

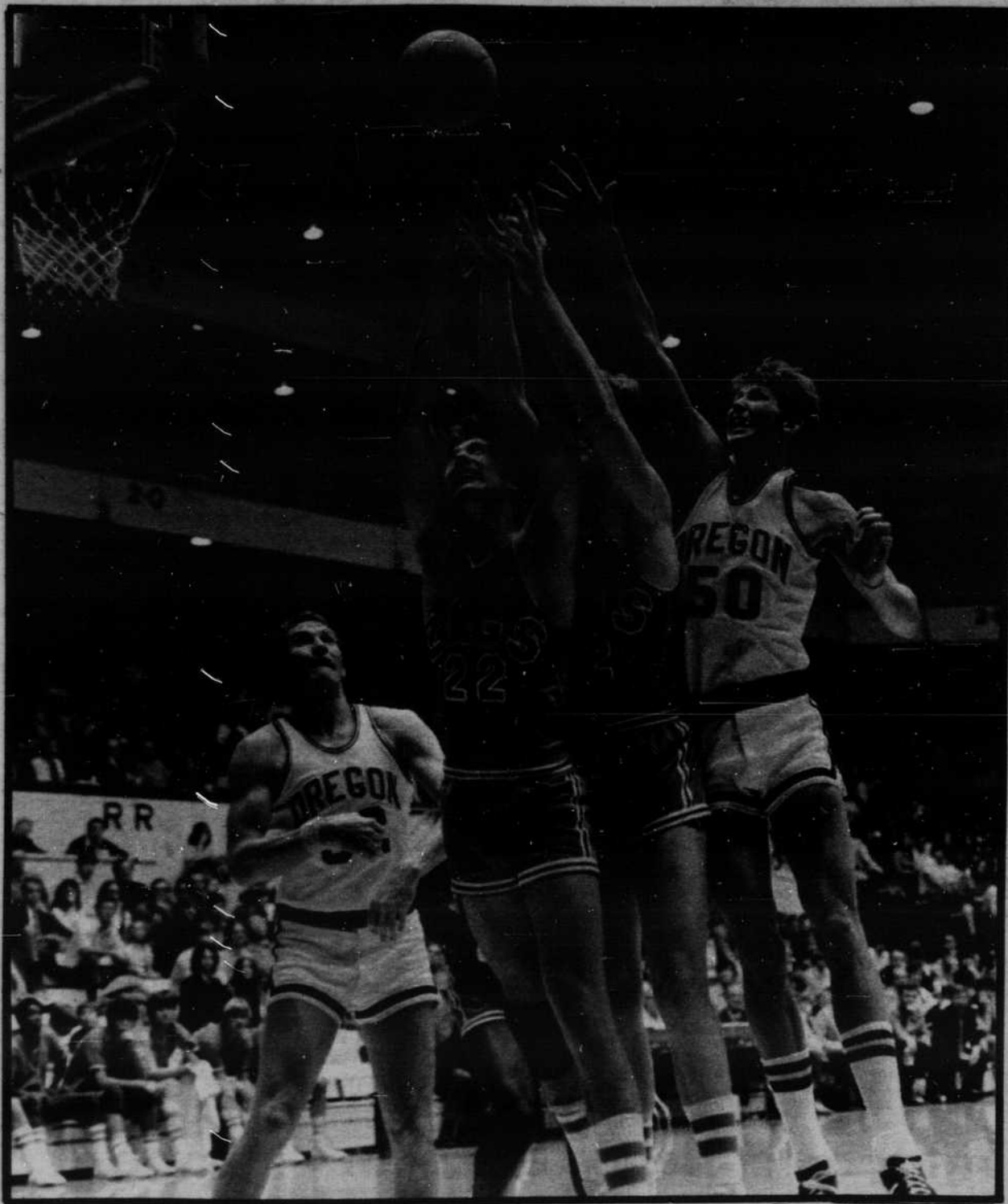


Photo by James Link

DUCK CENTER HITS THE BOARDS

Oregon's Willett learns defense the Harter way

By BOB WELCH
Of the Emerald

That was no error in Saturday morning's UCLA-Oregon box score. Bill Walton scored but six points. No, the typist didn't leave out a one or a two or a three in front of the six. It's official. Someone held the king of the court to a measly six points.

