

THE PIT

For nearly 70 years, basketball players and fans have shared in the rare history of McArthur Court

Rebecca Merritt
Oregon Daily Emerald

Rob Closs, a former Oregon basketball player, thinks the fans at McArthur Court are worth 7 points.

Closs, the Ducks' leading scorer in 1978-79, said the uproar created by Oregon fans was always a boost to his team and its score.

"There's nothing like walking upstairs from the locker room and walking on to the court," Closs said. "If you can't get excited about that, you must be dead."

For nearly 70 years, basketball players, coaches and fans have shared in the rare history of Mac Court. The University's basketball arena, where fans are unusually close to game action, could be considered college basketball's equivalent to the NBA's Boston Garden.

"I just think the atmosphere is like having the whole crowd right on top of the floor," said Terrell Brandon, a former Duck who plays now for the Cleveland Cavaliers. "It was very loud at Mac Court. You knew exactly who was the home team and who was the visiting team."

Built in 1926 with seats for 6,000, Mac Court used to be the largest sports facility west of the Missouri River, University archivist Keith Richard said.

"When U of O students contracted to build this, people laughed at them," Richard said.

People didn't think the University could attract 6,000 people to a basketball game.

But 25 years later, those 6,000 seats weren't enough for Oregon fans.

"Students, townspeople would be lined up outside down around the PE [physi-

cal education] building," said Barney Holland, who played for the Ducks from 1951 until 1954. "Sometimes they camped out to get in."

The University responded in 1954 by adding two balconies, increasing capacity to 10,000. The balconies were hung from steel arches across the top of the building, Richard said. Designers of the building told the University they could "add 5,000 seats by hanging people from the roof."

With the additional seats, Mac Court became the 12th largest basketball pavilion in the nation, according to a 1954 article in *The Register-Guard*.

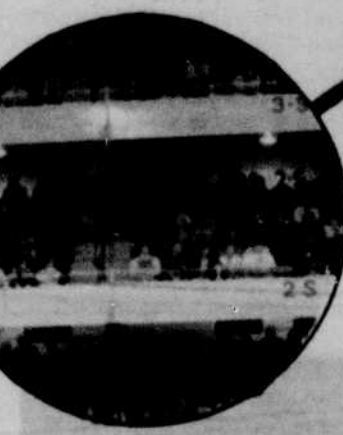
"Somebody had to have a lot of foresight to put that together," said Harry Glickman, president emeritus of the Portland Trailblazers. Glickman, who attended the University in the mid-40s, said when the Blazers were planning their new facility, he wanted something as eminent as Mac Court.

Former Oregon players agree that Mac Court has more personality and tradition than any other facility.

"I think Mac Court is the greatest place I ever played at," said Charles Warren, who played for the Ducks from 1958 until 1962. "It just dripped with color and history."

Unfortunately, though, an historic gem like Mac Court brings questions of preservation. The locker rooms were modernized last year and the floor is in good condition, but some people think it's time for more improvements.

"I always think when you have a new brand of basketball, with a new coaching staff starting a new era, things can improve," Bran-



IT'S VERTICAL

Mac Court is famous for its unique structure that places fans directly above the action on the floor. This led some to dub it "The Pit."

