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Holidays bring tourney cheers

By Paul Danzer
Of the Emerald

The decorations are up. The holidays are almost upon us, bringing with them a bevy of traditions. There're mistletoe and eggnog, trees and wreaths, Santa Claus and reindeer.

And — in Portland — there's basketball.

The traditional Far West Classic tournament will make its 27th run Dec. 26-29, bringing men's college basketball to Memorial Coliseum one week after the women perform in the fast-growing Giusti Tournament of Champions.

Not wanting to balk at tradition, Oregon will again be represented in both tournaments.

In recent years, the Ducks have been well represented. The men have finished second in the eight-team Far West Classic for two years running, while the women followed a runner-up showing in 1980, with a Giusti championship a year ago.

"We've been to the finals the last two years, so I think it's a hell of a tournament," says men's coach Jim Haney of the Classic.

While many basketball aficionados might agree with Haney, the Classic faced extinction two years ago. Among the reasons cited for discontinuing the tournament were the expansion of the Pac-10 schedule, rising travel and accommodation costs, and a lack of interest.

The key ingredient in saving the tournament has been the success of Oregon State's basketball program, which has been ranked in the top-10 in the nation during the past three seasons. The Beavers won the tournament in 1979 and 1980 before falling to third last season.

It's appropriate that the Beavers would be the team to

save the tournament. Oregon State began the Far West Classic in 1957 with a four team tournament at Gill Coliseum in Corvallis. OSU won the first one, and nine more in a row before falling to last place in the 1966 tournament. They won 27 Classic games before losing during their streak.

"The interest (in the Classic) has changed slightly in the past few years," says Haney, citing OSU's success. He notes that in the past there were three kinds of fans: Oregon supporters, OSU supporters, and the uncommitted fans. Now with OSU's success, the uncommitted fans have been replaced by Beaver rooters.

"When OSU has a decline, it will be interesting to see what happens," he says.

It will also be interesting to see what happens this year. The field, overall, is less flashy than it has been in the recent past, probably because the tourney was on the chopping block not to long ago.

The Ducks kick off the tournament with a 7 p.m. game against Montana State Dec. 26. Other first round matchups include the University of Portland against Idaho on the 26th, while OSU takes on Tennessee State and Drake challenges Lamar on the 27th.

"I don't think this field has the same glamor schools that it's had in the past," says Haney. "But at the same time the field is strong."

Haney says the tournament is a good psychological test for his team because they play three games in four days, and Haney says the goal is to win at least two of those games. "It's also a good opportunity to check where you are. Then, once the Classic's over, you can make any final adjustments."

Coach Elwin Heiny says the Giusti offers the women a similar opportunity.

"You have to look at games

like that as a building experience," Heiny says of the Giusti. "Each team has to find its own identity, that's what preseason is for."

Heiny hopes his team will be pretty well settled by the time they tip-off the Giusti at 7 p.m. Dec. 22 against highly regarded Colorado, and for good reason.

The fourth-annual Giusti boasts two-time defending NCAA national champion Louisiana Tech, along with AIAW runner-up Texas. Also entered are Long Beach State, ranked as high as fifth in the nation in pre-season polls, Washington, Oregon State and host Portland State. The Beavers have been in the top-20 in several pre-season rankings.

"I would really like to play against Louisiana Tech," says Heiny noting that playing the best teams gives them a chance to see where they stand. "You need to play the best to be the best."

Two years ago the Ducks played the best when they battled defending national champion Old Dominion in the Giusti finals and lost by just one point. "That gave us a real boost," remembers Heiny.

Betty Rankin, director of the Giusti Tournament, is hoping that the strong field combined with improved playing dates will give tournament attendance a real boost. For the past three years, the tourney has been held during finals week. By holding the tournament a week later Rankin anticipates better student attendance.

But even if fans don't flock to the Giusti, teams from around the nation would love to.

"I have huge files full of letters from teams asking for a berth," says Rankin. "We want to keep the best teams coming. And we want to increase the awareness of the skill level of women's basketball."

