and a fourth time ghosted in light grey on white in the background of the graphic. The biggest decision was to do the graphics on a white background to maximize contrast with purple, both in the logo and in the large hero image of Plum in a purple uniform. A white background also allows each full-color photo to stand out without having to compete with any other overarching color.

The end result was a brand toolkit featuring a primary and secondary logo, wordmark, numeral and driving Plum silhouette that was utilized not only to build key artwork, social graphics, billboards, Seattle Times print and digital ads, but also show up in-venue in the form of court decals, rally towels, warm up shirts, jersey patches, commemorative banner (showcased behind Plum during her halftime speech), and motion graphics on the video and ribbon boards in the arena.

DEVELOPING THE KEY ARTWORK

Creating the key artwork that would become the primary visual and also serve as a retrieval cue signifying the "Forever 10" campaign had to lean on a handful of the elements mentioned previously. First, the primary variation of the "Forever 10" logo

would be used, which featured the numeral ten with a rounded rectangle cutting through the large numeral, harmonizing it with the subtly rounded nature of the outer corners of the numeral. “Forever” written in the rounded rectangle would create some visual contrast featuring an italic slant, sharper than the numeral, but still feel connected to its rounded nature with subtle rounding on some of the outside edges of the letters.

The player composition used two photos of Plum at the University of Washington. The largest one was a hero pose in a purple uniform, the numeral ten in gold clearly visible across her chest helping highlight the campaign’s connection with the University of Washington’s purple and gold color palette. The second photo chosen was the downhill drive photo, used to create the silhouette in the brand toolkit. This brought the silhouette to life and showcased Plum in her most iconic form driving downhill to the basket. Both UW Plum photos showcase her looking towards the “Forever 10” primary logo, the drive photo being much smaller and overlapping the logo slightly. The rest of the player composition would represent three different parts of her career. A photo of Plum draped in an American flag after winning the gold medal in the 2024 Paris Olympics represents her success internationally, having won two gold medals with Team USA (one for 3x3 in 2020 and one for 5x5 in 2024). Another photo of Plum holding up her jersey after being selected number one overall in the 2017 WNBA Draft by the San Antonio Stars (later became the Las Vegas Aces). Finally, a photo of Plum blowing a kiss to the crowd in game two of the 2023 WNBA Finals against the New York Liberty. The Aces went on to win the championship, securing back-to-back titles in 2022 and 2023. The player composition as a whole places an emphasis on the University of Washington and her illustrious collegiate career while paying homage to her success at the professional level and internationally.

With the player composition and primary logo placed, the last decisions were around background elements. The pattern overlay in grey at a very low opacity, intended to create some subtle texture overlaid on the white background, was comprised of the downhill drive silhouette, the numeral ten and Plum’s signature, creating even more repetition in some of the iconic elements of the campaign. Anchored at the bottom of portrait layouts and in the corner of landscape layouts was the primary UW Athletics “Block W” lockup alongside Plum’s signature. The end result is artwork that feels polished and balanced, allowing space for the photo composition and logo to stand out with supporting elements in the background from the brand toolkit.

HOW THE SYSTEM HELD

The composition held up because the cluster of Plum photos could shift as needed. Sometimes for more portrait layouts the cluster stayed tighter together, and then for orientations that leaned more landscape I could spread out the group of photo cutouts and give more space for each to stand on their own. The large photo of Plum in her purple uniform looking right always anchored the composition layout. Even in a more

landscape orientation the purple photo kind of started the comp, and each photo led to the next, ending in the drive silhouette, which led the viewer's eye to the big primary logo or main verbiage.

As much as I could I wanted to utilize the primary mark to keep the focus on the numeral. The secondary one was utilized more so for merchandise, the microsite and some of the board elements. Animating the silhouette coming together with the numeral ten was part of the motion assets.

The only time I broke it was for the Ballard Bridge billboard, which utilized the wordmark variation with "Forever" written in Legacy and the ten at the end. It allowed me to maximize the size of the logo and simultaneously include a CTA to Forever-10.com underneath it. The cluster of athlete cutouts functioned the same way, and I was able to spread them out a bit to fit the more landscape orientation. But I moved away from the downhill drive silhouette and instead paired the large photo of Plum in purple with another photo of Plum doing a crossover for increased visibility.

The goal for this billboard was for people's eyes to see Plum in purple and the large Forever 10 wordmark and get to the CTA, so I used a purple gradient overlay to do the opposite of what I did on digital. I wanted the hierarchy to be Forever 10, then Plum in purple, then the CTA, because drivers going over the bridge have a smaller viewing window of time to get there. On digital I wanted it to feel iconic, with the focus on Kelsey at UW, yes, but also on all her other accomplishments that have made her one of the more well known athletes in the sport of women's basketball. It adds to her legacy, and honoring that legacy is what the "Forever 10" jersey retirement was for.

IN THE ARENA

I can't speak on the process to get the court decal approved. I wasn't a part of that. The decision I did make was between using the Forever 10 wordmark and the primary Forever 10 mark. The primary mark won. It mirrored the Alaska Airlines Arena logos already on the floor, which made the court feel more balanced, and the wordmark form allows for more visual competition because "Forever" takes up a lot of space horizontally. In the primary mark it's clear that the numeral is the backbone and "Forever" cuts through the center in a more secondary nature.

The ribbon and videoboard motion was produced by our creative video directors from the toolkit.

SPONSOR AND RETAIL EXTENSIONS

Pepsi wanted to be a part of the Forever 10 ceremony, and that collaboration came to fruition in the form of a full arena giveaway of almost 10,000 rally towels with the primary Forever 10 mark and a Block W and Pepsi lockup in the corner.

On the retail side it was unique because the brand kit I developed was just the beginning. Breaking T produced the apparel line, sold through the Husky Team Store and Fanatics, and they used the logo marks as well as the wordmark, really leaning into the secondary Forever 10 mark with the Plum silhouette. But they were also able to build on it, using the numeral with different color variations and the lockup with the Block W and Plum's signature, which anchored every graphic either cornered or centered. They also created one using a vector illustration of Plum and the text "Plum Dawg" with the Block W and Plum's signature. So yes, they utilized it, but it was also riffed on, which I think is what made this toolkit unique.

RESULTS

The hero announcement carrying the key artwork became the campaign's most-seen asset: 458,700 views, 4,800 likes, and 839 reposts on the day of the November 2024 announcement.

Across fourteen tracked posts featuring the designed work, the campaign generated 867,852 impressions, close to 10,000 likes, and 1,534 reposts. Those figures cover X alone. Instagram, Facebook, and Plum's own following are not included, so the real number is meaningfully higher.

The print work earned its own amplification. A journalist's photo of the full-page Seattle Times ad, which ran in the Sunday edition on January 12, 2025, pulled 93,600 views, 2,100 likes, and 199 reposts on its own, outperforming most of UW's native posts for the campaign.

On January 18, the retirement game sold out. 9,294 fans filled Alaska Airlines Arena surrounded by the identity system: the center-court decal, 10,000 rally towels with integrated Pepsi sponsorship, ribbon board and videoboard motion graphics, and the ceremony banner. The game was broadcast nationally on BTN, and a WNBA video post featuring the banner reached another 112,100 views.

One finding worth carrying forward: fan-utility assets outperformed promotional ones. The downloadable phone wallpaper drew 31,500 views and 503 likes, a 1.6% engagement rate against the hero announcement's 1.0%, and roughly forty times the likes of a "Shop Now" post published the same day. Designing something fans wanted to keep moved engagement harder than designing something that asked them to act.

CREDITS

University of Washington Athletics · November 2024 to January 2025

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