His name is Gerald Willett. That's Gerald with a soft G and Willett as in will-it-go-in-or-not? That's a question Walton may have been asking himself Friday night as the Duck center was putting a clamp on his usual scoring barrage.

And while Willett was soundly outrebounded by the Bruin's star center, 13-4, and couldn't hit a shot all night, he proved that he can play defense, the essence of Dick Harter's basketball program.

The sophomore's sudden emergence as a strong defensive player is a result of time. It's a result of a year's maturity, more experience and simply surviving three months of Harter's drills, an achievement in itself.

After a high school career that saw him gain all-state honors at Eugene's Churchill High School, Willett led the frosh in scoring (16.6 avg.) and rebounding (11.1) last year. And the 6-8, 210-pound admits he's come a long way since then.

"I'm quite a bit stronger this year," Willett says. "I do alot of things better, like rebounding and blocking out. I'm probably a bit smarter, too."

You've got to be smart to defend some of the players Willett has had to lately. You've also got to have a bunch of other qualities, including the ability to cope with some centers who match grizzly bears in physicalness.

As a result of this stiff competition, though, Willett, despite a few bumps and bruises, finds he's more sure of himself on the court.

"I've got alot more confidence in myself than I had at the start of the season."

Willett is shooting .481 from the field, tops among Oregon Daily Emerald

the regulars, but far below his sizzling .610 frosh percentage. Still, he's leading the team in rebounds (7.9 avg.) and is third in scoring with a 10.3 mark.

Harter is impressed with Willett in his first varsity season.

"I'm very pleased with him," the head coach says. "He's developing very well. Very consistently. Gerald's improving everyday."

"Like any sophomore, the main thing he has to work on is his whole game. He has no glaring weaknesses. He's been playing defense and rebounding very well. And he's shooting intelligently on offense."

Teamwise, Willett feels the Ducks, 7-5, have done as well as he expected.

"Our only problem is turnovers. We've got to improve on the smaller aspects of the game. We've got to concentrate on avoiding the stupid mistakes."

And as to the return of Walton, Willett isn't worrying about it, though he admits the Bruin star will "be coming up here to score."

In the meantime, Willett has more important things to think about. Like guarding Washington's Reggie Ball on Friday night and WSU's leading scorer, Mike Dolven, on Saturday.

Harter has called these two games the most important of the season. Willett isn't disagreeing.

"If we play up to our potential, we'll be right up there by the end of the season," he says. "I think we can win our next four or five games. The USC loss has made everyone want to work harder so we don't lose those one-pointers anymore."

It all depends on defense, according to Willett. "If you can play defense, you can always play basketball," he says.

In that case, Gerald Willett may be around for a long time.

JV Basketball

Catchings leads

Bob Catchings leads the Oregon JV basketballers in three different departments, according to statistics released earlier this week.

Catchings, the 6-6 freshman from Joliet, Ill., is on tops in scoring with a 28.3 average in three games, field goal accuracy with a .513 mark and rebounds with a 14.0 average per game. He poured in 37 of his total 85 points in the season's opener against the Portland JV's.

Center Jeff Nelson, another freshman, is second in rebounding with a 10.2 average and also follows Catchings in scoring with a 10.2 mark.

Kevin Culligan has blistered the nets at the free throw line for a .904 mark to lead the JV's team in that area.

The Duck JV's 4-1 on the season, meet the Washington JV's Friday night and Claudia's AAU Saturday night in action this weekend.

Swimming

Stanford invades

After dominating the Far Western Intercollegiate Relays at Leighton Pool Saturday, the University of Oregon swimming team opens its 1973 dual meet schedule against imposing Stanford and Alaska on consecutive days.

The Cardinals invade Leighton Pool Friday afternoon at 4 p.m. for a meet with Don Van Rossen's Ducks. They are led by Olympic breaststroker Brian Job, who holds the NCAA meet records in the 100 (56.833) and 200 (2:02.592) yard breaststroke events.

Alaska comes to Eugene on Saturday for a 10 a.m. meet. In a dual meet at Fairbanks last year, Van Rossen's team stopped the Totems, 91-48.

