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Western Kentucky Unveils New Athletics Logos And Marks

Familiar 'red towel' logo revised and joined by family of new icons in first significant change since 1971.

August 7, 2001

Bowling Green, Ky. – For the first time in 30 years, Western Kentucky University has made a significant change to its athletics logos. The new marks, designed by Rickabaugh Graphics of Gahanna, Ohio, were revealed at a news conference Tuesday morning in the Downing University Center on the WKU campus.

The new-look logos are actually a "family" of marks and icons that can be used in a variety of applications that maintain a coordinated presentation of Western athletics. The family centers on the red towel and symbolizes the long, rich tradition of Hilltopper athletics but graphically takes a major step forward into the 21st century.

"Rickabaugh Graphics had done research for the past 18 months involving hundreds of interviews and dozens of meetings with students, administrators, coaches, student-athletes, retailers, season-ticket holders and members of the regents, advisors and HAF (Hilltopper Athletic Foundation) boards resulting in a new family of marks and logos," said Western athletics director Dr. Wood Selig. "These new graphics carefully maintain the history and tradition of the 'Red Towel' and Big Red while adding new icons and energy to enhance the appeal and recognition of our graphics on a national scale. We anticipate the immediate acceptance of these colorful, vibrant and expressive new marks by Western fans everywhere."

The project has been a cooperative effort between WKU athletics and The Collegiate Licensing Company of Atlanta, Ga.

As has been the case since 1971, the primary athletics logo continues to be the red towel with the letters "WKU", although the new towel is more curved with the letters shown in a modified type face. Among the new logos is a red towel wrapped around an outline of the state of Kentucky with a starburst signifying WKU's geographic location in the Commonwealth. Another new addition to Western's family of athletic marks is a group of various type styles, including a stacked version of the words "Western Kentucky" and the letter "W" in an upper-case block format.

Big Red, the popular mascot of Western athletics, has been a part of the scene on the Hill since 1979, both on the sidelines of Topper events and as artwork representing Hilltopper teams. That graphic has been updated to include the revised Red Towel with the word "Toppers" on it as well as a prominent "WKU" on Big Red's chest.

"When a school has such a rich athletic tradition as Western Kentucky, it is always best to build upon that tradition rather than attempt to create something completely new," commented Eric Rickabaugh, president of Rickabaugh Graphics. "For that reason, the Hilltoppers athletic identity is built upon the foundation of two long-loved and treasured WKU images – the Red Towel and Big Red.

"The two images were given a slightly updated touch to improve reproduction and matched with a new complementary logotype design," he added. "The resulting family of marks is

solidly grounded in the proud past of WKU athletics, but with a fresh, exciting, new vision of Western Kentucky athletics.”

Besides the various logos and marks, two new secondary colors – gray and black – were added to the long-standing WKU color scheme of red and white. Gray was part of the Hilltoppers’ color palette until the mid-1950s, while black is an essential trim color in modern graphics.

Rickabaugh Graphics is one of the outstanding graphic design firms in the nation, specializing in developing visual representations in the world of athletics. The organization has designed graphics packages for a variety of colleges and universities in recent years, including Ohio State, Vanderbilt, Seton Hall, Xavier, Dayton, Drexel and Idaho State, as well as the Big East Conference. And, Rickabaugh has developed marks for several professional sports teams, including those in the National Basketball Association, the National Hockey League and the NASCAR circuit. In addition to that list of accomplishments, icons have also been created for performers in the music industry, including Celine Dion.

Western’s unique “Red Towel” originated with the late E.A. Diddle, one of the most successful coaches in history and a member of the Naismith, Helms Athletic Foundation, Kentucky Athletic and WKU Athletic Halls of Fame.

Through 1,062 Hilltopper basketball games – 759 of them wins, the highest total ever for a college coach at the time of his retirement (and still seventh on that elite list) – Diddle clutched a red towel. He chewed on it, threw it, cried on it, waved it at fans and used it to signal his players.

The Red Towel became synonymous with Diddle and he became synonymous with Western’s outstanding athletic heritage. And, now fans at Hilltopper sporting events wave red towels as they cheer for the “Big Red.”

The concept of WKU’s Red Towel athletics logo was developed by former Hilltopper All-American athlete, head coach and athletics director John Oldham in 1971. Dr. Chuck Crume, a long-time faculty member in the Department of Physical Education and Recreation, and a well known wildlife artist, rendered the original artwork for the Red Towel logo. Since then, the artwork has undergone minor revisions on a couple occasions.

Tuesday’s news conference unveiling was capped off by a fashion show featuring Western coaches, athletes and staff members in apparel featuring the revised and new WKU icons. Merchandise bearing the new Hilltopper marks will be available exclusively at the University Bookstore in the Downing University Center on the WKU campus AND online at www.wkusports.com through the end of the week.