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# MIZZOU

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## Detail man

Story by Lisa Groshong | Photography by Rob Hill

Equipment failure is not an option for Don Barnes.

The coordinator of athletic equipment for Tiger teams has built a career out of making sure everything works like it's supposed to. If Barnes had been in charge of Janet Jackson's costume for the 2004 Super Bowl, the phrase "wardrobe malfunction" may never have been invented.

Barnes has spent eight seasons with the Tigers, toiling in relative obscurity. "There's no glory in this position," says Barnes, who nonetheless takes pride in knowing he influences the outcome of games.

"I've known we've made a difference," he says. Barnes spends every home and away football game at the end of the bench, manning five trunks of gear, tools and spare parts — everything from duct tape to wrenches to spare jerseys. Four years ago during a game against Colorado, running back Zach Abron ran off the field with a bent face mask. "Two plays later, we had it fixed," Barnes said. "He went back in there and scored a touchdown."

Barnes provides Tiger athletes with every possible advantage when they step on the field, from shoes to warm-up suits. "We'll give a player a new pair of gloves for every game," he says. The



Tiger equipment manager Don Barnes organizes MU football gear in custom-built GearBoss modular storage units. The carts roll right into a 48-foot tractor-trailer. Barnes' department provides for Mizzou's 20 intercollegiate sports, handling everything from golf balls to leotards.

football team spends about \$15,000 a year on gloves alone.

But it's not just football: Barnes and his staff provide equipment — everything from golf balls to leotards — for all 20 intercollegiate sports. They wash 2,500 pounds of laundry a day, the equivalent of 90 loads at home. When the athletic training center was being renovated from 2006 to early 2007, staffers hauled dirty clothes to a Laundromat. Today, three industrial washers and six industrial dryers handle 225 pounds of laundry an hour.

“Baseball is by far the worst” for laundry, Barnes says, especially when the team plays in states with red dirt. He would prefer they score via home runs rather than steals, which grind dirt into the white uniforms.

Before this summer's NCAA regional baseball games, equipment assistant Matt Inskip used a butter knife and a power sprayer attached to a gallon jug of enzyme stain remover to attack a pair of baseball pants. “Laundry is my life,” Inskip says.

But football is the focus of the equipment room, from the rows of shiny helmets — Barnes replaces the decals before every televised game — to the wall of historical photos, including one of Tiger football players crowded around President Harry S Truman in the White House in 1948. About 60 percent of the athletic department's \$43 million budget comes from football, and the money is allocated accordingly. “This is a business for us,” Barnes says. “We're in the entertainment industry.”



Barnes maintains a collection of historic photographs and uniforms. Shown here are an early football uniform, left, and more modern version.

It's a high-stakes industry that requires major logistics. “My mistakes are not cover-uppable,” Barnes says. That's why “we try and overprepare for any possible scenario.”

Barnes and his crew pack a 48-foot tractor-trailer for away games, rolling custom-built GearBoss modular storage carts from the equipment room onto the loading dock. They prepare for any type of weather and every potential calamity. And like any family on a road trip, they also plan for trips to Wal-Mart. Barnes usually swings by for gum for the athletes. “It helps calm their nerves,” Barnes says. The players favor Juicy Fruit.

On game weekends, the equipment staff spends six hours on Friday and four hours on Saturday morning setting up. “Game time is the calm before the storm,” he says. If the team loses, they can load up and head home in as little as 20 minutes. No matter what time they arrive back in Columbia, Barnes and his crew start the washing machines.

“We work 100 hours a week from August until the season ends,” Barnes says. And although he loves being part of a winning season, bowl play extends Barnes’ work year and takes away from his family time.




Sometimes he manages to mix the two. In December 2006, Barnes traveled with his wife and four children, all under 12, to El Paso, Texas, for the Sun Bowl. They left the day before Christmas. In addition to helmets and uniforms, Barnes loaded up gifts and a full-sized Christmas tree to make sure Santa could find his kids.

So does he always work his organizational magic on family vacations? “Absolutely not,” Barnes says. “I’m just the opposite. I have enough trouble packing for myself. I do it all here.”

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