

# stu jackson

## Stu

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decide what the hell he wanted to do and how he wanted to be.

"I just had to move to do that. If I would have stayed in the same situation in Eugene, I don't think I could have done it. I just couldn't have done it."

The impact of this drastic turnaround in Jackson's life is almost too deep to explain. Where the year before he was idolized by every Eugene-Springfield citizen who knew the difference between offensive charging and a blocking foul, all of a sudden he was now just a guy limping to class on crutches, getting drenched by a downpour of rain.

"I just couldn't handle it," Jackson explained as to why he looked for a change of scenery. "There would have been a lot of obstacles as far as coming back and sitting out a whole year. It would've been messin' my head a little bit — being there in Eugene a whole year and not playing. I mean I'm walking around and everybody thinks I'm supposed to be a ballplayer."

Jackson started calling different schools and coaches to try and sell himself, but found the going pretty rough. He was honest in his efforts, letting coaches know that he couldn't guarantee anything and telling them what the doctors said, but was also very sincere in his determination to play one more year of college basketball.

A friend suggested that he get ahold of coach Bill O'Conner at Seattle University and Jackson decided to give the private, Jesuit-Catholic school a try.

"It was kind of hard at first," admitted Jackson. But then I called up coach O'Conner and he said 'Come on up.' That was the second of January (1977); on the third I packed my bags and made the move. I was gone."

Because NCAA rules stipulate that a player must attend the school he transfers to for one year before becoming eligible to play, Jackson had plenty of time to rehabilitate himself and try to prove the doctors wrong.

By staying in Seattle and selling shoes at Sears over the summer, Jackson felt that he wouldn't be taking away from what he was trying to accomplish. Instead of

going home to Reading or back to Eugene, where the majority of his friends were, he opted for the solitude of weight machines, Sears, basketball and sweat. And it was no easy road either as the doctors in Seattle echoed what their Eugene counterparts had already said.

"I've got it in writing," Jackson smiled with an air of *touche*. "Coach told me to go see a doctor cause I'd refused to for a long time. Well this one cat said I'd never be able to play by January. Got it in writing."

And smile he should. Since becoming eligible in early January of this year, Jackson has worked his way into the starting line-up on a team that can rightfully boast of having Pac-8 talent. And he's not just there for a show either; he plays and plays hard.

Later that night against San Francisco, the 14th-rated team in the nation, was a good example of how Jackson has played since coming back. With the Dons zoning the majority of the evening, Jackson worked with reckless abandon as a post man inside, sprinting from one side of the lane to the other, fighting for position against seven-foot All-American Bill Cartwright every inch of the way.

He ended up playing all but three minutes of the contest, scoring 15 points, taking two charges (one was called) and diving to the floor three times for loose balls. Not bad for a guy who is supposed to be standing in left-center field, sipping some suds and wondering if the girl at the plate is even strong enough to hit it out of the infield.

"It started coming around about the middle of November," said Jackson about his knee. "It must have improved 200 percent in one week. It was amazing; I really couldn't understand it."

"I was limping around like a little cricket before that," he said. "All that summer I'd been playing, but hell, man, I couldn't do anything. If I had to put a number on it now as compared to before, I'd put it at 80 to 85 percent, but that's just a guesstimate."

When asked how the doctors explained what happened,



Jackson has proved that he can still score, though, as against San Francisco he lofted one in over the outstretched hand of the Don's Bill Cartwright. And when he now sits on the bench, it's usually with a feeling of contentment.

Jackson just laughed. "I haven't seen a doctor in two months and I won't go see one. Hell, all they're gonna do is tell me that I'm lucky right now, but later on... That's not anything I don't already know."

"I just want to play, man. These last eight games — it's the home stretch."

It's interesting, but Jackson sees his move to the West Coast Athletic Conference (WCAC) as a step up while most Pac-8 basketball representatives would try to convince you otherwise.

"This year the WCAC is obviously better than the Pac-8," stated Jackson. "There are a lot of good players in this league, let me tell you. The supporting casts may not be up to the Pac-8's level, but the players... whew."

Watching San Francisco out on the floor made for no argument, but Jackson offered proof, anyway.

"There's a kid at Nevada-Reno," he continued. "Name of Egard Jones, he's phenomenal. He plays like Bob McAdoo; can't shoot as well, but he does it all. Then they've got a guard by the name of Johnny High. He's about 6-3, big strong kid like Ronnie. Really tough. Comes in there flying through the air like helping for election. I'm tellin' you, this league has got some players."

Intensity is the only factor Jackson viewed as being different between the two teams and leagues he has played on in college. He felt that his own style of play didn't change with the move north, but he could feel a definite change in the approach to the game when he arrived.

"The intensity here is just not what it is at Oregon," he said. "And that's not saying anything bad against the Seattle program, it's just two different ways of getting something done. I don't think I'll ever adjust after going through a program (Oregon's) for three years. I attack some things up here the same way I did at Oregon."

After graduating this June with a degree in business, Jackson is undecided on his future. One thing he wants for sure is to stay on the west coast and he'd like to get into coaching if at all possible. Once the season is over he'll start sending out feelers while maintaining the graveyard shift he currently works 40 hours a week as a security officer.

"I only need to take one class spring term and that's it. I'm done," laughed Jackson. "I'm gonna spend most of that time drinking beer and looking for a job. Yeah, that's what I'm gonna do with that time."

When questioned about a possible return to Eugene and his past differences with Harter, Jackson responded positively.

"The thing with Coach Harter is really nothing now," he said. "It wasn't even the biggest reason why I left. You just gotta understand where he's coming from."

"That's the whole thing. It's a hard thing to understand when you play there, but when you leave it's a little easier to understand."

"And if I ever had the chance to go back to Eugene I'd gladly take it," he said. "I miss Eugene a lot. You know I left a lot of friends and a lot of people that I really love there."

After watching the Dons a while longer and starting to leave, Jackson turned around and came back.

"You know I'd like to say that I really appreciate the fact that people down in Eugene care about me up here," he said. "It really makes a guy feel good to know that people are thinking about him."

Awesome. Not exactly the kind where you take a ball in midair with someone hanging on you, turn completely around and stuff it through. But a different kind. The best kind.