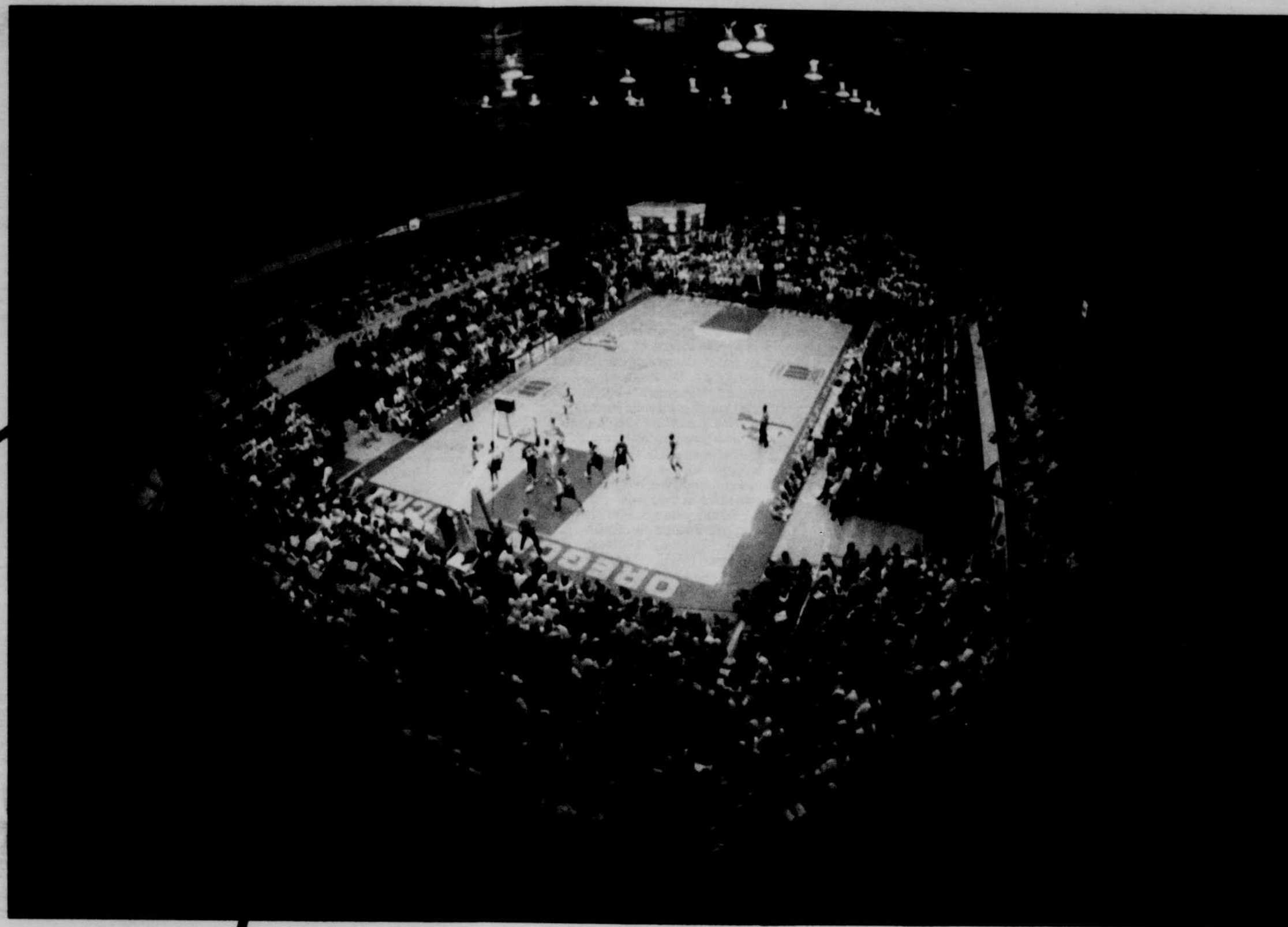
The first game played at Mac Court was Jan. 14, 1927. The Oregon Webfoots beat the Willamette Bearcats, 36-10. Before then, the basketball team played at the Eugene Armory, located where Centennial Bank is now.

don said. "This is the '90s and as far as the Mac center goes, if they want to bring in big time basketball and highly touted recruits, I think they need to upgrade the facility."

Jamie Klund, assistant sports information director, said the University has discussed replacing Mac Court with a new facility. Ten years ago, Bill Byrne, former Oregon athletic director, talked about doming Autzen Stadium.

"It's still functional but it's certainly showing its age," Klund said. "At some point the fire marshal is going to condemn the place."

Klund said no plans have been made to replace Mac Court because the University can't afford a new facility.



