

Towel boys do their part against USC



FROM THE SIDELINES

BY JAKE BERG

Today, ladies and gentlemen, quite literally, I am speaking from the sidelines.

I am sitting in McArthur Court behind the USC men's basket in the second half last Thursday. Oregon — miraculously — is staging a rally and looking like it might have a chance to win the game against the No. 13 team in the country.

The crowd is going crazy. Getting loud. Stomping feet.

As for myself, I am shouting every profanity I find suitable at the referees and USC players. The Ducks are playing good basketball, Antoine Stoudamire is shooting like a god on the court, and Jeff Potter is doing his best to dominate the inside game.

But the most valuable player on the court Thursday is not Stoudamire or USC guard Harold Miner, who each score 32 points in the game.

Sports fans, the two MVPs for the contest are the two towel kids under the USC basket. These two youngsters (names and addresses unknown) are rookies to the MVP balloting, but they have seen more Duck games this year than the average University student. And the potential of what they do during the game certainly has more bearing than just a few obnoxious cheers from my mouth or that of anyone else in the student sections.

Not only do these young lads wipe up the sweat that our basketball heroes leave behind on the floor, they have more of a chance to make no-miss-Miner miss more than anyone on the

Duck bench.

I'd be disappointed if you were already convinced of these kids being better defenders than the Ducks' 7-foot Chuck Patterson, but what the kids do is technically illegal. Technically.

While I'm sitting some 15 feet behind the basket telling the ref what he should do to his mom, I'm watching the basket as the Trojans move in for an attempted score. It's a crunch-time right now, and a basket here could make the difference in the game. The crowd is noisy and rowdy, but it's not enough to be causing what I'm witnessing right now.

The basket is shaking. It's moving back and forth, very visibly. The Trojans shoot a jumper, and it goes in and out. The Ducks rebound and move down to their end of the court. I'm still looking at the basket, wondering what gave it so much life.

USC comes back down with the ball, and the crowd again comes back with a fury. So does the backboard. I do a thorough visual check of the area when I spot my MVPs for the game, the towel kids. And they're obviously shaking the base of the backboard.

The Trojans miss another shot — Duck rebound.

Didn't anybody else see the basket doing the tango? Or was I just imagining things? My friend reassured me that I was not. He saw it, too.

Because it was so obvious, why didn't anybody do anything about it? Perhaps the USC bench didn't complain because they were far off on the other end of the court, but someone had to have seen it.

Heck, the referees themselves frequent the backboard area,

it's their job. It's also their job to stop the interference.

Something else that caught my eye — but had little or no bearing on the game — were the socks of Oregon's Johnnie Reece. The freshman point guard either forgot to roll them down or left them up for good luck, or something.

It worked against Oregon State, when the Ducks won 64-63 and Reece's socks were pulled high in all their glory, and it nearly worked against USC, a one-point loss.

But maybe Johnnie figured out that unrolled socks just weren't stylish. Or maybe he knew, like everybody else, that the Ducks didn't have much of a chance against UCLA Saturday.

Reece rolled his socks down, and Oregon lost to the Bruins, 84-65.

Or maybe, just maybe, Johnnie listened to his peers in the student section who noticed and laughed at his socks being only a couple of inches below the bottom of his team-high baggy shorts. "Roll your socks down, Johnnie!" was as common a phrase from the mouths of the student body as, "Go Ducks!"

Speaking of the student body, the student section/general admission third level of Mac Court was beyond empty against USC. It was invisible. Not one person lurked in the shadows of the building's most elevated area for seating, indicating a lack in student interest that has been prevalent for much of the season and has caused the third level to be closed numerous times.

There also seems to be somewhat of a lack of interest in the Oregon team itself. After all, the biggest attention-getter and

cheer from the students in the first half came when USC's Miner pulled a casual 360-degree dunk on a breakaway.

Crowds are setting records for futility during coach Don Monson's career this season, which certainly will not help him regain his job if athletic director Bill Byrne is as unhappy with the program's success as he sounded in a recent Associated Press article skeptical of the program.

It wouldn't make sense to let Monson go after just one bad season. Given, it will probably be the coach's worst in his nine years here, but after all, many of his other seasons were far from impressive. Besides, Monson has done considerably well with the young and injured group of players that he has to work with, and next year they definitely can't be any worse.

Anyway, is Oregon capable of finding a head coach better suited to the run the program than Monson? Could a better coach be lured to Oregon?

Byrne said in the AP article that he was pleased with Monson's coaching abilities, but he indicated that the program's recruiting history was suspect.

That may be, but who can argue with the steal Monson made recruiting Jeff Potter? The freshman has recently turned out to be a true surprise for the Ducks and is a fan favorite.

Wait a second. This all started with those towel kids, right? Well, I'm still sitting behind the backboard, the Ducks' chances at beating USC are looking smaller, and the basket is still pretending it's a rocking chair, with two smiling little boys moving underneath.

By the way, has anyone noticed Potter's unorthodox free throw stance?

Jake Berg is the sports editor of the Emerald.

Ducks to run for world title this spring

One Oregon runner and two of the Ducks' former runners have qualified for the World Cross Country Championships to be held in Boston on March 21.

Lisa Karnopp, who completed her final term of eligibility in the fall and won the Pacific-10 Conference cross country title, finished fourth in the senior division of the U.S. trials held two weekends ago in Memphis.

Former Duck runner and 1988 NCAA 5,000-meter champion, Annette Peter, finished third in the race of 27 entries from across the country.

"It's an elite race," said Tom Heinonen, women's cross country coach. "Only runners who think they have a chance of winning go to this race."

Freshman Melody Fairchild, who did not compete for the cross country team this season because of an injury, finished third in the junior division of the meet.

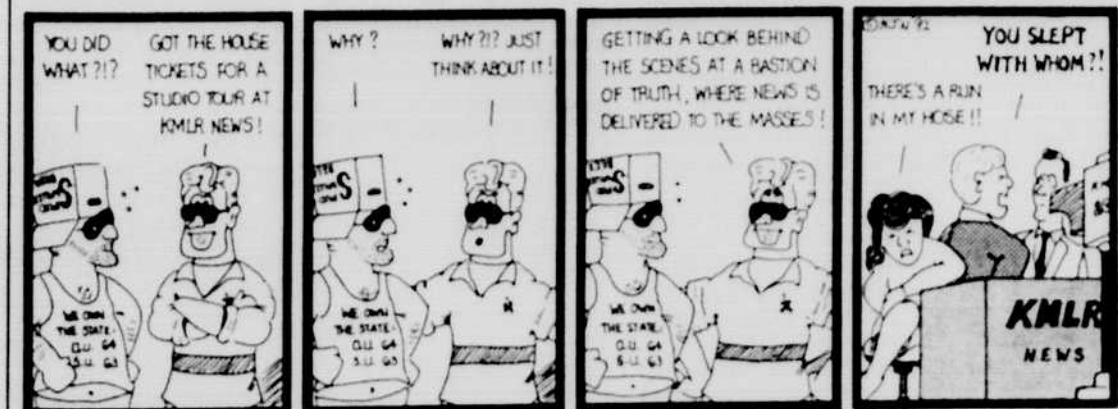
Fairchild won the junior event last year and went on to finish third at the world championships. Heinonen said it was encouraging to see Fairchild run a solid race.

"She was in woeful shape, but she was running pain-free," he said. "She's so talented she was able to finish third."

Besides the Pac-10 title, Karnopp had numerous other achievements this fall. She finished in the top four in every one of the meets the Ducks participated in.

Weasel's World

Kraig Norris



Oscar the Freshman

Neal Skorpen

