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## Vandal fans trade paper bags in for hats, shirts

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By Joel Mills of the Tribune

Retailers report increase in sales after winning season



New Vandal gear from the recent Humanitarian Bowl win is available at the University of Idaho bookst... Barry Kough / Lewiston Tribune



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MOSCOW - With the success of this past football season, Vandal fans were finally able to trade the paper bags over their heads for T-shirts, hats and sweatshirts proudly emblazoned with logos of silver and gold.

The team notched its first winning record and bowl game win in more than a decade. Last week Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter came to town and declared Jan. 23 "Vandal Football Day." On Tuesday, Moscow Mayor Nancy Chaney announced "Vandal Football Week," culminating with a parade through downtown Saturday afternoon.

And according to local retailers, winning on the gridiron has translated into a significant increase in Vandal merchandise sales.

"We really started to notice it around October," said Meg Brewington, manager of the Shirt Shack in Moscow. "Our sales really picked up."

Idaho was in the middle of a five-game winning streak, and students, alumni and parents started streaming into the store to snatch up Vandal gear, from shirts to mugs to barbecue aprons, Brewington said.

"We were never open on weekends before," she said. "We started opening on game days because it was worth it. We were making the sales."

Those sales have tapered off since Idaho beat Bowling Green in last month's Humanitarian Bowl in Boise. And the Vandal basketball team's mediocre season thus far hasn't done much to bring back the hot numbers from last fall, Brewington said.

Winter weather hasn't done anything to help business either, she added.

"It's easier to go to the bookstore on campus right across from your classes than to go downtown when it's cold and wet and snowy."

UI Bookstore merchandise manager Shelby Silflow said sales momentum generated by the football team has carried into January.

"We've seen a lot of traffic in the last couple of days, with people picking up their (Humanitarian Bowl) memento shirts or sweatshirts," Silflow said. "Those are doing extremely well. We've been able to ride the wave through December with the bowl game and through this month with the championship merchandise that arrived after the start of the year."

A Boise storefront the bookstore rented for the two weeks before the Humanitarian Bowl also did a booming business, Silflow said.

The bookstore hasn't yet crunched the numbers. But based on her experience Silflow said sales jumped immediately once the team shed its losing ways.

"We really did see an increase with the success that the football team had," Silflow said, noting loyal fans who always buy Vandal gear maybe bought a few more pieces this year. "People were excited to wear the products and were really proud."

Since the bookstore is university-owned, the proceeds from the sales get spread around to various departments, from athletics to the store itself, she said.

The merchandisers at the UI are doing their best to keep the momentum going through the spring. Silflow said products celebrating the university's annual Lionel Hampton International Jazz Festival next month have started arriving.

Plus, football recruiting season is under way and the fall football schedule will be announced later this spring.

"There will be some excitement around that," she said, noting the bookstore's plan to bring in even more Vandal gear later this year. "I'm going to bet on the fact that we'll have a great season next year, and we'll probably buy that way."

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