

# Brooks faces challenge with Rams

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Oregon Daily Emerald

As Rich Brooks takes over as head coach of the Los Angeles Rams, he faces more than the challenge of taking over a mediocre National Football League team that hasn't been to the playoffs in the 1990's.

He faces having to move a mountain.

The team is moving to St. Louis, Mo. With that move, Brooks faces not only coaching a new and unfamiliar team, but coaching a team that is playing in an unfamiliar city and on a strange field. With a dismal 23-57 record over the last five seasons in Los Angeles, the Rams scraped up a 4-12 record last year under coach Chuck Knox. That record, however, is deceiving because the Rams couldn't even muster up a win in their own division, the NFC West.

The Rams offense was led last season by former Oregon star quarterback Chris Miller, who has been plagued with injuries throughout his NFL career. Brooks has two other former Ducks to work

with, Ernest Jones and Anthony Newman, and also gets to utilize running back Jerome Bettis.

While a solid player would help the Rams' offense, the move and several financially disappointing seasons will prevent the team from dipping deeply into a free agency. So Brooks is probably stuck — for the time being, at least — working with what he has.

"With five losing seasons in a row — it is definitely a building process that needs to be achieved here," Brooks said.

While Brooks faced much of the same thing when he took over a downtrodden Oregon team in 1977, he knows that with the Rams he doesn't have the time that it took him to guide Oregon to the Rose Bowl.

"I've been in the business long enough to know that you better get the job done," Brooks said, adding that time was a key factor.

"If I don't do it, they will have someone else there doing it, so I think it is important that I get it done quickly."

## METZ

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Brooks has seen at Oregon speaks volumes of his ability to evaluate talent and make the most of what he was given.

As surprising as Friday's announcement was, though, it fits right in with one of the wildest years that Oregon sports has ever seen. Nothing that could possibly happen this year could surprise me.

After a disappointing 1-2 start to the football season, all hopes of another trip to a postseason bowl looked to be lost. But, just like everything else in this strange year, things just fell Oregon's way for once. Thanks in large part to Rich Brooks, I had something fun to do over Christmas break.

It seems like it was just yesterday that Brooks stepped down as the school's athletic director. When the announcement was made in Johnson Hall, the Rich Brooks I saw was a quiet, almost nervous man who knew he had something to prove in his 18th season at Oregon. I'd be lying if I didn't say that skepticism was pretty high, that dropping the extra responsibilities would make a difference on the field.

Throughout the season, Brooks remained his quiet, reserved self. The lackluster 1-2 start made the press conferences a bit uneasy, and uncomfortable for the 53-year-old. As the wins started to mount, Brooks continued to be reserved, but with every win the veteran coach exuded more and more confidence. We'll never know just how satisfying it must have been for this man to finally achieve the unthinkable at Oregon. No matter what the Ducks did, it just wasn't good enough.

At the beginning of fall prac-

tice, members of the media gathered to quiz Brooks on the "big season." Just like every year since he took over as head coach of the Ducks, Brooks was asked what his goals for the season were. And I'm sure every year, the mild-mannered coach hinted that representing the Pac-10 in the Rose Bowl would be the ultimate goal. This season, as it appeared that the Ducks were doomed to another 6-5 or 5-6 season, the question was almost never asked. It was almost like nobody wanted to ask it, maybe for fear of an angry answer or maybe out of respect for the man that had put up with so much as the head coach. But out it came.

Brooks' answer? Now that I look back at it, the way he put it was so perfect. Brooks sat back in his chair a little bit, took a deep breath and once again announced he would very much like to make it to a Rose Bowl. So there it was. The camera people got their 10-second season-goal clip, the reporters got their quote, but in the end, Brooks got his wish. It was like he knew something the rest of us didn't. That sounds kind of easy to say in hindsight, but there really was kind of a strange confidence in Brooks' voice that day.

