

# Media hype suffocates talented athletes

Most people like attention. It's always nice to know that someone wants to hear what you have to say, wants to know what you think.

For major college athletes, specifically football and basketball players, attention is a given. Athletes in these two sports can count on the media to repeat and print their every thought.

## commentary doug levy

The limelight is extended if the athlete happens to be gifted. The media dogs the talented athlete, watching his every step, monitoring his every breath.

And yes, it is fact that being a big-time college athlete means giving up some privacy and succumbing to the highs and lows of publicity.

But it is unfair to assume that celebrated student-athletes are faultless, or some kind of saviors. Sportswriters and sportscasters tend to portray them as such.

Kevin Willhite is a 20-year-old freshman running back for Oregon's football team. He has rushed 55 times for 173 yards — not bad for an ordinary freshman running back.

Willhite, of course, is no ordinary freshman. Two years ago, he came to Oregon as a high school All-America from Rancho Cordova, Calif. People expected, and continue to expect, plenty from him.

The media has showered attention on Willhite. From the time he came to Oregon, it was almost assumed that he would score a touchdown or do magical things each time he touched a football. The media thought so, and then Pac-10 football fans thought so.

An injured hamstring and bruised ribs have made Willhite something less than All-World. Remember though, that this is just a 20-year-old kid, not the Superman the press made him out to be.

Oregon coach Rich Brooks has been known to bristle about the lavish praise poured on Willhite and others. He knows the media has the right to cover college sports, but he feels the exploits of its athletes can be overblown.

"The press," says Brooks, a combination of conviction and despair in his voice, "can do

what they want. But I don't want to project someone to be more than they are. No matter how talented an athlete is, he still has to perform."

Tim Norton hasn't even performed yet. A rifle-armed quarterback out of Skyline, Calif., he transferred to Oregon from Tennessee this year.

Although Norton must sit out 1983 before earning his spurs at Oregon, *The Oregonian* saw fit to feature him in a page one story. The probable "quarterback of the future" for the Ducks, said the Portland daily.

Again, the media has stuck its claws into a great talent. Again, Brooks is less than pleased.

"It's kind of hard to predict things of someone who hasn't even played a down in the Pac-10," Brooks says.

Chris Miller played his first down Saturday against UCLA at Autzen Stadium. Miller is a local hero, a freshman quarterback out of Eugene's own Sheldon High School.

Facing a tough Bruin team, Miller completed two of seven passes, including a 24-yard scoring strike to the omnipresent Lew Barnes. He showed enthusiasm and ability to run.

But if Miller thought he had to run during the game, he must have felt like Alberto Salazar in Oregon's locker room. Television crews and reporters stuffed microphones and note pads in his face until he was alone in the dressing room.

*The Register-Guard* featured Miller in a column. Miller told questioners he was "going bananas" when he was inserted into the game. He'll really be going bananas if he has to face armloads of media folks again.

"He certainly didn't set the world on fire," says Brooks, clearly perplexed as to why Miller got Joe Namath treatment.

That's the problem — too many college athletes are placed upon a red carpet. Those of us in the media, myself included, should recall that these are teenagers, not grizzled professionals.

Oregon basketball coach Don Monson sums up how a teenager should be treated.

"When you talk about freshmen," Monson says, "you can't evaluate them too much. It's not fair."

It's unfortunate, but it's true. Collegiate football and basketball stars are coddled, caressed and abused by attention. They needn't be.

## et al.

### MEETINGS

**THE ASUO INVITES** students to its monthly open staff meeting in Suite 4 EMU today at 7 p.m. Come ready with criticisms, compliments and suggestions.

**PUBLIC RELATIONS STUDENT SOCIETY** of America will meet Thursday, Nov. 10 at 4 p.m. in Allen Hall, Room 211. All students interested in public relations are welcome.

**OPEU CLERICAL COMMITTEE** meets today from 5:15 to 6:15 p.m. in EMU Century Room F. Call Vicki ext. 3591 for information.

**THE ASIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION** holds its general meeting at 5 p.m. today in the second floor lounge, Friendly Hall. All interested students and faculty are welcome.

**SUAB** meets today at 3:30 p.m. in Room 337 EMU.

**ALPHA PHI OMEGA** general meeting today at 6:30 p.m. in the EMU Century Room A. All members and

### pledges please attend

**PRE-LAW STUDENT ASSOCIATION** Executive Council will meet at 3:30 p.m. today in Room 164 Oregon Hall.

### LECTURES

**"INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE NEW ARMS RACE"** is the title of a panel discussion today at 12:30 p.m. in the EMU Forum Room. Panel members will be Richard Kraus, George Zaninovich, Jude Smith, Nigel Griffith and Eike Fischer. Sponsored by SNUFF for the Week of Education.

**THE FEASIBILITY OF A PEACE STUDIES** program at the University will be discussed today by panel members Judith Kuipers, dean of undergraduate studies, Oregon State University; David Frank, professor of rhetoric, and Betsy Boyd, student member of the Committee for Peace Studies, at 2:30 p.m. in the EMU

Forum Room. Sponsored by SNUFF for the Week of Education.

**FREE SHOWING OF THE FILM "Civil Defense Debate"** will take place today at 4 p.m. in the EMU Forum Room. Sponsored by SNUFF for the Week of Education.

**J.S. AMBASSADOR RICHARD BENEDICK** will discuss "United States Foreign Policy and Population Trends" tonight at 7:30 p.m. in Geology Hall.

### INTERVIEWS

**A SEMINARY REPRESENTATIVE** from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Ill., will be available today from 3 to 5 p.m. at the Wesley Center, 1236 Kincaid St., to talk with students who are interested in pursuing a graduate theological degree program. Call 686-4694 for details or an appointment.

**A SEMINARY REPRESENTATIVE** from Iliff School of Theology, Denver, Colo., will take students interested in a graduate theological program to dinner tonight. Call the Wesley Center, 686-4694, for reservations.

**JUNIORS AND SENIORS** registered in the College of Business Administration who are seriously considering a career in banking are encouraged to apply for an observational internship this winter at First Interstate Bank. Credit is available. Resumes are due in Room 246 Susan Campbell Hall by noon Monday, Nov. 14.

**SENATOR PETE WILSON** (R - California) is currently seeking applications for interns to join his staff in Washington, D.C., during winter and spring terms. Responsibilities will include constituency work, legislative research, scheduling and press work. Position descriptions and applications are available in Room 246 Susan Campbell Hall. The position is unpaid.

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by Berke Breathed

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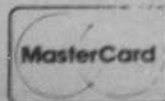
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