

## FIRING

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beat East Tennessee State 98-83, the same team that upset Arizona in the second round of the NCAA tournament. Those are the Wildcats who handed Oregon its worst loss ever and worst-ever loss at McArthur Court this season.

The Ducks also lost by two points in Japan to North Louisiana, another NCAA tournament team.

Oregon returned from the Daiwa Ball and promptly whipped Oral Roberts 105-75, welcoming transfer Antoine Stoudamire, who scored 19 points coming off the bench.

All of a sudden, Monson, whose team was picked by everyone to finish last in the Pac-10, was starting to look like coach of the year.

That's when disaster struck in the form of foot injuries, sidelining starters Jordy Lyden, Andre Collier, and Clyde Jordan.

The rest, as they say, is history. As in Oregon's worst record since 1957 and the end of the Don Monson era in Eugene.

In retrospect, Byrne's claim that there were negative trends developing in the program can be justified.

Monson had posted three losing seasons in the last four, including two 20-loss campaigns.

But the Ducks did go to the NIT just two years ago. Given this season's injuries and the low expectations, last year's 13-15 record in a season

with no major injuries, when talk of an NCAA tournament berth surfaced after a fast preseason start, seems in a sense more disappointing.

Not to mention that everything bad that happened to Oregon this year was completely out of Monson's control. No coach is expected to keep a player from signing a million-dollar contract to fulfill his lifelong dream, or to catch falling bags of nails.

Where Byrne can be faulted, however, is in his claim that the program's future doesn't look brighter.

Granted, it's hard for the future to look much darker after a 6-21 season. But the Ducks lose only center Chuck Patterson from that team, and incoming 6-foot-10, 270-pound Damion Porter and 6-foot-8 Aaron Johnson should more than make up for Patterson's departure.

Oregon returns a proven Pac-10 star in Stoudamire, who was somehow left off the league's all-star team.

Lyden, Jordan, and Collier had stepped up as the Ducks' floor leader before his injury.

Add to that base a solid crop of freshmen just off a true trial by fire in their initial seasons, and a winning season looms large on the horizon.

Whatever happens, of course, Monson's name won't be mentioned. But it is worth remembering that if Oregon surprises everyone with a great season, the man responsible for putting the team together won't be the Ducks' head coach.

## MONSON

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in 10 years, and the resulting drop in ticket revenue was a bitter pill for Oregon's athletic department — saddled with a multimillion-dollar deficit — to swallow.

"We must be competitive in the Pac-10 Conference, and we are not," Byrne said. "And, attendance continued to drop throughout the season. Public support for our program is dropping rapidly."

Monson did suffer through season-ending injuries to three of his starters, including his two leading scorers, before Pac-10 play started.

Oregon was also without two

starters from a year ago, as 1991 Pac-10 Player of the Year Terrell Brandon gave up his final year of college eligibility to sign with the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers, and junior center Bob Fife redshirted.

"The injuries we had ... that kind of thing doesn't happen very often," Oregon freshman guard Orlando Williams said. "I was kind of disappointed that they made the decision to replace Monson. We're such a young team, I feel we can only go up."

Byrne said the search for Monson's replacement would begin immediately. He said Monson's base salary would not be exceeded, but Byrne would not comment on any of

the numerous candidates mentioned as possible successors.

Byrne said he planned to reassign the 58-year-old Monson within the athletic department, but that an agreement as to specifics had not been reached.

There is a distinct possibility, of course, that Monson — who could not be reached for comment — will not accept a new position at Oregon.

Monson came to Oregon in 1983 after a successful five years as head coach at Idaho. He posted a 100-41 overall record and led the Vandals to two straight NCAA tournament appearances, as well as a No. 8 national ranking at the end of a 27-3 regular season in 1982.

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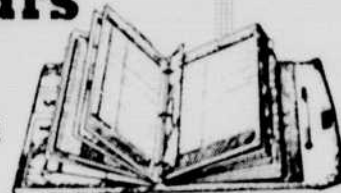
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