Nike's message negates the spirit of UT's motto

"What starts here changes the world." This motto, or brand message, has appeared on the University of Texas' main Web page since August 2004. It is a message all faculty, staff, administrators, students, alumni, and people of this state can get behind 100 percent. The University's Office of Public Affairs and the Center for Brand Research worked with advertising firm GSD&M and advertising professors Neal Burns and Deborah Morrison to develop UT's motto. It appears prominently in the television ad spots UT is allotted during broadcasts of its NCAA sporting events. The motto tells the world what we stand for.

In this brand message, the words "for the better" are implicit. The university, through its research and teaching and the alumni who support it, is a place that makes the world a better place.

We all know from a very young age that the motto like this is a hard challenge. If most of us connected with UT live up to these words, even in small ways, the impact will be big. One of the great things about being around UT is meeting the people connected with it who do make a difference. In recent years, I have been blessed to get to know Bill Wright of Abilene.

Wright graduated from the Business School in 1966 and worked in the gasoline industry in West Texas. He said, "If I had been more of a success, I would have the money to endow a chair." Instead, Wright has offered us his graduates take out into the world, aspires to make the world a better place.

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Wright is understandably upset. He believes these ads make a mockery of the educational values he has dedicated his life to promoting on the high school and college level. They denigrate his, and my, lifelong belief that sports are an important part of education.

As UT Athletics Director DeLoss Dodds has said, and Sports Illustrated has confirmed, UT athletics programs are the Joneses (with whom everyone wants to keep up). Let's try to use our influence as the No. 1 program in the country to change this small bit of our world.

Let's tell the NCAA and Nike that those ads are not consistent with what we stand for. Let's tell the world this changes the world. Let's put our mouths and principles where our brand message is.

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