

Club hockey team sets sights on next season

By Lyle Crouse
Emerald Contributor

After only one season of full-contact hockey that has gained the attention of its West Coast opponents, Oregon's Club Sports team might be creating its own ice age.

"When hockey season was over, I thought I'd have two months when I didn't have to think about hockey," said Coach Mike Sobol. "But within two days of our last game, I was getting calls from teams who wanted to play us next year."

Because of such interest, Sobol and other college coaches are working hard to form a league for next season.

"We're trying to put the scheduling together to make this work," Sobol said of the league, which currently includes Oregon, Washington, Gonzaga, Colorado State, California-Berkeley, and San Jose State.

Sobol is already making plans for the weekend of Nov. 15, when Oregon hosts Colorado State for two games.

"We're pretty sure the Freedom Bowl is still fresh in the minds of Duck fans, so we're thinking about a Freedom Bowl II," he said, referring to the football team's 32-31 loss to the Rams in the 1990 Freedom Bowl.

Anyone who brings Freedom Bowl memorabilia to a Colorado State game will pay lower ticket prices.

As Oregon competes against established teams such as Colorado State, interest in its program grows. Team captain Scott Brown said three Canadian students who played at the Junior-B level have expressed interest in attending the University and playing for Oregon.



Defenseman Chris Hoffman (right) cuts past a defenseman during one of the Oregon Club Hockey team's games this season.

Brown founded the team two seasons ago, when Lane County Ice was completed. When the facility opened, Brown remembered past conversations with other students who missed playing hockey. Their common interest led them to Club Sports, and the team was born.

"There was never a conscientious de-

cision to do this," Brown said. "It just sort of miraculously happened."

But the team soon became a full-time project for Brown, who spent the first season as team coordinator, coach, and player.

"I wanted this to be my contribution to the University, something that would be here when I was gone," he said.

"You don't often get a chance to do that."

Oregon's first season was spent in a city league, in which no checking was allowed. This season the team moved up to full-contact intercollegiate hockey and finished with a 4-6-1 record.

A welcome addition in the second season was Sobol, whom Brown called a "godsend."

"If we had wished for a coach, an ideal coach, it would be him," Brown said. "His persona coincides directly with the team's."

Sobol, whose coaching philosophy includes giving quality playing time to each member of the team, set three goals for the program when he became coach: establish team camaraderie, have fun and give every player a chance to improve.

Oregon will have many opportunities to build on those goals next season, when it expects to play close to 20 games.

"We will be playing a much more difficult and longer schedule next season," said Sobol.

He has added two new goals for his players in the upcoming season: rise to the higher level of competition and promote hockey to the community.

By involving the community, Sobol and Brown hope to entertain large home crowds and erase a hockey stereotype.

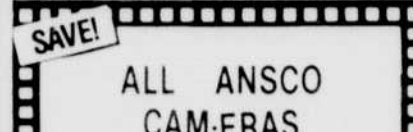
"I think to a lot of people, especially in Eugene and in the Northwest where they're not exposed much to hockey, it is perceived as an exhibition of fighting, which is a shame," Brown said.

"This perception of hockey being played by a bunch of goons, that's what we want to put to rest," Sobol said. "We want the public to understand that fighting is not what we're about."

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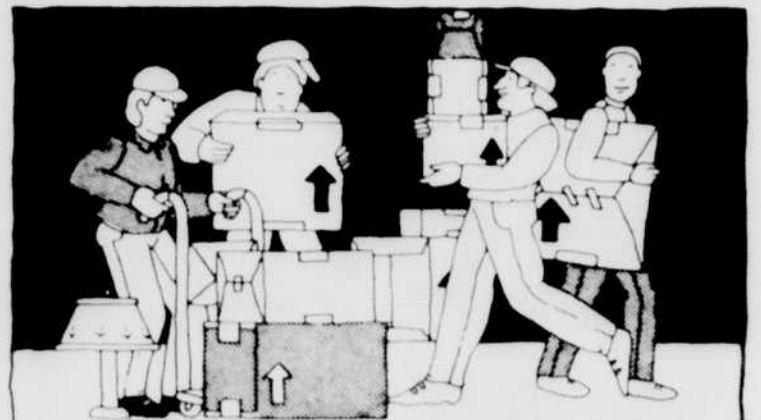
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