

Why ND is coming

Dinner date sets up game

By Doug Levy
Of the Emerald

Eugenians are rejoicing. The Oregon Ducks are going to play host to the Notre Dame Fighting Irish.

Columnist Steve Harvey, the enemy of every losing football coach in the land thanks to his Bottom Ten standings, must be happy too. Harvey probably has his rout-of-the-week already picked.

Let's face it, Oregon versus Notre Dame in football is like Bette Midler versus Victoria Principal in a beauty contest — it just couldn't happen. But it will.

The Duck faithful can thank two people for this home and home football series (the Irish

defeated Oregon 41-0 at South Bend in 1976). It was Peter Murphy, a Notre Dame alum and president of the Murphy Co. of Springfield, who pulled some strings. And it was Len Casanova, former Duck coach and athletic director from 1966-1970, who sealed the package.

The story unfolded 15 years ago.

In 1967, Grants Pass High School star running back and punter Mark Brandt decided to attend Notre Dame, thanks to the efforts of Murphy. "I help Notre Dame recruit the kids they want in Oregon, and Mark was an outstanding prospect," recalled Murphy.

Brandt was successful at Notre Dame. He led the freshman team in punting during the 1967 season. During spring drills, Brandt impressed coach Ara Parseghian enough that he was given an excellent chance at earning a starting receiver spot, and "he was definitely going to be the punter," said Murphy.

But then a tragedy struck. On Brandt's first weekend home, he and a group of friends were swimming in the Rogue River. Brandt got cramps, and drowned.

Parseghian, extremely fond of the boy, had hoped to come to Oregon for the funeral, but his heavy volunteer involvement with multiple sclerosis prevented that. Parseghian then asked athletic director Moose Krause to make the trip in his place.

Enter Casanova. "Moose and I had been friends for many years," said Casanova, "and he came out to see the boy's family. He met Peter Murphy there (at Grants Pass)."

Murphy took over again. "After the services, Moose, who knew Len very well, asked if he could see Len. I arranged a meeting between Moose, Len and myself."

The three met at the Eugene

Hotel and had dinner together. During their conversation, the possibility of a game between Oregon and Notre Dame was mentioned. However, the game was basketball, not football.

"Originally, the plan that Cas and I had was to try for a basketball game, because we didn't think a football game would be possible," Murphy said. "But Cas got to talking about Autzen Stadium, and how it had a new artificial surface (installed in 1967)."

Krause, upon hearing Casanova talk about Autzen, was amazed that a stadium holding 40,000 people had been built for so little money, and he wanted to see the stadium. They drove to Autzen, and "Moose was so impressed, he said, 'Why not football?'" says Murphy.

This led to the final step of negotiation. Casanova, Krause and Murphy drove to Portland to meet with another influential Notre Dame alumn, Bill Schmidt. Schmidt, owner of the Schmidt Steel Co. in Portland, knew all three of the men very well.

"Bill was very ill at the time from a stroke, and when Moose saw him, he said, 'Bill, we're thinking about a football game between Oregon and Notre Dame'. Bill's eyes just lit up," Murphy said.

On the way back from Portland, the deal was struck. "Moose said, 'well, how do we work it', and that was it," said Casanova. "I think that originally their guarantee was for \$50,000, but it became \$100,000."

"I'm delighted that we could get them (Notre Dame) to the coast," said Casanova. This will be the first game in the Northwest for ND since 1949, when they played Washington, and the last until the Irish update their schedules in 1994.



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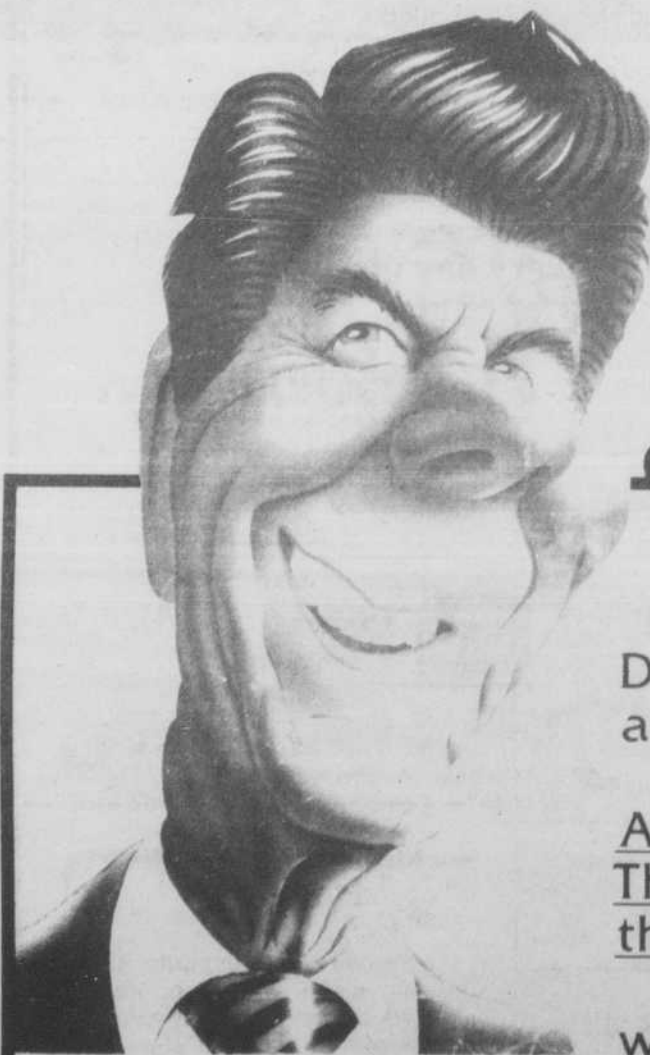
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