

Can a team be too talented?

By Rich Skeen
Of the Emerald

As Oregon men's cross country coach Bill Dellinger began his 17th season, he faced a problem other coaches would have loved to solve — he had more good runners than he could place on a seven-man team.

Along with All-American senior Jim Hill, Dellinger could turn to John Zishka (fourth at the 1982 Pac-10 meet), senior Brad Simpson (43rd at NCAA championships) and Chris Hamilton, a touted junior transfer from University of Portland.

After those four came senior Vance Blow and a crop of talented young runners — sophomores Harold Kuphaldt, Matt McGuirk, Dan Nelson and freshmen red-shirts Dub Myers, Will Kimball, and Garth Morrisette.

Dellinger's solution? Redshirt runners that didn't make the team. Redshirting, or removing an athlete from competition to save a year of eligibility, has become a key tool for collegiate coaches and athletes, and one often advocated by Dellinger.

"We'd rather have a guy participate if he can, but sometimes as a freshman an athlete is not physically ready (to compete)," says the Oregon coach. "Redshirting helps him mature."

The coach knew redshirting would let him stockpile future runners as well.

"If a runner can't break into the top seven, he might as well red-shirt," says Dellinger.

Of Oregon's runners, Kuphaldt, McGuirk, Nelson, Kimball and Myers (fifth in 1982 NCAA 1,500 meters) knew going into 1983 meets that they'd be redshirted if they couldn't make Dellinger's top seven. None of them resent that.

"I thought it was a good idea," says McGuirk. "There was no pressure — if you didn't make the team, you got another chance to make it the next year."

"Coach's idea was a good one," agrees Kuphaldt. "If I didn't make the team, it wouldn't bother me."

Myers, a sophomore from Portland's Parkrose High School, was one of the most likely to find himself redshirting.

"He could compete on any team

in the country," says Dellinger, "but redshirting will pay off for Dub later."

Although redshirting young talent isn't easy for Dellinger, he is quick to point out that Hill redshirted.

"There were two or three times I kicked myself in the butt and asked myself, 'Why am I redshirting him?'" says Dellinger. "But for Jim, it was a real advantage — he was on scholarship an extra year, and he had an additional year to finish his studies."

Faced with a tough decision, Dellinger maintained that he'd wait as long as possible to choose redshirts.

Injuries to Zishka (heel) and Blow (virus) made the 17th year coach's choice a little easier. As it turns out, Myers, Kimball and Morrisette likely will skip the Pac-10 meet and get redshirt status.

In the end, Dellinger profits this year and next. He'll have Myers, Kimball, Morrisette and blue-chip freshman John Carlotti from Cedar Grove, N.J., ready to go in 1984. Sorry Bill — some guys have real problems.



Emerald Photo

Bill Dellinger says Dub Myers (above) could compete on any team in the country, but the sophomore likely will redshirt at Oregon.

Special teams—

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"We call our special teams pride and joy," says Walden. "You have to earn a spot. It's all pride and joy of success in the kicking game."

At Oregon, where coach Rich Brooks is considered a special teams expert, a place on the teams is not just handed out. According to Ramsdell, positions on every special team must be earned.

"We just don't put guys in there to give them playing time," says Ramsdell. "The best players are put in there whether they are starters or not. You need to prove your merit to play."

Once a special teams job is earned, practice time is minimal. But players and coaches try to make the most out of that time.

"We work hard on special teams because we take pride in it," says linebacker Todd Welch, who plays on kickoff and punt return squads. "We probably work harder on it than any other team."

Minutes spent in practice may not reflect how much of a role special teams play during a game. Execution is always important. The slightest mistake could lead to a blocked punt or a missed field goal.

"There is an awful lot of emphasis there," says Ron Johnson, who plays on the Ducks' punt, punt return and kickoff teams. "The coaches like to make sure we do a good job."

"Everybody on the special teams puts out a lot of effort because Brooks is a good special teams coach," says Doug Herman, a member of Oregon's punt, kickoff return and extra point teams.

Runners—

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join University of Portland transfer Chris Hamilton to give Oregon experience. Junior Mike Blackmore and sophomore Dan Nelson — both of whom had good falls — round out the Ducks' seven-man contingent.

And Oregon will leave plenty of talent at home. Dub Myers ("he could compete on any team in the country," says Dellinger) and Will Kimball probably will redshirt this season.

Dellinger says that while the Ducks will wear the favorite's tag at Stanford, stiff competition will be on hand.

"Arizona has really improved," says Dellinger, "and Washington State has three world-class runners."

In the individual race, Hill is the man to beat. He'll be challenged by UCLA's Jon Butler, fifth a year ago, and Arizona's Tommy Ansberry, sixth in 1982.

Last year, Oregon won the meet with 46 points, just ahead of UCLA's 51. Arizona was third and Washington State finished fourth.

After the Pac-10 race, the Ducks will be at home Nov. 12 to host the District VIII Championships at Lane Community College.

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