

# A link in the Washington connection

Northern neighbors gave Oregon Blair Rasmussen

By SCOTT COE  
Of the Emerald

There's something about interviewing someone you have to look up to. Way up to.

Blair Rasmussen, the 7-foot freshman center from Auburn, Wash., sat slumped over on a heavily outmatched wooden stool, lacing and relacing his size 16 basketball shoes.

"I love the game of basketball, and have ever since I was little." Although it's rather difficult to imagine when that was, Rasmussen says, "I'm having more fun playing now than I've ever had."

The state of Washington has supplied more than just its famous apples to Eugene. Rasmussen is the second big man recruited from Washington by coach Jim Haney that he and Duck fans hoped would step in and elevate the Ducks from their perennial Pacific 10 Conference also-ran status.

Haney's first Washington experiment, Ron Burns, is sidelined for at least this season with a sore back. But even at full strength Burns did not develop into the type of dominant force Haney and Duck fans had hoped for. As a result, the publicity surrounding Rasmussen's arrival has been somewhat subdued.

"I don't worry about what the public is going to think of me," commented Rasmussen, "I'm just going to let my basketball speak for itself."

Rasmussen made his decision to play for the Ducks early along in last year's high school recruiting war. He knew exactly what he was looking for, and when he found it, he was eager to remove himself from the recruiting pressures.

"It was becoming a giant hassle," Rasmussen explained. "You get to a point where you aren't interested in a lot of

places, and the constant phone calls really become a nuisance."

So why Oregon, if so many schools wanted him? Rasmussen's logic put the often over-complicated recruiting process in a realistic perspective. "I first looked at Stanford, but I couldn't see myself as a Californian, you know, the lifestyle down there and everything."

Sorry Cardinals, Bruins, and Trojans, this big man's not a beach boy. "I could have gone to Washington, but I wanted to try something different," he said.

So Oregon served as a happy medium. Happy, of course, for coach Haney.

"I liked (Eugene's) climate the best, and it's an easy-going lifestyle. But what really sold me was that Haney stressed the education aspect of the whole thing — that's why we're here, really," he said.

Last summer Rasmussen joined many of the top prep hoopsters in the country in various all-star tournaments. He and his new Duck teammate Rodnie Taylor played in North Carolina for an all-Washington team, with both players getting in ample playing time.

In New York however, it was a different story.

Rasmussen was selected for the West team in the National High School All-Star tournament, but spent most of the tourney watching the action from court-side. He played backup to Stuart Gray, considered by most everyone to be the best pivot man coming out of high school this year. Gray was eventually named the tourney's MVP as he led Rasmussen's West squad to the Championship.

Gray is going to be playing basketball for the UCLA Bruins this season.

"Stuart Gray is good — yeah, he's great," Rasmussen said. "But I can match up to him really well, although he's got the edge in talent. I'm looking forward to the challenge of playing against him for four years. It's going to be fun."

Rasmussen had a minor operation on his left foot this summer, and is still experiencing soreness from the surgery.

"It's still tender on top, where they cut it, so I have to soak it after every practice to cool it down to normal," he explained.

The top of his left foot isn't the only sore area on Blair Rasmussen after practice. He is quickly learning about the increase of bumps and bruises that come with playing college basketball.

"The battling under the boards," he said, "you get battered around every day, and these are only my teammates!"

The atmosphere in the Duck's locker room thus far is a cohesive one. This will be Coach Haney's first team made up entirely of his recruits, and the comradery seems to be no accident.

"There's no problem between us (the younger players) and the vets," Rasmussen said, "which is unlike the past, or so I've heard."

"We've decided we're not going to say anything about what we're going to do. We're just gonna come to play and hope for the best," explained Rasmussen.

Rasmussen is hesitant at this point to make personal predictions or goals. "That stuff is for the coaches," he said. He feels his biggest weakness is his jumping ability, or lack thereof. "That should improve when my foot gets stronger," he added.

When Rasmussen takes the court, the effects of his operation become apparent. His movements aren't fluid as of yet. It's as if he's afraid to get in the way. He's timid on offense and not aggressive on defense. But when Haney whistles for a shooting drill, you get what you came to see.

