

Oregon's fortunes in Pac-10 football have gone about as well as Mike Owen's chances on the football field. Emerald Photo

Can Oregon find happiness in the...



As another Oregon winter settles down to its task of dumping alternate doses of wet and cold on Eugene, Rick Bay sits in his office as Oregon's athletic director and searches for answers.

Answers to the question of how to pull Oregon's intercollegiate athletic program out of the Pacific-10 Conference basement and turn the Ducks into something more than a "good little school."

So far, Bay has found no ray of sunlight to warm the chill of another approaching winter, another year of being battered and bruised by the USC's and UCLA's of the Pac-10.

The situation, it appears, is not good. There are only eight major sports at Oregon after massive cuts a few years ago. The football team is headed for its third straight losing season, and hasn't been to a bowl game since 1963. The basketball team hasn't had a winning season for four years, and the last playoff appearance was in the 1976-77 season.

Amid the gloom, Bay keeps trying to patch together an intercollegiate athletic program that seemingly always hovers near the edge of extinction.

But why keep trying? Why not join an "easier" conference — like the Western Athletic Conference — where schools spend money on their intercollegiate athletic programs at the same stingy level that Oregon is forced to?

The answers to those questions are complex, says Bay, and the find their justification in academics as much as athletics.

"It would be a serious mistake for the University to get out of the Pac-10," says Bay.

Bay isn't the only one opposed to leaving the Pac-10. University Pres. Paul Olum is adamantly opposed, as is Vice President for Administration and Finance Dan Williams, the man Bay reports to.

Bay, like Olum and Williams, cites the carryover into academia as a prime reason for maintaining conference ties.

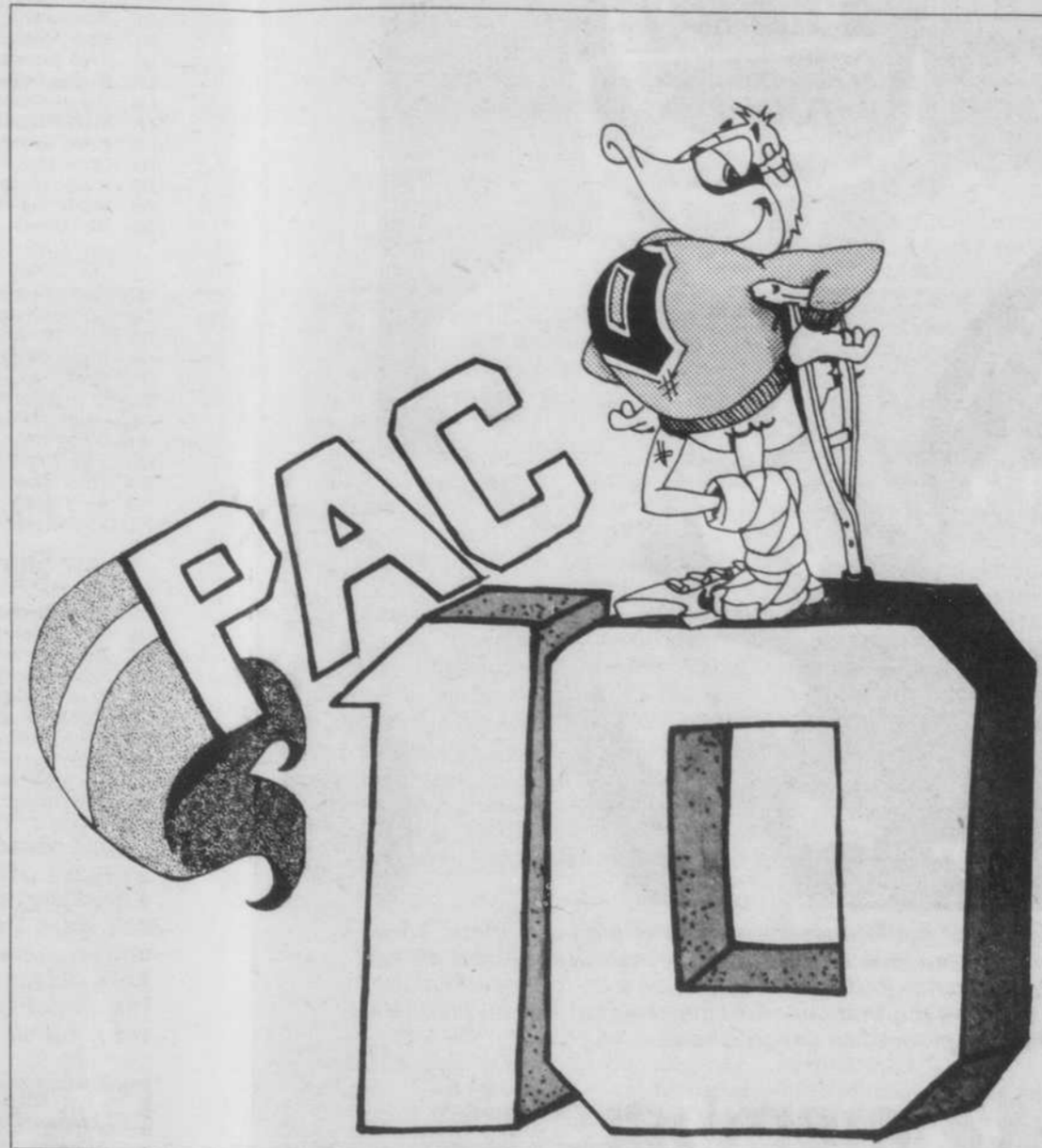
"Our professors like to be associated with the Stanfords and the Californias because of their nationally known excellence in academics," Bay says.

