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WKU football

Dressed for success: Tops' Upton Stout building thriving apparel business

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Western Kentucky University redshirt sophomore defensive back Upton
Wayz," featuring his signature paint splatters at Houchens-Smith Stadiur
Ramey/grace.ramey@bgdailynews.com)

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Upton Stout can stroll the Western Kentucky campus on any given day with a good chance of spotting an incredibly familiar piece of clothing on a fellow student.

Those hoodies, T-shirts and other assorted apparel emblazoned with 'Lazy Wayz' you might have spotted on WKU's campus? Those are Stout's designs.

Putting them on teammates, other WKU students and eventually far beyond into the general populace? Stout has designs on that, too.

Stout, a standout defensive back who completed his redshirt sophomore year this past season at WKU, has seen what started as a desire for new look as a high school student in Houston turn into something much more – a burgeoning business that's drawing new customers every day.

Just how far Stout can take it remains to be seen – Guccio Gucci got his start as a bellhop learning his future clients' tastes at London's Savoy Hotel, and we all know how that turned out for the famed Italian designer.

Stout has his own vision for his clothing line, which at present consists of custom-designed jackets, hoodies, hats, sweat paints and T-shirts, with an eye toward expanding into footwear soon.

Stout didn't really plan for this at the start, back when he first put fabric paint to cloth as a student at Houston's North Shore High School.

“Really, not being able to have all the type of clothes I wanted to growing up,” Stout said. “You know, when school comes around you want to go out there with the best clothes on. I got started probably my sophomore or junior year of high school. My birthday is January 9th and Christmas is (Dec. 25), so I wanted to go back to school wearing something nice and I really didn’t get what I wanted to.

“I sold my Playstation so I could go get some shoes and some clothes, so I could get a little bit of change and go to school with something new on. It was really after that when I was like instead of trying to wear other peoples’ stuff I’m going to go find some blanks and put my own stuff on it and have other people wear my stuff.”

Stout’s gone through a couple iterations of his clothing line before settling on the Lazy Wayz brand. He has a longtime friend in Dallas with a graphic design background who helps out with the T-shirts, but the jackets, hoodies and other pieces in his line are strictly handled by Stout.

“When it comes to the jackets and stuff, I’m 100% involved,” Stout said. “I’m going out and getting the jackets, I’m doing the painting – I’m really painting inside my closet at the crib. But when it comes down to to T-shirts, I’ve got my own graphic designer so any type of decisions or ideas I have I just throw it to him and see what he can do.

" ... Every single jacket is a one of one. I know for sure I haven't made one jacket just like another one."

Those custom jackets run for $45 right now and can be purchased with a direct message to Stout's Instagram account for Lazy Wayz (lzywyz). Stout has already shipped more than he can quickly count up, with out-of-state customers included in his clientele.

Spotting his work on campus, even worn by people he doesn't know, is becoming more common. Stout enjoys that, even if he does play it cool when it happens.

"Walking around this campus, yeah, because I really feel like that's where my business really started is the WKU campus with all the athletes wearing it," Stout said. "Now it's like regular people wearing it now ... like I walk around and just somebody wearing Lazy Wayz."

"This is going to be my fallback plan, for sure," Stout added. "After football, while I have my time in the league, I'm going to try and bring my clothing brand up as much as I can and after that I'm going to try and stick with it."

Stout is still focused on his football career and has had an interesting offseason, to say the least.

Following the Tops' 8-5 campaign – after the regular season, but before the Famous Toastery Bowl comeback win against Old Dominion – Stout entered the NCAA transfer portal.

He had put together two solid seasons at WKU, earning CFN Freshman All-American Honorable Mention and and Conference USA Honorable Mention honors in 2022 before putting together another stellar but injury-shortened campaign this past season.

Stout had tried the transfer portal before, coming to WKU from North Texas before the days of NIL and athletic collectives. Despite never having visited Kentucky before his official visit – Dec. 11, 2021 – he committed that day, and later that night the town was devastated by a deadly tornado.