So now the school is officially Brooks-less. It's going to be strange not seeing Brooks at basketball games and around the campus in general. It's going to be strange reading Ron Bellamy's columns on another head coach at the University of Oregon. Like him or not, Brooks has been around almost as long as most of us have been alive.

His 91-109-4 record doesn't indicate the stuff of legends, but Brooks offered more to the school than just 91 wins on the football field. On Friday, Brooks took time to reflect on his career and life at Oregon. He's right

when he said he leaves an Oregon program that is much better than it was when he took over in 1977. Coming from a different part of the country, I can honestly say that even hard-core football fans had probably never heard of Oregon football until the late 1980s. And now, the Ducks are known as a team to be reckoned with after an unbelievable season and a respectable showing in the most tradition-filled postseason bowl in college football.

People can complain all they want about supposed under-achieving Oregon teams from the past and the Independence Bowl appearances that went with them. But the plain and simple fact is that those things didn't happen until Brooks came here. It took a while, but the late 1980s up to this year's trip to the Rose Bowl can be considered a highly successful time in Oregon football history.

And Brooks managed to do it all at a school that, while it has had a modest amount of football success, really has a recruiting disadvantage to Pac-10 perennials like Washington, UCLA and USC.

What a year it has been for Rich Brooks. If you would have been told at the beginning of the season that the Ducks would win the Pac-10 Championship, play arguably the best team in the nation in the Rose Bowl and that Brooks would win three national coach of the year awards, you would have had the person that told you that committed. Add to that a \$2.5 million deal that gives Brooks the chance to show his stuff at the highest level of coaching, and a guy that would normally be catching up on some sleep and doing a little fly-fishing finds himself right back at work, evidently doing what he loves most — looking a challenge right in the eye and attacking it.



Oregon defensive coordinator Nick Aliotti is just one of a list of coaches that expressed interest in the head coaching position that was left vacant after Rich Brooks stepped down Friday.

## COACH

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As for the current coaching staff, Williams said a timely decision was essential for the sake of coaches.

"We have a very competent and loyal coaching staff, and their futures could hinge upon what kind of coach will be hired," Williams said.

Schuler, currently California's offensive coordinator, was replaced by Aliotti as Oregon's defensive coordinator two years ago, while Toledo was the Ducks' offensive coordinator before Bellotti and is currently the offensive coordinator at UCLA. Shea is a former Oregon football player who has worked as offensive coordinator at Stanford and was going to be head coach at San Jose State.

Brooks has expressed his desire for a coach from within the Oregon staff to be named. When asked specifically about Bellotti during a press conference on Friday, Brooks said he thought the offensive coordinator would be a good coach, and has expressed to Williams personally that Bellotti would be his choice for the job.

"I think that Mike Bellotti, with five years of head coaching experience, is obviously an outstanding choice," Brooks said.

"I think there are a lot of people that would be generally interested in coaching at

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— DAN WILLIAMS  
athletic director

Oregon. The young men playing at Oregon are outstanding young men and great football players."

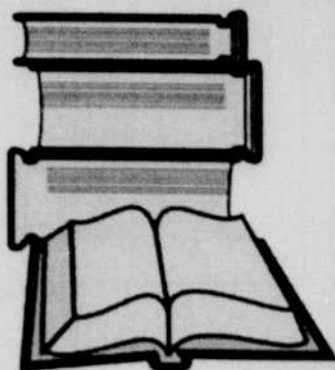
Bellotti just finished up his sixth season with the Ducks. He was head coach at California State-Chico from 1984 through 1988, and earned the Northern California Athletic Conference coach of the year award in 1986. Aliotti served as offensive coordinator at California State-Chico for four years with Bellotti.

Zoumboukos is in his fifth season as assistant head coach, and has coached at the University of San Francisco as well as his alma matter, University of California-Davis.

The Rams' hiring of Brooks was not a surprise to Williams, but how fast the Rams reacted to Brooks' anticipation was.

"They acted pretty quickly," Williams said. "They essentially hired a coach in 24 hours."

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