"And people tend to classify your academic strength based on the athletic conference you're in," he adds.

Although having Oregon in the Pac-10 satisfies innumerable professors, students and Oregonians, the situation leaves Bay frustrated with the lack of resources he has to work with.

"We'll never even dream of dominating the Pac-10 given our current support base," says Bay.

To Bay, the words "support base" are critical in intercollegiate athletics. Take Arizona State's Sun Devils. They



play in 70,030-seat Sun Devil Stadium. They averaged 65,338 fans in 1982 — Oregon averaged 23,110. That difference of almost 42,000 per home game (enough to fill Autzen Stadium) translates into hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars in gate receipts flowing into Sun Devil coffers that never find their way into Oregon's pockets.

Or take USC. Television executives drool over USC's Saturday afternoon matchups against the likes of Notre Dame or UCLA, and one spot on a nationally televised game can bring \$500,000 or more. USC often gets two spots a year.

Or how about the University of Washington or UCLA? Both have student enrollments over 300,000, and both schools are located in metropolitan areas that have greater populations than the entire state of Oregon. More students means more alumni and a greater pool of potential donors. And a large population means a potential for higher gate receipts.

Perhaps a study done of the more than 100 Division I-A schools illustrates the disparity best. Athletic department

budgets ranged from \$5 million to \$12 million in the study, the latter being the Michigan of the college football scene.

Oregon, meanwhile, was at the low end of the spectrum, with an annual budget of \$5.5 million, while the Arizona State's of the Pac-10 operated athletic departments on \$10 million a year or more.

Is the disparity really that great? Yes, says Bay emphatically. Oregon's coaches are ninth or tenth in the conference in terms of pay, the Ducks have more part-time coaches than full-time coaches (the reverse is usually true), and Oregon is operating with the minimum number of major sports if it wants to remain in the conference.

If that isn't discouraging for Bay, he must now look for ways to cut his budget again, as he predicts another deficit this year.

The most obvious places to cut are the two biggest expenses — football and basketball — but Bay finds it difficult to cut the two.

"It's a double-edged sword," he says. "If you cut one of the two sports that brings in most of your revenue, you risk

reducing that revenue." Bay has cut the football budget each of the last two years, but sees nowhere to cut money from either that program or any of the other areas of the athletic department.

"We just can't cut anymore." And revenue production looks almost as bleak. Although alumni donations have increased, attendance has fallen each of the last four years, from a "high" of 37,000 in 1979. This year, Oregon ranks ahead of only Oregon State and Washington State in Pac-10 home attendance figures.

Chances of gaining a berth on national television are nil because "you have to earn your way on" with a good record, Bay says. But even the chance of getting on a regional broadcast has been denied the Ducks, who had to watch while Oregon State appeared twice on regional television and picked up \$400,000 for the pair of games.

There is no money forthcoming from the University or the state, either.

It is a seemingly never-ending whirlpool for Oregon and Bay.

"I have grown cynical in the time I have been here," says Bay. "I'm grateful for the moral support we have received, but we are dropping further behind."

"To be perfectly brutal with the people who criticize our lack of success, 'You are getting what you are paying for,'" Bay says.

Money, says Bay, is what Oregon needs to compete in the Pac-10.

"Unless we have money to improve our program, it's unrealistic to expect us to recruit en masse out-of-state athletes," he says. "We can't keep quality coaches and ask them to compete against schools that have things we don't have."

"It has to become a state pride and a legislative concern," Bay says. "People have to put their money where their mouths are."

Bay professes delight and disappointment in the support for Oregon intercollegiate athletics. He is delighted by the "many loyal individuals who support a program that struggles" and yet disappointed by the lack of state support.

"If the legislature was really committed to a strong athletic program, we would do just fine," Bay asserts. "But I don't sense any sympathy for Oregon's situation at the state legislature."

Bay believes Oregon's athletic program is an extremely valuable asset for the state, but he is at a loss to explain why the state has made no move to invest in improving that asset.

"They don't seem to understand the situation," he says.

But Bay plans to lobby them nevertheless. "I don't know where else to go."

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