

Coaches quite similar despite some differences

By Jayson Jacoby
Emerald Sports Reporter

The casual observer probably wouldn't find many similarities between Oregon's head coach Don Monson and Arizona's Lute Olson.

Monson prowls the sidelines, hands in pockets, usually with his head in the floor. He reminds the officials in his gravelly voice when he is displeased with their decisions. He doesn't smile very often when he's on the court.

Olson typically sits in his chair and doesn't ruffle his suit the way Monson sometimes does. He is more cosmopolitan. He even does celebrity endorsements for Arizona's Valley National Bank.

But the two veteran Pacific-10 Conference coaches, whose teams meet tonight in an 8:35 game in McArthur Court, have a lot in common, as well.

Both started their current jobs in 1983. And both inherited troubled basketball programs, Olson taking over a Wildcat team that had gone 4-24 the previous year and Monson was UPI West Coach of the Year assuming the leadership of an Oregon squad coming off back-to-back 9-18 seasons.

Both are highly regarded in their profession. Olson has been named Pac-10 Coach of the Year three times, and Monson was UPI West Coach of the Year his first year in Eugene, when he took a 16-13 team to the National Invitational Tour-

namment.

And Monson and Olson each came to their current coaching jobs after having turned struggling programs into national contenders.

Olson took an Iowa team that was last in the Big-10 Conference to five straight NCAA tournament appearances, including a Final Four berth in 1980.

Monson was 100-41 in five seasons as Idaho's head coach, and he took the Big Sky school to two NCAA tournaments and had the Vandals ranked eighth in the country in 1982, when they finished 27-3.

But that's about where the similarities end.

Since 1983, Arizona has become a national power, chalking up seven straight winning seasons after an 11-17 mark during Olson's first year in Tucson. The Wildcats have won five Pac-10 titles over that span, including the last four. Olson's overall record at Arizona is 210-73, and his teams have made seven straight NCAA tournaments.

Monson's record at Oregon is 116-139, and while the Ducks have three NIT appearances over that stretch, they haven't won more than 16 games in a season under Monson.

While the numbers might seem puzzling, a closer look at the two programs reveals a lot about what it takes to turn a college basketball team into a consistent national contender.

Naturally the biggest factor is recruiting. Olson has certainly

had more talented players to work with than Monson, but when recruiting in Eugene and Tucson is compared, that shouldn't come as a surprise.

Tucson is roughly the size of Portland, and Eugene's metropolitan population is little more than 150,000. Recruits don't always choose a college just because it's in a big city, but they sometimes reject colleges that aren't.

"We have more of a metropolitan area (than Oregon)," Olson said. "That's at least not a deterrent, like it might be there."

Both Monson and Olson agree that climate plays an important role in their efforts to attract quality players.

"Kids come in here, and it's sunny 360 days a year," Olson said. "A kid goes in there for a weekend, and he might get rained out the entire time."

That may be one of an exaggeration, but Monson and Oregon State coach Jim Anderson — who has been at Corvallis as a player or coach for more than 30 years — agree.

"The weather in Arizona certainly appears more glamorous than it is here," Anderson said. "We have an image over much of the country that all it does is rain here."

But Arizona's biggest advantage may have been its record in Olson's second season, when the Wildcats won 21 games. Olson's teams haven't won fewer than 18 games since and have won more than 25 three times. Monson and Olson both said

the boost in recruiting of 20-win seasons and NCAA tournament experience is a big one.

"When you win 20 games, then it's a program that's looked at as being on the way up," Olson said. "We could go out and sell that going, it kind of snowballs."

"You look across the country," Monson said. "Every year it's the same 15 or so teams at the top. Arizona's one of those teams now."

Surprisingly, Oregon actually spends more (\$136,000) on re-

cruiting than Arizona (\$125,000) does. But that may be a reflection of how much easier it is for the Wildcats to attract top players. With all its advantages, Arizona probably doesn't have to work as hard as Oregon to entice its recruits.

Despite the fifth-ranked Wildcats' (20-4 overall and 9-3 in the Pac-10) dominance of Oregon (6-16, 2-11) the last few years in Tucson, which includes a 42-point trouncing last loss ever Jan. 30, 104-53, they have been ambushed the last two games at the Pit.

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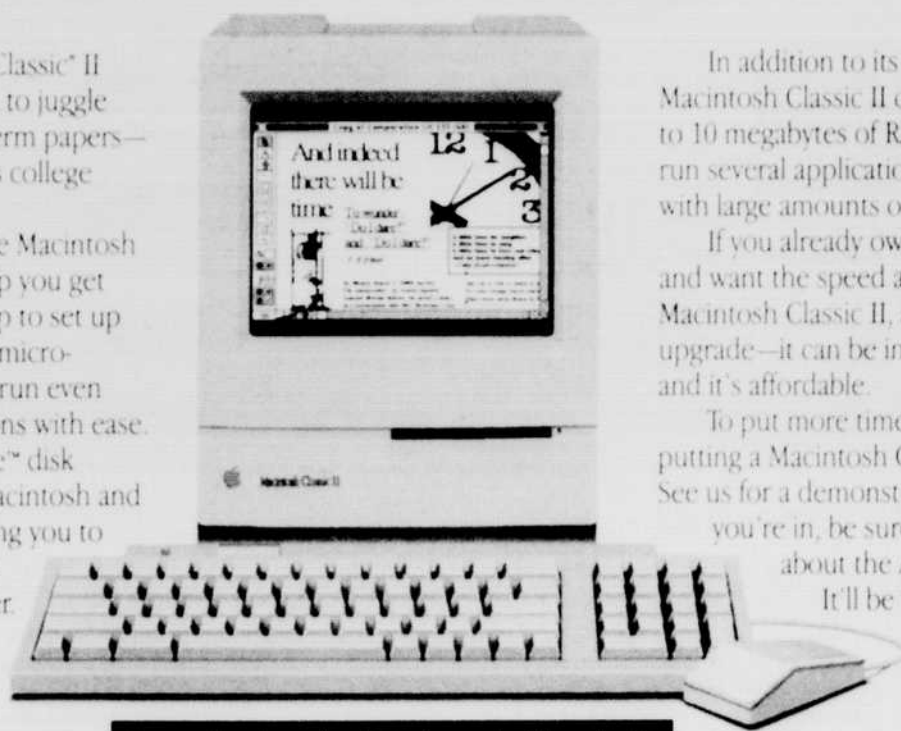
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