

basketball

A case of mistaken identity that's got everybody smiling

By MIKE GRADY
Of the Emerald

Well sports fans, it's trivia time once again and today we've got an easy one for you. Ready?

Who is, or was, the Oregon basketball star known for superb overall athletic ability as well as hoop talent, and who was also a state high school track and field champion.

Think you've got it? If not, here's a clue that even my mother could guess it with (Mom is the type who would back down from judging a slam dunk contest between Mike Drummond and Julius Erving for fear that the competition might be too close for her to pick the winner): This person is black and left handed.

"Oh no," you groan. "He's made it much too easy with that one. If the right answer isn't Ronnie Lee, I'll eat my athletic pass."

Well start munching. At least if you've been a dedicated fan so far this year you won't have as much

of the card to digest — over half of the holes should be punched out by now.

To those of you who picked the correct answer to be Debbie Adams, a 5-10 freshman forward on this year's women's varsity squad, I say good job (Cheaters! I know damn well you looked at the picture first).

But by guessing Lee when the answer was Adams, you really shouldn't feel too bad. A comparison between the two, when considering the start of their careers at Oregon, can be quite striking. As the lone freshman starter on a team that returned a number of quality players from a year ago, Adams has been nothing shy of spectacular, averaging 10.8 points and 10 rebounds per game.

What is especially frightening while watching the 19-year-old playing her fast and aggressive game, is the realization that basketball isn't even her best sport right now. Running is the real reason she's here.

"I'm really here on a track scholarship," Adams said recently while sipping on a soft drink at the EMU, "but I wanted to play basketball too."

"I chose Oregon over the University of Washington (Seattle is her hometown) because I couldn't have played basketball up there. They don't like you to compete in more than one sport."

Hawaii and Oregon State were two other major colleges bidding for Adams during her senior year at Seattle's Roosevelt High, and like UW and Oregon, they too were after her for her talents on the track.

While a basketball court might be a little too confining to appreciate Adams' speed, the fact that she finished first in Washington last year for the 100 (10.7), 220 and long jump (19-5½), as well as running a leg on state champion 440 relay team, can still be seen by watching her catch up to an opposing team's fast break.

"What Debbie does on the basketball court right now," said her coach, Elwin Heiny, "she does on speed. She has such outstanding physical potential . . . it just has to be refined." Heiny said that he sees Adams' future in basketball at a guard position, but that right now it really isn't her strength to play away from the basket.

"She could become a really fine guard," said Heiny. "She doesn't have the guard-type motion. She's more of the power forward right now, but she's got the potential. With a lot of work and ball handling she could be there."

Adams, a PE major who is interested in coaching and physical therapy, agreed with Heiny's assessments of her game and spoke of improving the parts of her game that she previously hadn't had to bother with.

"I like to play on the outside," she said, "but I've got to start getting it all together. I played center in high school and it wasn't as complicated as what it is here."

"I didn't have to do all of the things that I do now," she continued. "I didn't dribble or do any of those things."

For a high school team that finished second in the city and fifth



Photo by Mike Grady

Ronnie Lee? Not quite, but you'd be hardpressed to find a better comparison to describe Oregon's Debbie Adams. Only a freshman, Adams has established herself as a premiere hoop star.

in the state, what she did do, though, was score and rebound. And she did those at a pretty impressive rate of 20 points and 12 rebounds per game.

When asked about the favorite of her two sports and the goals she'd like to see herself achieve in either one, Adams had a hard time picking one over the other.

"The 1980 Olympics is sort of a goal and definitely something I'm working for, but I really don't know when it comes down to the two sports," she said. "I like basketball because it's a team sport and you have to be able to play with other people."

"Track, on the other hand, is a totally different thing, but I like it too. It's more of an individual thing. If you mess up it's nobody else's fault, you mess up on your own."

And while Adams may talk about the "messaging" aspect of a performance instead of taking a more optimistic stand, you get the feeling that that is her way of hiding behind a curtain of humility. By coming to Oregon with the goal of getting an education and improving her athletic skills through better coaching, Adams has put herself somewhat reluctantly into the position which most athletes bask in — the limelight.

"Debbie's really a super person as well as a good athlete," said Heiny, trying to put Adams' attributes into a capsule. "She's a good learner. If she doesn't understand something, she'll ask. She gets along with everyone and everybody on the team likes her."

So see, you guys who blew the question shouldn't feel so bad after all. The answer might have been wrong, but the qualities weren't.

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