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Position Descriptions are in 221 Hendricks Hall,
sign ups begin Nov. 4.

Ratball

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of a condition than a game. The last game of the night takes place after several hours of play, just before everyone is ready to go home.

Play generally breaks down about half way through the game: players take half-court shots, stop running the floor, make long, errant baseball passes and extensively reduce the contest to a joke. The "final games" don't actually end more than they disintegrate. It's a classic syndrome that occurs anywhere ratball is played.

"The last game is always trash," says the Rat, who has had an average night. "But this spot is mostly OK. Three rats."

Tuesday:

We ventured into Springfield to check the rat scene at the Memorial Building. Walking into this place was like walking into a Bruce Springsteen video. No "Air Jordan" wardrobes for these guys.

The regulars come dressed to play in their jeans, camouflage jackets or their old high school issue gym shorts. Instead of bringing radios, some of them bring their wives or girlfriends to cheer them on and help keep score.

Housed in an old building, the gym itself inspires images of 1950s-style, Saturday afternoon CYO games. The nostalgic feel prevails with the exception of one feature: 1980s-style clear backboards with breakaway NBA rims.

The Master is quick to exploit this big-time attraction by working several sensational slams into the game, including his favorite: the "Flying Suicide Slam." But despite such technical trickery, the Rat finds the competition in Springfield "above average."

Nevertheless, the Ratmaster is on fire at the Memorial Building and gives the gym a good rating.

"These are my kind of players," says the Master of the hard-nosed, blue-collar menagerie that fills the gym until nearly 3 a.m. "I give it a three and a half."

Wednesday:

The most unique setting in Eugene for ratball is definitely found beneath the Highway-105 overpass, near Second Avenue and Washington Street. Six baskets, suspended from the bridge, hang down to form a large set of outdoor courts that are protected by a giant "roof," which is actually the freeway above.

The courts are lighted at night, but the Rat and I arrive at 3 p.m., just in time to get in a game with some high schoolers, who frequent the courts immediately after school gets out.

The Ratmaster is immediately set on edge when one young ratster in a "Wham!" tour T-shirt begins cranking Madonna's "Like A Virgin" cassette on his box.

"Definitely not your serious rat music," says the Master, who mostly likes to jam to Run D.M.C. or Chaka Khan.

The Rat has trouble with his outside shot here,

and finds the smooth, concrete surface very slippery, resulting in a negative rating.

He finally allows that the location of the courts is a positive factor and that maybe he's just had an off day. Grudgingly, he agrees to up the rating. "Two rats."

Thursday:

Steeped in tradition, the "Y" has been the cornerstone of community athletics for more than a century. Eugene's YMCA features a large, two court gym for ratsters. The courts however, are short and narrow, mandating unique, four-on-four full-court games, a practice, as any experienced ratballer knows, that is virtually impossible on a regulation-sized court.

The play is physical and intense, with a lot of pressure on a team to "keep the court." The Ratmaster even threatens to erect a "Caution-Flying Elbows" sign after he is continually struck in the heat of battle by flailing limbs.

The evening is slightly marred by "Mike," a player who calls a foul about every 30 seconds. At one point, Mike makes a bogus "three-in-the-key" call, an appalling claim in any ratball game, and a serious rat faux pas.

"There's one of these kind of guys in every gym," advises the Rat about Mike. "The best way to deal with them is just to take it to their face."

And take it he does, putting on an aerial circus with an assortment of long range bombs and "def jam slams."

Even considering Mike's attitude and the fact that one must pay to play at the YMCA, the Master likes the place.

"Smart players, tough players, good players," he says. "I give it three rats."

Friday:

On his last day in town, I knew I had to take the Master to the proverbial rat mecca — Esslinger Hall.

Simply put, with personal biases aside, Esslinger is the premiere spot for ratball in Eugene. It has the most open gym times, the best courts, and the widest array of players.

We hang out at Esslinger for an entire day and night, and get involved in nearly 25 games, a bona-fide rat-a-thon. As expected, some games are good and some are bad.

Bitter arguments concerning the prodigious calling of fouls and errant score keeping arise occasionally (a common haphazard in ratball) proving that Esslinger isn't infallible. Then again, ratball isn't supposed to be a divine creation, and that's the whole idea.

The Ratmaster, who turns in steady performances all day long, likes the feel of the place.

"It smells like a gym in here," he says, nodding and drawing a deep breath. "Four rats. Nah, what the hell, I feel good. Make it five."

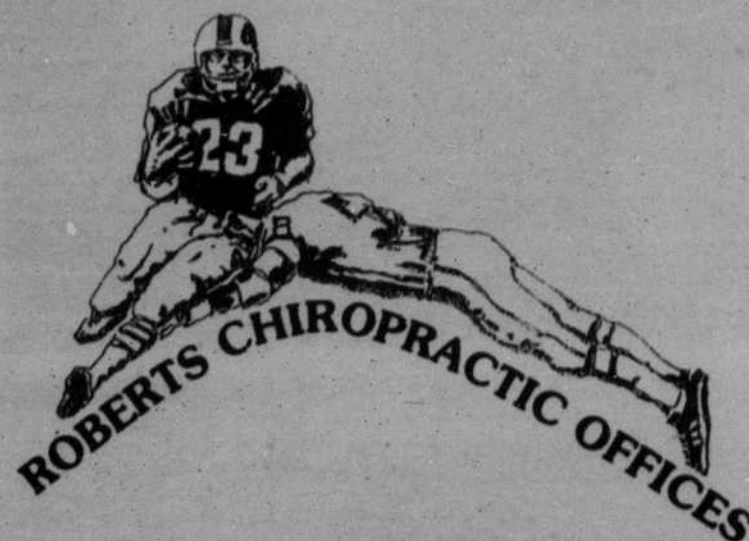
And at last we have realized what we set out to find on this ratspedition: a perfect score.

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