

Video hoop is not the same in the Pit

By RICHARD WEINS
Of the Emerald

Closed-circuit Blazermania received a less-than-enthusiastic welcome to Eugene Tuesday night as three-fourths of Mac Court's seats were empty when Portland opened its series with Seattle.

Only 1,595 persons paid \$4 or \$6 to watch the telecast. Maximum capacity for the event was 6,500.

Those who came witnessed a very different sort of Mac Court basketball show. There were no cheerleaders, no scoreboards shaking from the stomping of a massive crowd and no action on the floor — the only part of the darkened arena filled with \$6 ticketholders.

Instead, all eyes were glued to a 20' by 15' screen at the south end of the floor. At 7:45, Portland assistant coach Jack McKinney began a pre-game show by explaining "our closed circuit rules to you newcomers out there: pay more attention to the game than the usherettes, only go to the bathroom during halftime and follow the coach's example by never disagreeing with the referees."

McKinney then talked strategy, but was gradually drowned out by the small but noisy crowd as zero-hour neared. "This is the Pit!" someone yelled for no special reason. Yes, it was the Pit, but it was not a typical Pit crowd: middle-aged men, often companionless, outnumbered students.

Still, the crowd acquitted itself well in the early going. A roar of approval went up when Bill Walton was shown warming up. And when the Blazers came out blistering hot, fast-breaking and back-dooring like they hadn't in months, the volume level was quite respectable. One almost felt as if he were at the game, until people started shouting "Turn up the sound!"

As Bill Schonley's piped-in voice described the action, the champions did everything right and pulled away from the green-clad "villains from up north." The fans most certainly would have voted the first half "Best Picture of the Year." Their biggest explosions of applause were reserved for the sore-footed Walton, who still waddled slowly rather than running, but hit all five of his first half shots.

The fans quickly became a new breed of audience adapted to the unique setting. Many took advantage of the complete anonymity afforded by the darkness to voice their feelings in the most vile terms imaginable.

What really infuriated the cussers in the crowd were slow-motion instant replays showing, in graphic detail, the referees making a couple of terrible calls — in favor of Seattle.

Replays were one of the few advantages closed-circuit viewers had over fans at Memorial Coliseum. A more surprising feature was the basketball rim noise. Somehow, microphones were placed close enough to the rims so that the crisp, clear sounds of swishers and slam dunks were easily heard.

Also easily heard were Blazer coach Jack Ramsay's instructions to his players during time-outs. Surprisingly, most of his words were in simple terms such as "we need movement of the ball" and "those passes have to pop."

At halftime, some fans voiced their complaints about the size of the screen, the fuzziness of the picture, the quality of the sound and their own particular poor views of the screen.

"The picture's terrible," said one man as he cleaned his glasses. "I can't see the passes. It's like watching a hockey game and trying to find the puck."

"It's better than TV but only half as good as being at a game," said a young woman. "I'm a Blazer nut, but I don't think I'd come again for \$5."

"Something's lacking," said a long-haired young man.

"No beers," said his companion.

Many other fans indicated they would come back for more closed-circuit telecasts. "I'd come out if it was a twelve-inch screen," said one.

The next possible date for a closed-circuit game is May 2. Each telecast costs the Oregon athletic department between \$6,000 and \$7,000, according to events manager Steven McBride. He believes the department made a small profit on Tuesday's game.

Most of the fans were satisfied at half-time simply because the Blazers led by seven. Unfortunately, the game turned into a model of Portland's season. After a great start, the injury-plagued Blazers' lack of depth turned the tide against them.

Often, the Pit seemed empty in the second half as cheers turned into disgusted silence. When time-out was called with a minute left and the Sonics up by seven, many fans rose to leave. "Where's everybody going?" shouted a loud-mouthed die-hard. "What's the matter with you people?"

But their early departure was fitting. The "Best Picture of the Year" turned out to be a flop. Besides, who sticks around for the credits?



Photo by Steve Schneider

Nothin' doin' at the swamp

Tuesday's light rain cancelled a two-game day for Oregon baseball, but it was Wednesday's torrential downpour that turned Howe Field into a quagmire and cancelled a game with Lewis and Clark. The rain had effects elsewhere, too, as the Ducks' men's tennis match with Portland was called. Still, some tried to salvage what they could, as a few Oregon batters practiced in the background for the upcoming three-game series with Oregon State.

Run scheduled

There will be an intramural cross country run today at 4 p.m. The race will cover two miles and will start on the intramural track. There will be two other cross country runs later in the term.

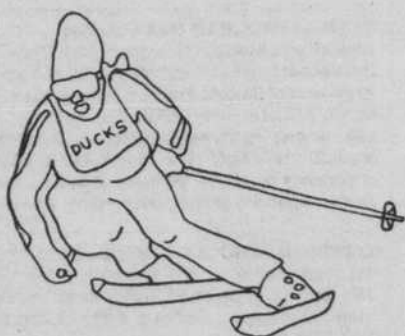
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