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Eager crowd waits hours to get in

Jackson's speech a major event

By Mike Drummond
Emerald Associate Editor

More than a speech, more than a rally — Jesse Jackson's campus campaign visit Thursday turned into Eugene's political event of the year. And when the lines began forming in front of McArthur Court at 8 a.m., the scene took on the characteristics of a political concert.

By 11 a.m., about 50 eager spectators had spread blankets, ordered pizzas, shuffled cards and rapped politics in anticipation of Jackson's only visit to Eugene.

The first two in line, 13-year-olds Nick Funnell and Matt Harris, ditched school with the blessings of their parents to ar-

rive at the doors of Mac Court a few minutes before 8 a.m.

Although too young to vote, Funnell's enthusiasm for Jackson sparkled like the themes of his campaign.

"I think he's going to win the election, but if he doesn't win this year he will later," Funnell said.

By 1:30 in the afternoon, the crowd outside had swelled to more than 1,000 people, with two lines running down University Street in opposite directions. A few minutes later, one line had run the complete length of 15th Avenue.

And it was a good thing they came early, because eventually some 5,000 people had to be turned away from Mac Court after it filled to capacity.

The crowd, mostly University

and area high school students, took advantage of the temporarily good but typically temperamental Oregon weather to patiently wait for Jackson's arrival. And they didn't seem to mind missing just one day of class.

University students Sonja Stone, 22, and her friend Melissa Neymen, 20, cut their health class, but took the time to catch up on their homework.

"Jackson's criticized for being radical, but I think our country needs that right now," Neymen said.

By 2 p.m., card games and backgammon boards were put away, and the throng of white, black, red and brown, young, old, tall and round were ready to see "the man with the plan."

Around 3 p.m. the flood gates to Mac Court were opened and people, thousands of them, sprinted to the floor and scrambled to the stands, jockeying for the best seats.

Spectators hanged banners promoting environmental, educational political and minority causes from the balconies.

It was hot and muggy but not miserable inside the arena, and Jackson fans waited with near-patience as a circle of Native Americans pounded out a ceremonial beat on a tribal drum.

Latin American tunes by local players came next. Pleas to the crowd to cease throwing paper airplanes went unheeded, and applause rang out for the more aerodynamic and particularly handsome crafts.

A gospel choir gave Mac Court the feel of a Baptist revival, and after brief announcements by guest speakers, Jackson finally entered the building, 45 minutes later than scheduled.

He slowly walked by the front row and nearby aisles — shaking hands, giving hugs and kisses and raising his arms — pressing his political flesh to a rousing round of sustained applause and cheers.

Managing to work his way to the podium, Jackson then began to speak in his characteristically charismatic way, often repeating a line two or three times and frequently interrupted by standing ovations. Jackson concluded his show by leading a chant for him and his cause.

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