The Ducks won eight of the ten events in Saturday's relays, and Pat McCornack qualified for this year's NCAA championships at Tennessee with a 458.50 effort in the 3-meter dive. Puget Sound swept all ten events in the college division.

The Ducks piled up 142 points to 122 for Oregon State, and 72 for Washington State. Puget Sound scored 154 points in the college division against 88 for Highline CC of Seattle, 60 for Lewis and Clark, 52 for Portland State, and 24 for Humboldt State.

Gymnastics

Ducks hit road

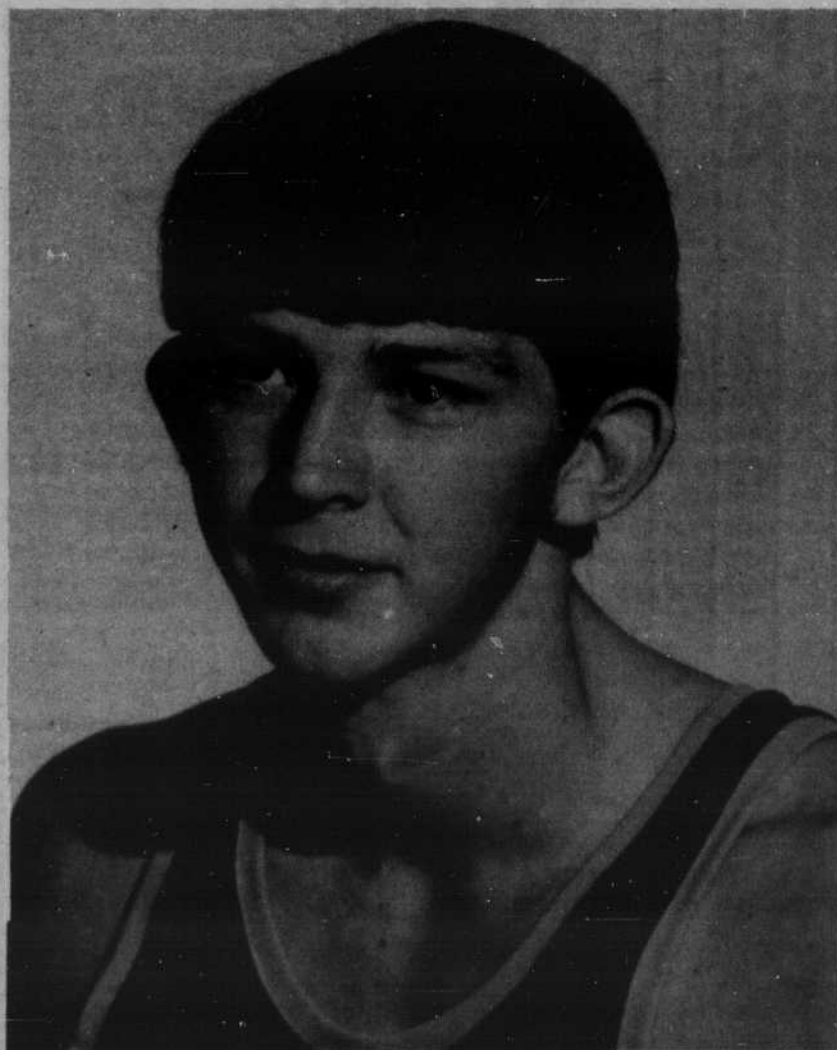
After a sunny holiday in Hawaii, the Oregon Flying Ducks embark on a long series of road meets that will encompass the entire month of January.

They face Portland State in the Viking gym in Portland Friday night at 8 p.m., go to Chico, Calif. for a meet with Chico State on Jan. 20, and invade the midwest to tackle some of the biggest gymnastics powers in the country Jan. 26.

The Vikings, with a young gymnastics program, will not be the caliber of the midwestern teams, but one individual will present a problem.

"They have one kid named Ron Nissen who is a threat to beat all three of my all-around men," says Bill Ballester, coach.

In their trip to Hawaii, the Ducks faced a makeup team from Hawaii in a dual meet and won handily.



GERALD WILLETT