

Bob Welch

Looking back

The good, the bad and the ugly



Four years ago when Ron Lee was graduating from Lexington High School and Don Read was an assistant football coach, a friend of my mom's expressed concern over my decision to attend, in the lady's words, "that other school."

When you're from Corvallis, going to Oregon when you could be pledging SAE and studying to be an engineer at the local U is looked upon there as nothing short of selling yourself to the devil.

The lady might be surprised to know that I survived the four-year ordeal. The hippies didn't convert me. The cops didn't club me. And the protestors didn't blow me up with their molotov cocktails.

In fact, it's been a very fine four years. And part of the reason it's been so fine has been the never-a-dull-moment-except-for-home-football-games happenings here in the world of sports.

What I've found so interesting has not been the success of Oregon's teams — though that's a part of it — but the unexpected occurrences, colossal contrasts and the occasional bits of humor that have accompanied it all.

Here are some reflections on the past four years of Oregon sports:

•The Kamikaze Kraze. Nothing I've ever seen in sports has been so intriguing and so inexplicable as the phenomenon known as Kamikaze basketball.

How do you explain a standing ovation for Ron Lee — when he simply peeks into Mac Court in his street clothes? How do you explain four drunks rambling through campus at 2 a.m. the morning of the Washington game chanting nothing but "Go Ducks?" And 5,000 fans jamming Mahlon Sweet Airport to see 12 basketball players walk 500 feet from an airplane to a van?

I certainly can't. But the intoxicating spirit lured many — myself included. While our grandfathers might have boasted about heroics in the Big War, the Class of '76 will probably boast to their grandchildren about graduating in the same class as a fellow named Ronnie Lee.

•Bad blood. Those who thirst for intense rivalries in sports have had nothing to complain about when Oregon and Oregon State have gotten together these last four years.

You name it, it's happened: ripping down goal posts with the game still going, tripping cheerleaders, throwing bottles, running roller-derby three-miles, twisting opponents' ankles in pile-ups (football) and throwing the usual elbows on the basketball floor.

But, as we all know, it's only a game....

•Triumphs. Success, some will tell you, is relative. You beat Utah when you're undefeated Oklahoma and yawn awhile. You beat Utah when you're winless Oregon and, hey, bring on the Steelers.

The Ducks' 14-6 win over Utah, — ugly as it was — was one I'll remember, as will most Oregon sportswriters. Have you ever tried asking Ron Hunt what the Ducks' problem is ... after their 14th straight loss?

There have been some other stirring victories — Don Clary's upset of John Ngeno in the 5,000 this spring and Shuichi Shoji's painful triumph in an Oregon State duel while writhing in pain from torn rib cartilage, to name just a couple.

But the biggest win will be remembered in simple numbers: 65-45.

•Tragedies. You'll always remember where you were when you heard the news: Pre's dead. A strange feeling of disbelief shrouded the campus on that Friday just over a year ago. And, somehow, sports seemed very unimportant then.

There have been other tragedies in the last four years. Tragedies like Craig Brigham being struck with mono just when a shot at the Olympics looked like a strong possibility. Tragedies like the boos Norval Turner got. And tragedies like the women's sports program having its budget cut 45 per cent this spring.

None was as painful, however, as realizing Pre would never run again.

•The contrasts. Anyone mildly interested in sports has witnessed the emergence of the Big Time sports and what's been termed the Minor Sports. At Oregon, the contrast is immense.

We have Don Van Rossen's swim team selling frisbees to stay afloat while Don Read's football team woofs down T-Bones at the Holiday Inn.

Women's teams must often dress in a locker room that's been declared a fire hazard while the Kamikaze Kids dress in a locker room that has a shag carpet and a stereo.

There are other inconsistencies. While twenty thousand fans would pay to see an Oregon basketball game, Ron Finley is placing personals in the classified section of the *Emerald* to try and rustle up wrestling fans.

While Dick Harter demands a tight-fisted brand of discipline from his team, he has tripped a cheerleader, been picked up on a DUI charge and been assessed needless technical fouls.

Some of the inconsistencies have been inevitable; most have not.

•The laughs. Marv Harshman and his band of Grouchos didn't win any friends on their trip to Eugene but you've got to give them credit for showing that it's still legal to laugh on a basketball court.

And in a press box. When Oregon was trying to break its 14-game losing streak at Autzen last fall, a sportswriter asked what the attendance was before the kick-off. Despite the miserable season and diminishing crowds, one Oregon official kept his sense of humor as he looked out at the sea of empty seats. "Want 'em by name?" he said.

No NCAA trip for Voorhees, Brigham

Weightman Dave Voorhees and decathlete Craig Brigham were definitely ruled out Saturday from competing in this week's NCAA track and field championships in Philadelphia.

Both were enjoying their finest years ever when disaster struck. Shortly before the Pacific-8 meet, Voorhees pulled a tendon in his knee and Brigham came down with mononucleosis.

There was some speculation that at least Voorhees would make the trip but coach Bill Dellinger, on a doctor's recommendation, decided against taking either.

Oregon, then, will send an 11-man team to the meet, which gets underway today with the decathlon.

Those Ducks going will be Rich Perkins, hammer; Ray Burton, discus; Jeff Carter, javelin; Tinker Hatfield, pole vault; Chris Brathwaite, 100 and 200 meters; Dacre Bowen, 400 meters; Matt Centrowitz, Peter Spir and Randal Markey, 1,500 meters; Dave Taylor and Don Clary, 5,000 meters; and Terry Williams, 10,000 meters.

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Soccer team to play before Timber's contest

The Oregon club sports women's soccer team will face Oregon State Wednesday night in an exhibition game before the Portland Timbers-San Diego Jaws game at Civic Stadium.

Kick-off for the women's game is 6 p.m. followed by the Timbers' game at 7:30 p.m.



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