“The coaches were blowing up my phone,” Stout said. “My hosts were Tre Shaw and Davion Williams, so we were in mid-town just cooling a little bit. Then they took me back to the hotel around like 9 and I went to sleep. I wake up and there’s a whole bunch of coaches texting my phone. I’m like, ‘Dang, what happened?’ They were like, a horrible tornado. I didn’t even hear anything. I was asleep the whole time.”

Stout found his transfer options had expanded after two seasons of building a reputation as a tough, sticky cover cornerback that opposing offenses had learned not to throw against – Stout was among the most sought-after players in the portal this cycle.

“I’d say the first time it was more of a rush and I’m just trying to get somewhere,” Stout said. “Before Western Kentucky, I was fixing to go to Montana State ... I’m just trying to get somewhere, honestly. I feel like this time it

was more like how can I get to the next level the quickest or who could help my family, or where can I get these extra resources from? It wasn't really just like the name or they've got this much viewership or this is who comes to the game and all that other stuff. It was more the business side – who can help develop me, who can do this and do that?"

Stout took official visits to Cincinnati, then Ole Miss. Next up was Southern Cal, and Stout thought he might be ready to relocate.

"Really praying to God, that's how I kept my roots," Stout said. "Before I took my trip to USC I was really praying to God to just keep me away from the flashing lights, just show me what I want to see and don't let me get attracted to the lights."

" ... I didn't want to fall in love with the place, I wanted to fall in love with the process."

Stout considered canceling his official visit to Michigan, but decided to go ahead – and nearly ended up in Ann Arbor instead.

"Once I took my Michigan visit, it kind of opened a different (view) to me. I wanted to go someplace to make my mark. All the different players Michigan had, I feel like if I went there I would've had to go there for two years. I didn't really want to do two years. I really wanted to do one, but the type of player I am I don't want to just go do one year and be like, 'All right, you came to play for

Michigan.' I wanted to go in there and leave a mark like Charles Woodson did or somebody else did, and I felt like me coming back here I could leave a mark.

"We played Ohio State last year, with Marvin Harrison, 'the best receiver in the nation,' and we play Alabama this year – 'one of the best teams in the nation' – so I felt like there's really nothing you can tell me with my film that we don't play some of the top people."

Stout was torn between the idea of playing for national powerhouse Michigan for what he envisioned two years, or coming back to WKU with the chance to continue making a major impact for the Tops' defense. Coming back offered the stability of returning head coach Tyson Helton and defensive coordinator Tyson Summers, along with defensive backs coach Da'Von Brown. Heading to Michigan meant joining a reigning national championship team led by head coach Jim Harbaugh – or would have, until Harbaugh left for the NFL to take the job as head coach of the Los Angeles Chargers.

Stout had already made his decision by then – he was coming back to Bowling Green.

"It was honestly that close, it was just a couple things we couldn't get handled so I feel like that was God's sign saying that's just not where you're supposed to be," Stout said. "Looking at it now, that was really God on my side seeing Harbaugh leaving and their DC leaving and the strength coach leaving – that was really the three people I had good relationships beside the DB coach."

Stout is eager to return as a part of WKU's turnover-forcing defense this season. Limited to seven games this past season, Stout totaled 29 tackles. He had his second career pick-six for the Tops with a 53-yard interception return for a touchdown against Houston Christian, recovered a fumble, tallied eight pass breakups and three quarterback hurries. He think he can do even more next season alongside his teammates on the defensive side.

"I feel like the defense can do a lot," Stout said. "I feel like the sky's the limit. It's just about the people we brought in, like can you buy into the process, can you do the extra stuff, can you stay after? But other than that, I feel like we're going to have a solid team just for the pieces we added. Coach Summers coming back for his third year, to me I feel like that's really rare with a DC like that – after the stats you put up two years in a row, you're still staying here after that. I feel like that shows the type of defense we're going to be this year."

Football is plan A for now, with Lazy Wayz a fallback option that Stout is determined to make work. Building his brand is a daily process, and much of take growth is taking place right here.

"I love Bowling Green," Stout said. "If I could do it all again, I would come here before I came to North Texas just because of the amount of love coach Helton and the people in Bowling Green have shown me."{&end}

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