

**SPORTS**

# Sports psychologist alleviates student-athlete pressures

By Erick Studenicka  
Emerald Contributor

## University hires full-time counselor for all teams

As intercollegiate sports have expanded, the need for support faculty and staff for student-athletes has also expanded.

In recent years, athletic trainers, managers and academic advisers have become integral and necessary positions within athletic departments, improving the athletes' physical and scholastic well-being.

Nowadays, as athletes are forced to cope with the stress and pressure of major college athletics, it is only natural that athletic departments are expanding to help the athletes' mental well-being.

At the University, the position of sports psychologist was established this fall to assist student-athletes with concerns ranging from stress management and injury rehabilitation to eating disorders and personal problem counseling.

The new University sports psychologist, Karen Nelson, is not entirely "new" to Oregon athletics, having spent the past six seasons as a sports counselor to the football team. However, this will be her first season working department-wide, in-

volving herself with athletes in fall and winter sports such as volleyball, cross-country, wrestling and basketball.

"I think other coaches began to notice increased performances in athletes who had been able to speak to a sports counselor and take care of personal problems, and they wanted to make the counseling available to every athlete," Nelson said.

"What I try to do is teach mental skills in the hopes of improving the athlete's confidence and mental attitudes," Nelson said of her job. "The coaches and trainers take care of the physical aspects of performance while I work with the mental part of performance."

A very common problem that Nelson deals with is the effect that an injury has on an athlete.

"A lot of athletes become depressed and lose their confidence while they're injured," Nelson said. "To combat depression, I use mental rehearsal and visualization techniques with the athletes so that they can picture themselves performing at 100 percent even if their bodies aren't ready for

competition."

The effect of an injury that hit very close to home was what first caused Nelson to think about a career in sports psychology.

"My son Brett suffered a serious football injury while in high school," she said. "He had been so active in sports that it really became traumatic when he was forced to quit. I saw a real need for counseling people like my son who were forced to give up something that had been a major part of their lives."

It was at that point that Nelson gave up her counseling job at Marist High School and returned to the University to get her Master's in Counseling Psychology and begin her career in sports counseling.

Throughout the athletic department, coaches and faculty are seeing the benefit of having a sports psychologist on staff.

"I've really noticed an improved attitude on the football team since Karen began working with the players," Oregon Athletic Director Bill Byrne said. "She's able to deal with a

wide variety of problems, including injuries. I'm really pleased that she's going to have the opportunity to work with all of the teams this fall, not just the football players.

The University's football strength and conditioning coach Jim Radcliffe sees Nelson filling a void in the players' lives.

"Sometimes players need to discuss things, but they can't really talk to a coach," Radcliffe said. "For example, a player might be disappointed about his amount of playing time or about his being dropped on the depth chart. In those situations, Karen is an understanding adult the athletes can turn to."

Volleyball coach Gerry Gregory sees Nelson alleviating some of the pressure placed on collegiate athletes.

"We expect our athletes to be perfect, but they have the same pressures every other student faces," he said. "Karen is available when athletes begin feeling pressure and need some advice and perspective on certain



Karen Nelson

problems."

Nelson said that when she began sports counseling seven years ago, there were few positions in the field. Now, almost every large athletic department employs a sports psychologist.

"It's really no wonder the field is growing so rapidly," Nelson said. "Coaches are beginning to realize it is not so much the physical skills but rather the mental skills that separate a great team from an average team."

# Experienced Men's Club soccer team hopes for repeat season

By Steve Mims  
Emerald Contributor

The Oregon Men's Club sports soccer team will play their second home game of the season at 4 p.m. today at South Bank Field vs. Willamette University.

"We can be competitive with Willamette," junior defenseman Mark Poole said. "We really want a vocal home crowd there. It should be a good game."

The Ducks are off to a 1-2-1 start after an 8-1 defeat at the hands of Oregon State on Wednesday.

Oregon is coming off a successful 1990 season, when they finished 7-1-2. The Ducks have a new head coach this season in player-coach Mike King.

The senior defenseman is optimistic about the 1991 campaign. "The team is playing well, and we are learning a lot each game," he said.

The team got off to a good

start, tying Pacific University, and then defeating George Fox, 2-1. But Oregon has fallen off a bit lately, losing to Portland State, 2-1, and then to Oregon State on Wednesday.

King was happy with the effort against Portland State.

"It was our first game on artificial turf, and we did well," he said. "They scored in the last five minutes, but it was good to show well there."

This year's strengths appear to be experience and team uni-

ty. There is only one freshman and four sophomores on the 19-man squad.

Some of this season's top returners are striker Skip Weintraub, midfielder Andy Gagnier and defenseman Ansel Evans.

"We have 12 returners scattered everywhere on the field," Poole said. "The junior and senior experience really helps out."

Perhaps the largest obstacle the team faces is its schedule. The Oregon team is a club

sport, and this season's 11-game schedule includes only two other club sport opponents. The remainder of the schedule is against NAIA or NCAA Division II teams.

King calls the schedule "the toughest ever."

One bonus for this year's group is the involvement of a sponsor for the first time ever. Feets Plus has agreed to sponsor the team and give them new jerseys and warm-ups.



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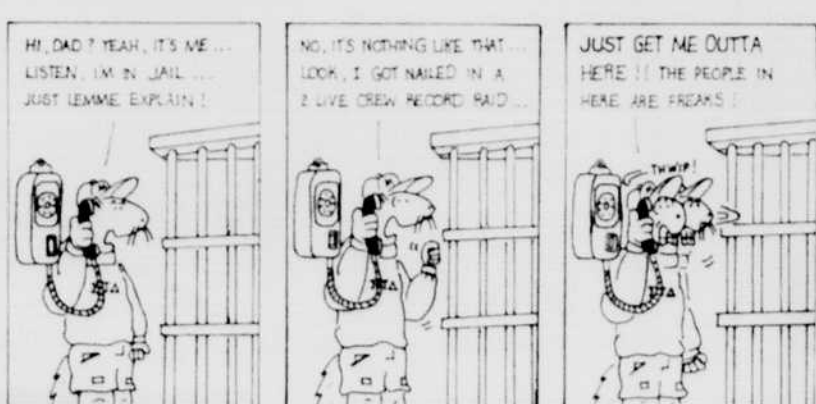
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