

Club baseball: Down, out, on its way back

By Steve Irvin
Of the Emerald

A golfer was practicing his iron shots at Howe Field recently. He casually lofted shots from one corner of the baseball diamond to the other, where a man caught them with a baseball mitt.

Those may have been the only balls caught at Howe Field this spring. Oregon's Club Sports baseball team was there a year ago, posting a 19-11 record on its way to the school's first winning season since 1976. Despite the team's success, baseball was dropped from the club sports curriculum.

To find out why, one must take a more detailed look at 1983.

Last year, coach Larry Hanson and assistant Brian Peterson headed the effort to bring baseball back to Oregon. The club team was formed in January 1983 and was financed by \$5,000 in community donations. The players came from campus. No scholarships. No frills.

There was incentive, though. The Ducks played against the teams in the Pac-10 Northern Division, which gave them a major-college schedule on a low budget.

The clubbers did well against Pac-10 competition. Perhaps too well. They played in the Pac-10 North tournament in Portland and upset Oregon State in the tourney's opening game.

That victory gave Oregon instant credibility and instant problems. Oregon State coach Jack Riley said he wouldn't allow his team to play the Ducks again. "We have nothing to gain and everything

to lose," he said at the time.

It was the beginning of the end. At the season's conclusion, the athletic directors of the Pac-10 North voted not to play against the Ducks, relegating them to a primarily junior college and small-college schedule.

"They didn't want their programs to reach the same level as the University of Oregon," Hanson says. "That's no knock on club sports, but when you compete against a team that's got a \$5,000 budget and you have an \$80,000 budget and you lose to them, people are going to start asking questions. . . I really can't blame them. Put in the same position, I probably wouldn't play either."

That left Oregon with an expensive dilemma if it wanted to play the same quality schedule — it had to get back into the athletic department. The clubbers had to raise the \$500,000 Athletic Director Rick Bay said the school needed to maintain a stable program.

Hanson, Nike mogul Bill Bowerman and Jack Pyle started "Save Oregon Baseball" — with the damning acronym of SOB — in an attempt to raise the money. They never came close.

Nevertheless, the club team began practicing in October under a new coach, John Meyer. Hanson was gone, his time taken by an athletic equipment sales job with Luby's Sport Center.

"I couldn't make the same commitment we made last year without the same schedule we had," Hanson explains. "I wouldn't ask myself or 24 other players to

make a five, six-month commitment if they're not going to have a respectable schedule to play. It's just too much work."

Without Hanson, Oregon's fortunes were all downhill. The organization that typified the previous team was lacking under Meyer.

Dave Miller, a relief pitcher for Oregon in 1983, says Meyer was lacking the dedication Hanson had.

"He (Meyer) was taking it pretty casually," Miller says. "He missed a few practices. He left early a few times. When we left to go down to Roseburg (the team's initial road trip for a game against Umpqua Community College) it took us a long time to get organized. He waited until the afternoon that we were going to go ask Sandy (Vaughn) for travel money."

Kyle Etchison was the pitching ace of the club team last year. He went to Portland State University in the fall, but was academically ineligible. When he returned to see the club team in the fall, a lot had changed.

"I went out there one day and watched them and everybody was doing their own thing," he says. "Guys were over hitting on their own. There was a guy standing there playing catch and the other guys were just talking. Nothing was organized."

Club Sports Director Sandy Vaughn says baseball as a club sport seemed doomed after Meyer's departure.

"To get a baseball team going within club sports with a volunteer coach. . . we just assumed that that would be the end of baseball in the club sports program."

Enter Bob Richmond. An attorney and owner of a commercial real estate firm in Eugene, he took the financial reins of a failing program. Richmond's intention, like Hanson's, was to bring baseball back on a club basis at first, with the ultimate goal of getting athletic department funding.

"I think there are a lot of players that would like to be out there. That's what it's all about — giving the kids a chance to play," Richmond says.

Sports shorts

Oregon's track teams qualified three more athletes for NCAA competition Thursday night at the Oregon State Twilight Meet in Corvallis.

Oregon's women got two qualifiers: **Brenda Bushnell** ran a PR 9:29.83 to meet the NCAA standard in that event, and **Birgit Petersen** qualified with a 9:30.93 in the same race. In addition, **Claudette Groenendaal** qualified for the Olympic Trials 1,500 meters with a field-record 4:15.86 clocking, and hurdler **Lisa Nicholson** will be in Southern California this weekend trying to qualify in the 400 hurdles.

On the men's side, Oregon's **Harold Kuphaldt** finished second to Stanford's **David Frank** in the steeplechase, but his 8:40.70 was still good enough to qualify him for NCAA and Olympic Trials competition.

Other Oregon winners: Women — **Kay Garnett** (14.10), 100 hurdles; **Julie Hilsenteger** (57.46), 400; **Sharon Johnson** (35-11/4), triple jump. Men — **Brian Crouser** (272.8), javelin; **Chris Bolden** (24-9/4), long jump.

Gregg Patterson and Croy Cochran, two outstanding state of Washington high school golfers, have signed letters of intent with Oregon.

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