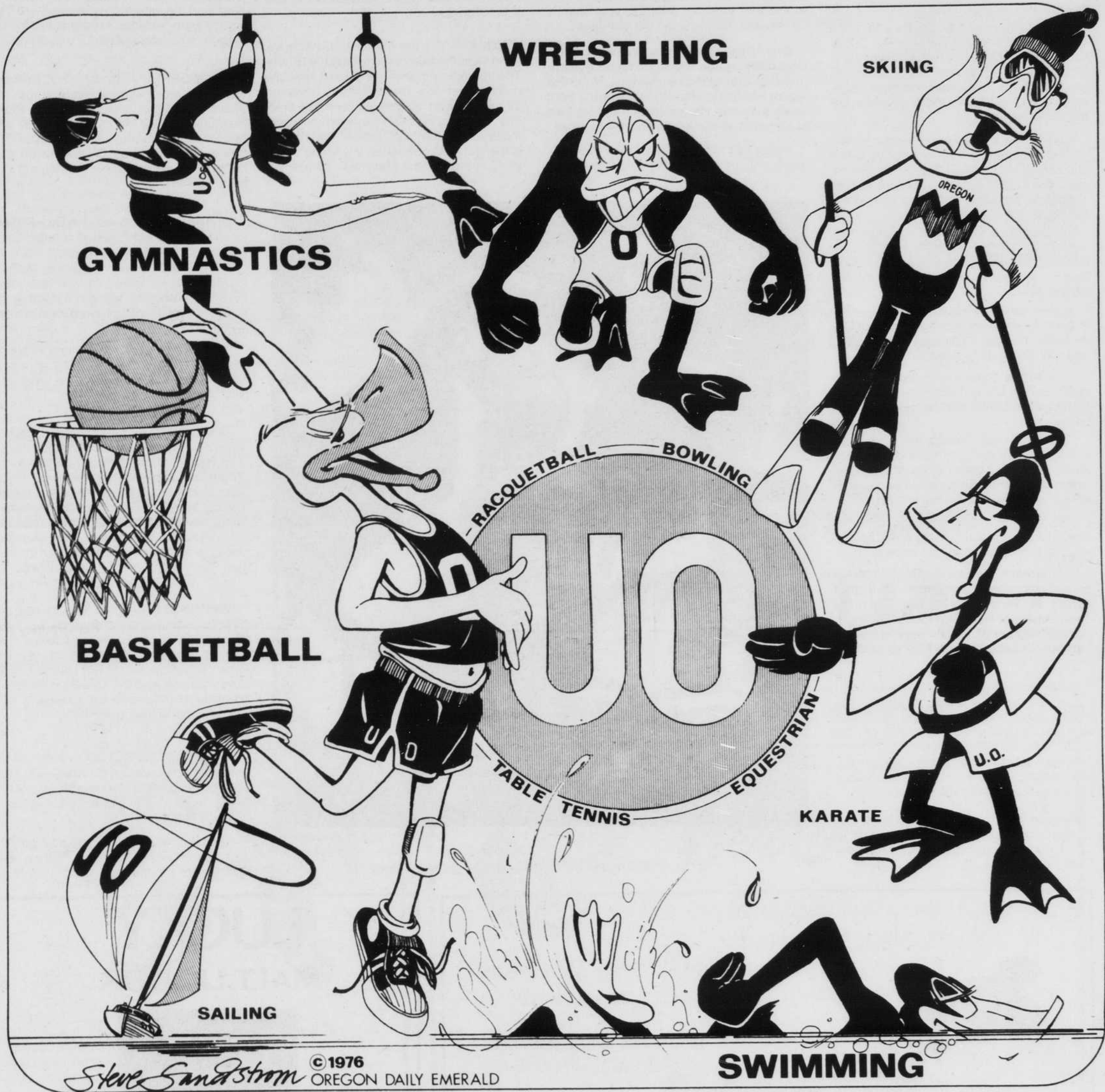


emerald winter sports special



Kamikaze b-ball is king, but isn't winter's only sport

By BOB WELCH
Of the Emerald

Only the professor's footsteps broke the nervous silence in the classroom. For some students, their careers hinged on this final test. He walked toward the chalkboard, picked up a piece of chalk and wrote some numbers on the board.

The time remaining in the test? Nope. The score of the Oregon-Oral Roberts basketball game. A lively murmur swept the room. The professor smiled.

Welcome to Kamikaze basketball.

Basketball is king of sports at Oregon and heads up a winter sports program that has the potential to appease even the most cynical fan.

However, the talent goes well beyond the Kamikaze

Kids. You won't see any Bob Rikli glasses at Bob's or Michelle Menkens t-shirts at Penny's, but they're still standouts — through relatively unknown — in their respective sports.

Rikli is a two-time All-American who last year was third in the NCAA in vaulting and second in the floor exercise. Menkens, only a sophomore, set six Oregon women's swimming records last year and has already bettered one of them this season.

How will Rikli, Menkens and the rest of Oregon's winter sports athletes fare the rest of the way?

While the Kamikaze Kids try and shovel their way out of mediocrity, other Oregon teams will have jobs of their own.

Ron Finley's wrestling team, off to a slow start and plagued with injuries, needs to capture some momentum if it hopes to repeat as Pac-8 champ.

The Duck gymnastics team, ranked in the nation's top ten last year, will find out just how strong it is during its current trip back to the midwest. The Flying Ducks need to get past perennial Pac-8 champ Cal to win the league title.

And the swimmers, who spent fall term frantically trying to raise money to stay alive, will be out to realize their dividends from such labors.

Meanwhile, the women's swimming team will shoot for second in the NCWSA championship and hopes to add to its list of 40 All-Americans.

The women's gymnastics team is out to reach a 98.00 score to qualify as a team for a national. And the women's basketball team will be out to improve on last year's 2-12 season.

It all adds up to an interesting winter. The challenges are there and the challengers are ready.

Now, if only the opponents will cooperate...