

Maybe I'm just a bit sentimental. But for some reason this seemed like a pretty special year for sports, especially here at Oregon.

I think many of us who followed the Ducks will breathe a sigh of collective relief come the end of the school year — and that has been extended somewhat with the NCAA Golf Championships here in a couple of weeks.

We were exposed to more ups and downs this year than any group of spectators should be allowed to face. If you've ever ridden in the Big Dipper in Santa Cruz, Calif., then you'll know what I mean when I say we started out in the dark — and it got hairier soon afterwards.

In most sports, we were presented with relative unknowns and expected to welcome them with open arms. This was the year of optimism, to be sure, but it was optimism based on many unknown qualities — too many, I think, to keep from being skeptical.

•The Dawning of a New Day. To the football-starved populous, a break from the failures of the past was seen as one with the coming of Rich Brooks and the "new" Oregon. There was a genuine feeling of excitement when the season began. Brooks and his staff were bringing in a new attitude, a new spirit, and a new way of looking at things.

And, indeed, after the Ducks' first road swing there was no dulling of the hope. Remember the Ducks opening play against Georgia? Collectively, Oregon fans must have been taken by surprise when the Ducks pulled a reverse to Ken Page. It gained only eight yards (it sounded more exciting on the radio than it looked on film), but who cared if it lost eight? No one in years had tried that in green and gold.

•The Running Kamikaze Kids. That was only too hard to swallow. Dick Harter team run? No way. But sure enough, at the beginning of the basketball season there they were, inexperienced and young to boot, running up and down the court like "real" basketball. When, in early December, Oregon undressed Oregon State in Portland with an embarrassingly easy win, we all figured that Harter was a genius, and, by those same tricky means he had used in the past, would provide a thorn for the rosy UCLA. That would change.

•Women's basketball. For the first time, the gals

Commentary

Taking a look back

Mike Marino

decided to play most of their games in conjunction with the men's game, hoping to increase their popularity. Talk about unknowns. Most people didn't even know the rules of women's basketball, let alone who was playing. Ask 'em for Oregon's coach — and it was dumb stares.

•Baseball. After the nightmare in 1977, Oregon could do no worse. Mel Krause had brought in a few junior college players who were to fill in some badly open holes. But no one knew who they were, only that whoever they are they couldn't do worse than the motley crew of a year earlier.

Those were the hopes, the unknowns. But somehow, things didn't quite make the grade like we thought they might.

Asking Rich Brooks to turn around the football program in one year was too much to ask of any man. And the basic fact remained that aside from a few recruits, the Ducks were sporting the same crew that bellyflopped in 1976.

I'll remember the quick education we all got that October Saturday when Washington came to play. Oregon didn't. To compare that afternoon to the Christians and the Lions would be giving the big cat a break. At least in Rome, they had to work to devour their prey. In Eugene, it was as if the poor man was knocked unconscious before the thing began — and then thrown into the ring.

A guy in the press box told me at halftime, jokingly, that he was leaving and would file his story from Duffy's. It didn't seem like such a bad idea at the time.

And running? About the only real running that Dick Harter did this year was from here to Penn State. Wham,

bam, thank-you-ma'am. No warnings, even promises that he is staying. But he went back on his promises to the school and, most importantly, his players.

Now Dick Harter was revered around these parts for a long time, and rightly so. But his manner of departure left a bad taste in everyone's mouth, and that, I think, will leave a stain on the Kamikaze era.

But the season itself, well, that likely holds more promise than anything else. Oregon's team wasn't bad. They weren't great, but they were young and we expected more than we should have in the first place. And they have the stars for the future — that in itself is a blessing considering that some considered leaving Oregon when Harter bolted.

But guys like Felton Sealey, Phil Barner, Mike Clark and all the rest of the young ones are going to prosper out of Harter's shadow.

And they'll even look different, maybe even yellow (some people think that their wearing of banana-colored uniforms will constitute too hard a break from the past, and will be too hard for the local fans to handle — rubbish.)

And even though they pulled a great nosedive in the second half of the season to have their second straight losing year, the Ducks on the diamond should get a whole lot better. All they've got to do is keep guys like Tom Dodd and Dean Kegler from getting wooed away to the pros, and they'll get back on the winning wagon.

Lord knows, track has. Hell, the Ducks can do pretty well this weekend in the NCAA'S — and there is optimism in the air once again. If you don't think so, try getting a good seat for the meet. Not only has the team gotten better, but there are personalities once again: Rudy Chapa, Don Coleman, Alberto Salazar and by his own choosing (and rightly so), the outgoing Andrew Banks. Track is fun again.

Perhaps it'll all be like that soon. Maybe we got impatient this year, when we should have given the future a chance to build.

A lot of questions remain for Oregon sports; the list is endless. But let's just call this year a start towards getting the answers.

Lead has Sonics ready to stay home

SEATTLE (AP) — The Seattle SuperSonics are home, and they have no intention of leaving.

"Our plan was to win the opener at home, get a split of the two games at Washington and then come back here and wrap it up," said Sonics guard Fred Brown. "I'd say we're right on schedule."

The Sonics took a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven National Basketball Association championship series by beating the Bullets 93-92 Sunday at Washington.

It's a commanding lead, since three of the remaining four games will be played in Seattle — where the Sonics have won their last 21 outings — including the next two games Tuesday and Friday.

The sixth game of the series, if necessary, would be played at Washington Sunday — but the Sonics don't think it will be neces-

sary.

"I believe in our home-court advantage," said guard Dennis Johnson. "We're tough at home. I'm pretty sure we're going to end the series in Seattle. I'm hoping for that."

"You can't say we're unbeatable, but we feel we're going to wrap it up at home," said center Marvin Webster.

"We're in good shape, but we still have to go out and win those two games," said Coach Lenny Wilkens, whose job now is to keep his club from getting overconfident. "But like I've said before, our home fans are great. There's no place I'd rather play."

The Sonics won't be playing in their usual building Tuesday night. A mobile home show is in the Seattle Center Coliseum, so the game has been shifted to the

mammoth Kingdome, the enclosed home of baseball's Seattle Mariners and football's Seattle Seahawks.

This will be the first basketball game ever played in the Kingdome, where the Sonics are scheduled to play next year, and it is expected to draw the largest crowd in the history of professional basketball.

The initial 29,000 tickets were gobbled up within two hours by fans eager to be a part of the club's first run at the title in its 11 years in the NBA. An additional 15,000 "distant viewing" seats

were placed on sale at \$3 each. If all are sold, as expected, the crowd would shatter all NBA attendance records — 21,564 for a playoff game at Cleveland, 35,077 for a regular season game in the Louisiana Superdome and 41,165 for a doubleheader at the Houston Astrodome in 1969 that included the San Diego Rockets, whose star was former University of Houston All-American Elvin Hayes, now the Bullets star.

"I think it's going to be fantastic playing before 40,000 or more," said Seattle forward John Johnson.

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Timbers improve record to 10-4

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — Clyde Best and Elson Seale led the Portland Timbers to a 4-1 North American Soccer League victory over the Los Angeles Aztecs at the Rose Bowl Monday at-

ternoon.

It was Portland's sixth victory in a row, giving the Timbers a 10-4 record and possession of first place in the NASL's National West.

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