

# Freshmen at the center of attention

With a month still left between now and the beginning of basketball season, Oregon coach Jim Haney has nevertheless been left to ponder the situation he's been placed in by the loss of three players who were each challenging for starting positions.

The loss of junior center Ron Burns, junior forward Ray Whiting and sophomore guard John Cheatham leaves Haney with a team the coach says is leaning toward the inexperienced side.

"The pendulum now swings to the inexperienced side with the loss of three veteran players," the coach says. "It means the bulk of our early practices will be spent going over fundamental drills — teaching the system to the younger players."

The young players include center Blair Rasmussen, forwards Rodnie Taylor and Jeremiah Adams, and guards Bryan Trendell and Scott Perry.

With Burns out, Haney has to consider Rasmussen a definite prospect to become the starting center, and logic, the coach says, would seem to bear that out.

"On paper, it would seem Rasmussen would be the choice at center," Haney says. "But I expect Jerry (Jeremiah) Adams and Jerome Williams to challenge for the position."

Williams, a 6-8 junior who redshirted last season, and Adams, a 6-8 freshman out of Verbum Dei High School in Los Angeles, can each play the forward position. Indeed, Adams was recruited out of high school

as a forward and Williams has spent much of his time as a forward for the Ducks.

That leaves Rasmussen, at 6-11, as the logical choice to start at center for Oregon. That is, if he can adjust to the college game.

Currently, the freshman center is recovering from the foot surgery he underwent during the summer, but Haney says the Washington 1981 high school Most Valuable Player is recovering quite well. It's his adjustment to the college game that Haney is concerned about.

"All of our younger players need to become accustomed to the physical demands of the game — only time will tell how much of a factor these younger players will be in our season."

"We will have to go through preseason drills and probably a lot of preseason games before we know exactly how these young people are going to fit into our plans this season," Haney says, with an emphasis on "this season."

It's certain that Haney has had a plan for what is probably the most talented group of freshmen he's had in his four years at Oregon. The question is, did he include them in his plans this year — before they've had a chance to internalize the Oregon system?

The losses of Burns, Cheatham and Whiting would seem to have quite a change on the characterization of the squad

that should be one of the surprise teams in the Pacific 10 Conference this season.

Haney says today's team is a change from what he had envisioned last spring, but that by the summer he knew that he would be missing some of the players that contributed to last year's 13-14 season.

"By June I had an idea that we might not have the total group back from last year, so we've been making plans to compensate for that," he says.

What the coach does have coming back is a qualified backcourt crew and increased strength over last season.

"At point guard, Fred Cofield and Barry Walker bring their experience onto the court and freshman Scott Perry could be a factor too," he says. Haney adds that Paul Bain and Trendell, the hot-shooting guard out of Marshfield High School should provide additional guard strength.

At forward, senior captain John Greig should be a starter with help from Williams, Adams and sophomore David Brantley, who set a new school record for field goal efficiency, hitting on 61 of 103 attempts for a .592 percentage.

Overall, Haney expects his team to be a much stronger team than that of a year ago.

"Physically, we are a pretty good-sized team, and we aren't weak at any position. There's




Jim Haney

good rebounding strength up front and we should be a pretty good shooting team."

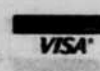

As Haney begins his fourth season at the helm, he now has a team entirely made up of players he has recruited. And even though three of the players Haney recruited will not be with the team this year, it should nevertheless be an interesting year at Mac Court.

Whether the Ducks go on to do great things this year, next year or whenever, may depend upon how quick five freshman recruits can grow into the program.

And as Haney says, "Only time will tell."



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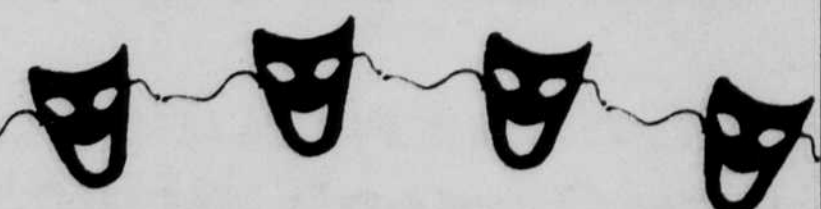
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