

Men's Sports

Successful athletics changing UO image

By BOB WELCH
Of the Emerald

A few years ago at the Pac-8 track meet, a group of California sportswriters were talking about the University of Oregon.

"I heard they had a sale on bras at their book store," said one scribe, "and nobody showed up!"

The joke is humorous, not only because of its content but because of the shallow, stereotyped image of the University it stems from.

To many outsiders, the University probably evokes thoughts of daily riots, courses in hair growing and professors lecturing between joints. Everybody's major is liberal arts, everybody drives '64 buses with "Keep on Truck'n" stickers on the back and — lo and behold — classes are let out early whenever the sun glimpses through an infamous Oregon rain cloud.

Likewise, the athletic program here is probably perceived from the darkest angles possible. Oregon, say the outsiders, is the school whose football team gets national recognition at the start of every season... because it loses to Oklahoma or Nebraska by a score that sounds like the odds on a Muhammad Ali - Mickey Rooney fight.

It's the school where butcherball is played, complete with a coach who trips cheerleaders, throws programs and probably steals purses from little old ladies to subsidize his spendy recruiting tab.

Throw in a bunch of loonies in long underwear, a water-logged baseball team and as many turnovers on the coaching staffs as there were last year at Autzen Stadium and, says the outsider, you've got your basic Oregon athletic program.

What everybody overlooks is the truth. Lost in subjectivity is the fact that Oregon's all-around athletic program was ranked ninth best in the nation last year, according to a poll conducted by Tennessee's *Knoxville Journal*.

For those who doubt the accuracy of the poll, consider that last year the Ducks (1) won the NCAA cross country title; (2) placed third in basketball's National Invitational Tournament; (3) were ranked eighth in AP's dual meet wrestling poll, finishing first in the Pac-8 championships and 12th in the NCAA and (4) finished sixth in the NCAA Track and Field Championships.

Consider also that gymnastics, a sport where Oregon wound up ranking sixth in the nation, was not even included among the sports used to compile the top 10.

In a collegiate system that is sometimes blind to every sport that doesn't have goal posts or hoops, and a time when many universities — notably Oregon State and Washington — have sent some sports to the graveyard, it's a credit to Oregon that it has maintained a solid all-around program.

Oregon is not Oklahoma. Its \$2-million dollar budget is half the Sooner's and, unlike Barry Switzer, Don Read cannot rely on 14 assistant coaches. Nor can the Ducks rely on the state government — as Arizona State does — to deliver 255 tuition-free grants and new athletic facilities. Nor can they recruit blue-chip athletes between rounds of golf like coaches can in talent-rich Southern California.

In a time when dollars, not players, often win athletic contests, such realizations justifiably magnify Oregon's athletic achievement — which says something about an overall program that outranks a school like Ohio State, even though the Buckeye's \$6 million budget is three times Oregon's.

Oregon has made changes, changes that hopefully will alleviate its financial dilemma but not erode its athletic programs. The Ducks have hired Pete Wingert, a financial consultant; realigned duties; Norv Ritchey's begun construction on Mac Court balconies; placed swimming, golf, and tennis on their own for scholarship money and limited the number of scholarships for track, wrestling, gymnastics and baseball combined, to ten each year.

Survival is the name of the game. Ritchey, a man responsible for much of Oregon's athletic success but who apparently could not handle the mushrooming financial complexities, found out the hard way.

Once upon a time, the most complex thing in an athletic department was learning how to spell the Polish middle linebacker's last name. New athletic departments from Long Island to University Street are finding they're enmeshed in a financial crisis that threatens to seriously dilute the quality of athletics on the field.

That the NCAA's new regulations will even the score between "rich" schools and "poor" schools is debatable. The new laws will likely aid schools like Oregon in some cases and smother them in other cases.

Fortunately, Title IX — the new federal equal opportunity law which many athletic directors believe could send collegiate athletics down a dead-end street — probably won't affect the University severely. Combined administration and IFC funds will give the Women's Intercollegiate Athletic (WIA) program about 75 per cent more money than last year and, while WIA head Becky Sisley admits they need more, she's not threatening the administration with a field hockey stick.

But the financial picture is still tenuous.

Hopefully, the new athletic director will believe — as Ritchey did — in the benefits of a strong, total program. And, hopefully, he'll be receptive to the means that will keep it that way.

Whether it's producing a football team that can capture the fancy of Eugene, charging admission to see Ronnie Lee fling a javelin across the Willamette or feeding the grid squad cheese and fries instead of steak, Oregon must make good in the budget book as well as on the scoreboard this year.

Otherwise an athletic program that has grown to prominence will be in jeopardy of wilting.

And people will go on associating Oregon with molotov cocktails, not athletics.



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