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Oregon State vs.
Tennessee State
9 p.m.

Drake vs. Lamar

Session III

December 28
1 p.m. & 3 p.m.
Consolation

Session IV

December 28
7 p.m. & 9 p.m.

Semi-finals

Session V

December 29
1 p.m.

7th and 8th place
consolation
3 p.m.

4th and 6th place
consolation

Session VI

December 29
7 p.m.

3rd and 5th place finals
9 p.m.

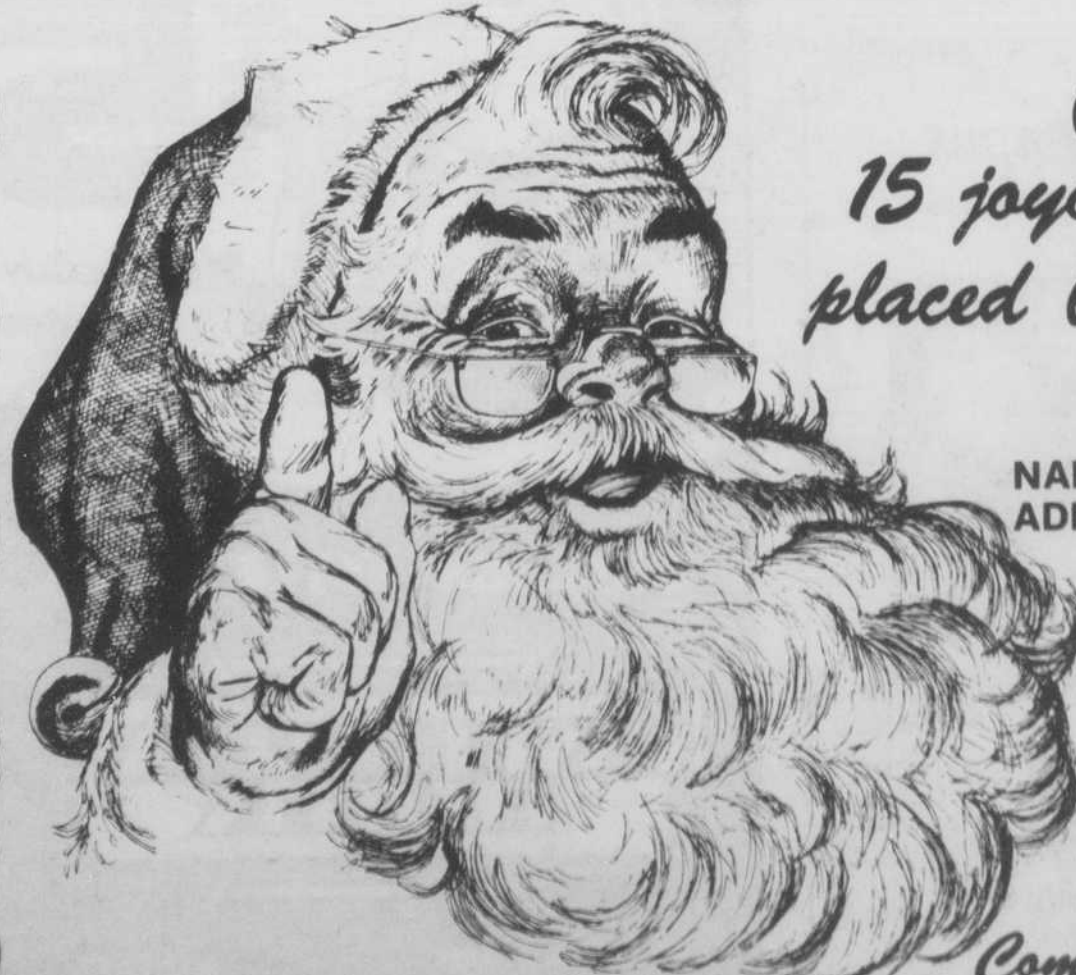
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