

Duck volleyball looks for success

□ Volleyball coach Gerry Gregory runs program in football shadow

On Saturdays when the Oregon football team plays at home, the Duck volleyball team is relegated to being the other game in town.

This can either be a blessing or a curse.

Advertising the volleyball match at the football game and allowing football ticket stubs to be used as free tickets to the volleyball match may boost attendance and provide an emotional lift to the volleyball players.

Then again, Duck fans may be uninterested in volleyball after a long day in Autzen Stadium.

Oregon volleyball head coach Gerry Gregory notices all this from courtside.

"There are some distractions involved, including the fact that the crowd can be a little fatigued. Our players are very interested in how the football team is doing, and that can be a distraction," Gregory said.

"But, it can really get us pumped when they have a big win. It can really be an encouragement for us and our fans."

Such is life for a volleyball coach and a volleyball program in an athletic department whose big-time sports may either overshadow or benefit smaller programs.

"There are always going to be inequalities in an athletic program. It's more expensive to run a football or basketball team than a volleyball team," Gregory said. "To keep with the Huskies and USC in football, there are things you have to do."

The high-stakes, high-profile sports may require more attention and resources, but Gregory emphasized that money does not make any program, large or small, a success. The equation is more complicated than that.

"For women's volleyball, the question I ask is, 'Do we have the things that will allow us to be successful?'" he said. Gregory said areas such as an adequate travel budget and facilities are necessary in order to build a competitive program. He says Oregon has those.

Even more importantly, Gregory said, is quality of the university as a whole. A particular school's assets and liabilities play a major role in being able to recruit players.

Successful volleyball programs like those at Stanford and UCLA often are able to recruit from a wealth of talent that lives in their

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respective geographic areas. The Arizona schools have the advantage of being able to offer warm weather all year long.

Recruiting players to Oregon poses its share of challenges, especially as the University deals with budget cuts caused by 1990's Ballot Measure 5.

"Lots of things create struggles for an athletic department. For us, one issue is dropping the education department here," he said.

"A lot of young educators also tend to be athletes. The loss has hurt us in recruiting. ... Often times, we can't recruit a player because she will hear that we're hurting, that we're in a budget crisis.

"Are we hurting? Yes and no."

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Oregon junior LaReina Woods is one of the leaders of the Oregon volleyball team. JEFF PASLAY/Emerald

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