



tamara swenson double play



Bill Ballester

Emerald photo

It's been nearly a week since the athletic department hatchet job. Athletics started the day with 20 sports, 10 men's and 10 women's, but long before noon the number had dropped dramatically.

Men's baseball and gymnastics, women's golf and soccer were on their way out. Two administrative positions were eliminated. Salaries were sliced. But, as ordered, the athletic department had cut nearly \$1 million from its budget.

No one is pleased with the reduction in the budget, especially elimination of sports, but it exists. And at this point, little can be done to change the entire package.

However, the fight isn't over yet.

Men's gymnastics coach Bill Ballester has sounded the call

to battle. "I hate to see the University set this kind of precedent. These kids have proved themselves as the top in the nation, they're good students and good athletes. And we cut their program as a reward."

After five years in the top five nationally, Oregon's gymnastics program is defunct. "I'm not fighting it for me," Ballester said. "I'm fighting for these kids."

But it will have to be a short, quick fight.

Monday, Ballester began the long and arduous process of finding schools for the gymnasts. "These kids don't have the weeks it may take to find funding to keep the program." But he is sure the funding is there.

The gymnastics team spent

\$51,995 this season, with another chunk going to Ballester's salary. Nearly \$30,000 of the teams expenditures were for grants-in-aid. The University has promised to honor those scholarships because of a "moral obligation" for one more year — if the gymnasts choose to stay at Oregon.

Ballester would like to ensure that they do stay. And that there is a program for them to compete in.

So \$30,000 is already budgeted next year to cover a defunct program.

Ballester has offered to coach without a salary next year, provided the University will let him earn money promoting gymnastic events. The athletic department could set what it thinks is a reasonable amount for gate receipts and let Ballester keep the rest.

Chancy. Foolhardy. But workable.

The University is committed to the scholarships, and Ballester is willing to work for next to nothing — so only \$20,000 dollars has to be raised.

University Pres. Paul Olum said he is willing to recognize the program if it can fund itself.

Off hand, I don't know anyone with \$20,000 they need to give away to a tax-deductible institution, but the money exists somewhere.

"With \$20,000 we would continue to be a great gymnastics program," said Ballester. "We can make that money go a long way." But Ballester isn't willing to wait a long time. The gymnastics world continues, while Oregon athletes search for a new home.

Over the past 10 years, more than \$500,000 have been poured into gymnastics to make it a national-caliber program.

Cutting any sport is unwelcome. But cutting a national-caliber program for want of \$20,000 is deplorable.

"We've already accomplished what they want the other programs to do," said Ballester. "We're the most successful program on campus." The Ducks have a 132-20 win-loss record under Ballester, the best percentage of any current Oregon coach.

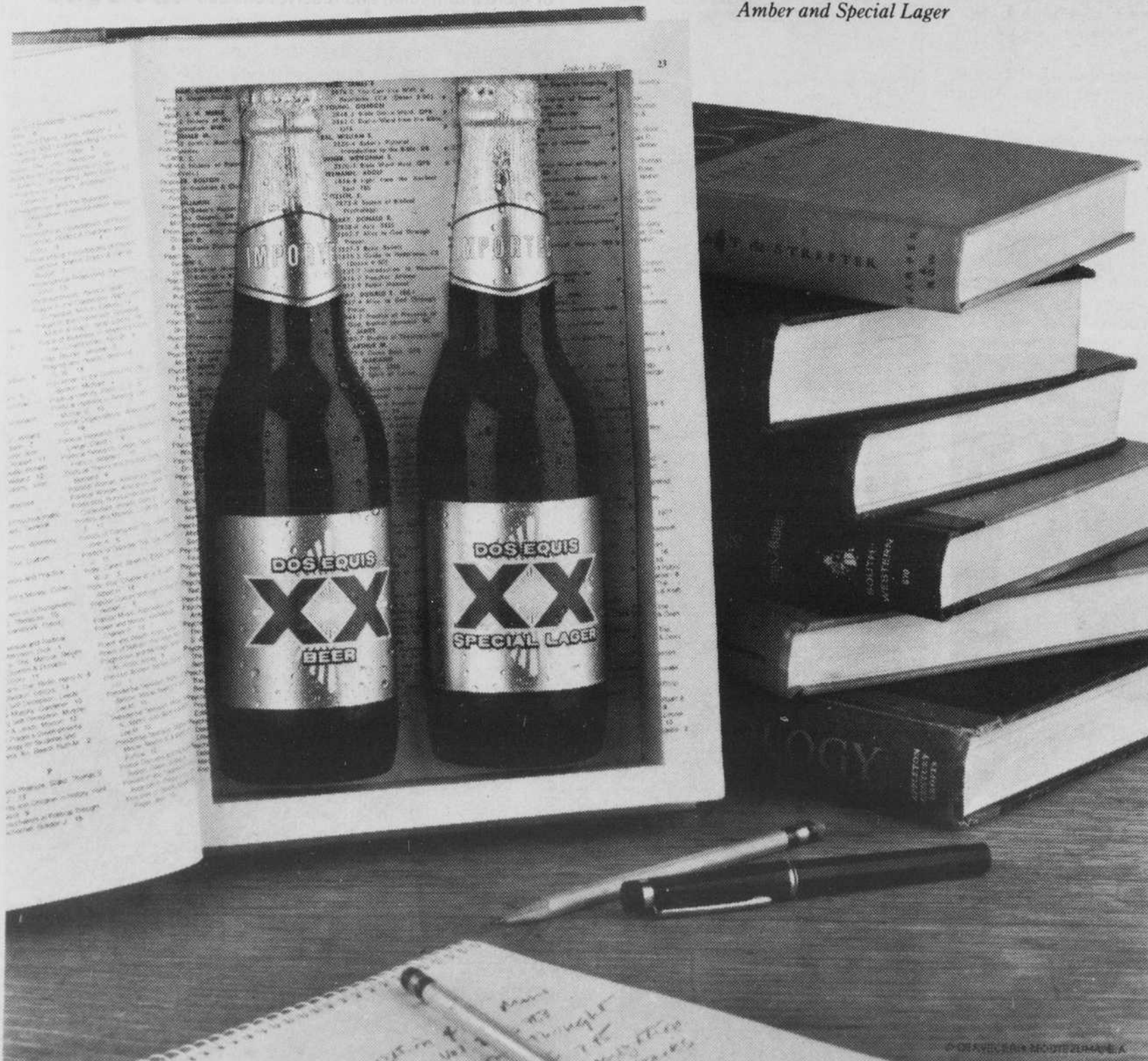
Certainly the money exists somewhere.

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