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Locker rooms always a hassle

By Paul Danzer
 Of the Emerald

While fans jockey for parking spaces, and the athletic department looks for corners to squeeze extra fans into, the equipment managers for Oregon and Notre Dame will have their backs against the wall before the game.

They'll be forced to because of the cramped space in the stacked locker rooms at Autzen Stadium. The visiting and home locker rooms sit on top of each other at the west end of the stadium. They provide almost no breathing room, let alone room for dressing, treatment of injuries or coaching.

According to Oregon equipment manager Pat Conrad, his counterpart at Notre Dame, Gene O'Neill, whom he met at a convention, was appalled by the locker room situation at Oregon. It's a common reaction.

"Through my experience travelling around I would say

our playing and seating facilities are great," said Conrad. "It is the backup facilities where we are not up to par."

The biggest shortfall of the locker rooms at Autzen is lack of space. Each room contains just 54 lockers. Any team who plays the Ducks brings at least 60 players (the Pac-10 conference limit). Add to that the number of coaches and trainers who tag along, and things can get very interesting.

"It's a zoo. That's the word for it," said Conrad describing life in the locker rooms before and after games.

He does know. If the opposing teams have it bad, Conrad has it worse. The Ducks dress 90 players for each home game.

Because of the lack of space, trainers must set up their treatment centers in the showers. These are hardly plush facilities.

As if lack of space doesn't create enough of a challenge for the equipment managers,

lack of time adds to the excitement of game day preparations.

The time constraints are caused by the University's contract with district 5AAA to hold high school football games at Autzen every Friday night. Because of those games, the equipment managers cannot move their equipment into the locker rooms on Friday.

"It's no problem for the coaches or anybody else," Conrad said. "It's the little guy who must deal with it — the equipment manager. But, he's going to get the job done. It's just a lot more difficult."

Joe O'Brien, Notre Dame assistant athletic director didn't knock the stadium.

"We are thrilled and anxious to come out there," he said in a telephone interview. "It's a beautiful area, with beautiful facilities."

O'Brien was diplomatic in discussing the locker room set up. "We have played in a number of places with a wide range of set ups. We're not that picky."

But some people have been picky. The most notable was the Michigan state equipment manager according to Conrad. "He took one look at the locker room and said 'Isn't this depressing,'" he recalled. "Most people have a little more class than that."



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