As the big freshman rotates around the key from 18 feet away from the hoop, a teammate feeds him for a series of jumpers. First three in a row, then four-of-five, then six-of-

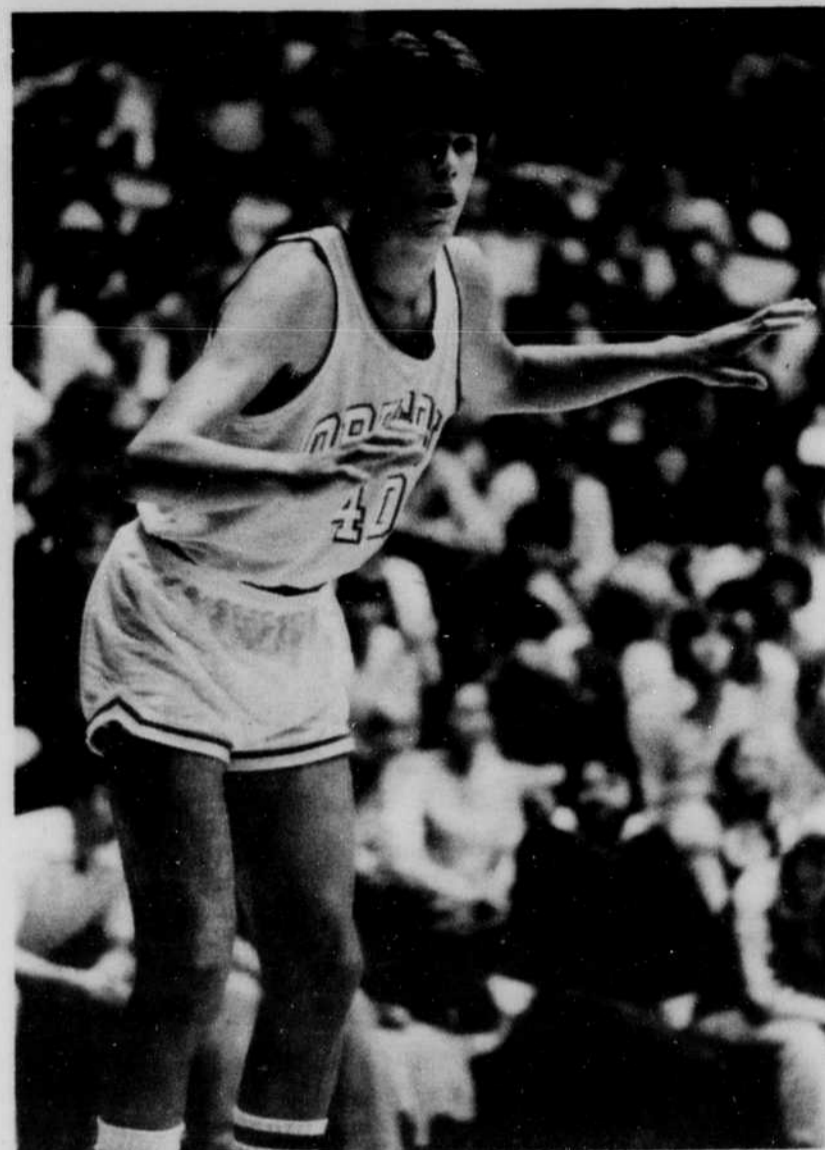


Photo by Bob Baker

The effects of preseason surgery still hamper Rasmussen.

eight. The shots are graceful, with a textbook arch. Rasmussen looks like and moves like they tell you to in basketball camps.

As the whistle sounds and the scrimmage resumes, an errant jumper caroms off toward the young center. He gathers it, spins away from a defender and swishes a left-handed hook from seven feet.

"A major league hook-shot," comments an observer. At last check, the Pac-10 definitely falls into the "major" category.

So, Oregon's got a new

center. In fact, they've got two, when you include freshman Jerry Adams from Verbum Dei high school in Los Angeles. He, too, has looked promising in preseason workouts. But when Coach Haney calls for his starting five during workouts, or his "Gold team," as he calls it, it is Rasmussen who quickly puts his jersey shiny side out and steps forward.

It's not certain yet whether or not Blair Rasmussen will be as good as gold for Haney's Ducks, but it seems apparent that this big kid from Auburn, Wash. isn't going to be a bad apple.


## Snowstorm delays game

Monday's men's basketball game between the Oregon Ducks and the University of Rhode Island was postponed until Thursday at 7:35 p.m. in McArthur Court following a snowstorm that prevented the Rams from flying out of New England.

The onslaught of snow had


decreased by Monday, but high winds continued to plague the Northeast.

Both teams will carry 2-1 records into Thursday's contest, as the Ducks play a non-counter against Athletes in Action Wednesday and the Rams do not play until again until Dec. 26.



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