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Sports

Rasmussen holds his own in NBA

By Dennis Fernandes
Of the Emerald

One of Oregon's most memorable alumni came back to Eugene for Homecoming last weekend.

Blair Rasmussen returned to the friendly confines of McArthur Court Sunday night, wearing the unfamiliar blue garb of a Denver Nugget.

And instead of shooting that soft baseline jumper over the likes of Stuart Gray and Chris Welp, he was banging around his 260-pound frame underneath the basket with Portland Trailblazer centers Sam Bowie and Caldwell Jones.

The 6,342 basketball enthusiasts appreciated Rasmussen's performance as

much as Jerome Kersey's thunderous dunks and Walter Berry's nose underneath the basket. He received a loud round of applause when he came into the game the 6:22 mark in the first quarter. The applause was louder when Oregon's fourth all-time leading scorer canned a ten-foot jumper for his first bucket.

He did not play as well as he would like in front of the home folks, but the efforts were appreciated nonetheless.

Bowie blocked his shot three times, but he still turned in a respectable night: 15 points and seven rebounds in 24 minutes.

"I got pushed around a little bit on the inside," Rasmussen said. "I don't feel I reacted very

well on defense."

But Rasmussen is not worried. If this were in preparation for his rookie season last year, however, he would be concerned.

It wasn't until the playoffs last year against these very same Blazers that Rasmussen convinced his coach, Doug Moe, and the rest of the Nuggets that he could play in the NBA.

After averaging the least amount of minutes for first round draft picks and only 3.2 points per game during the season, Rasmussen came off the bench in the playoff series and averaged 12 points and 7.5 rebounds.

Prior to the playoffs, head coach Doug Moe was not en-

couraging about Rasmussen's prospects on the team.

"He was talking to me last year about about sitting on the bench for another year at least," Rasmussen said. "The whole outlook is different because of the playoff performance and the way I've played in camp. He's giving me a lot of minutes so I can develop."

He has taken advantage of those minutes. Before Sunday night, he was leading Denver in scoring (17.3 a game), rebounding and blocked shots. In Denver's only preseason victory last Wednesday night he tallied 28 points.

"I think my whole game is better. I'm quicker and stronger out there," he said. "I'm confident of what I can do when I get inside with the ball."

His peers seem to agree. "His footwork is a lot better, and his court awareness has improved," said Wayne Cooper, Denver's starting center. "I think he's going to be a force in this league."

"I think Denver is going to be very pleased with him in the years to come," Bowie said. "I had a chance to work with him at Pete Newell's camp (the annual seminar for NBA big men), and I really got a chance to appreciate his skills down there."

"On the offensive end, he can score with anybody," Bowie said.

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Students for Packwood

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