TIGHT SEATS

Mac Court seats just over 10,000 but it's tight seating compared to other facilities.

The court is named after Clifton N. McArthur, who served as Oregon's first ASUO president, was the first editor of the Oregon Weekly campus newspaper and was an advocate for student athletics.

"The Pit" is famous for its amplified sound that

Noisy McArthur Court annoys rivals, boosts home team efforts

Marcelene Edwards
Oregon Daily Emerald

MacArthur Court is notorious throughout the Pac-10 for its high energy and loud fans.

The pounding excitement of the fans who gather in Mac Court on game nights rattles many visiting coaches and players. Yelling plays and directions onto the court can become difficult, if not impossible.

Some Pac-10 coaches look to a visit at Mac Court with apprehension.

"It's a great home court advantage for Oregon," said Jim Harrick, head coach for UCLA. Harrick's team plays at the Pauley Pavilion, which opened in 1965 and seats 12,819.

Mac Court has a lot of energy when Duck fans fill the stadium, he said, and that can work against other teams.

reverberates from every corner. Cheers and jeers from the fans don't go unnoticed.

Things that come out of the stands can get personal, and the acoustics do not hide anything, said Jim Anderson, head coach for Oregon State.

"It can be very abusive," he said. After years in the Pac-10, Anderson tries not to let the trip to Oregon interfere with his game. He just thinks it is "another one of those Mac Court days."

Compared to his court, Gill Coliseum, which opened in 1949 and holds 10,400 people, Mac Court is an ancient building in need of repair.

"It looked old and decrepit when I went there in the 50s and it hasn't changed much," Anderson said.

However, some coaches think Mac Court is a great place to play basketball.

Bob Bender, head coach at Washington, says Mac Court is one of the best places to play in the country. Old buildings give the game character, he

said, and the fans add to that.

"I don't like playing in a stale environment," he said. "You are supposed to have a hard time yelling out on the court."

Bender's home court is the Hec Edmundson Pavilion at Washington, built in 1927, the same year Mac Court opened, for about \$600,000. The Oregon facility cost about \$175,000.

Other coaches embrace the energy that pours from the stands.

Opponents always like to play in a packed gym, said Kevin Eastman, head coach at Washington State. Although Eastman has never been to Mac Court, he is eager to test out the environment Saturday. He has heard Oregon fans can be rowdy and loud.

"If you are going to try to ever win a league you have to go to tough stadiums," Eastman said. "Mac Court is a great place for the home team."

Home court advantage certainly applies to Mac Court. All the arenas are tough to play and tough

to win on the road, but Mac Court gives the Ducks an upper hand, said Oregon coach Jerry Green.

Every time the team gets ready for a home court appearance, Green said he gets excited.

"Mac Court is special because everybody here has an influence on the game," Green said.

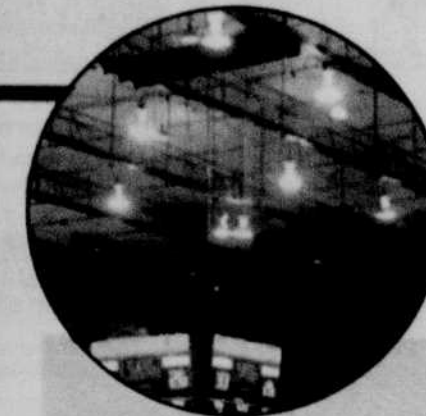
The fans become as much a part of the game as the players.

Green has heard that other teams are intimidated when stepping onto his court, but he said it is an excellent environment for playing college basketball.

However, sometimes home court advantages don't always work. From a coaching standpoint the Ducks may play better away than they do at home, Green said.

At home, the Ducks sometimes get too high strung trying to impress the crowd.

"There is so much behind us you really feel like you can do anything that you want to," he said.



INNOVATIVE DESIGN

Mac Court's unique roof design allows for no supporting posts that would obstruct the view of fans.

The initial bid for McArthur Court was \$167,400. Building designs included this innovative Lamella Roof, which was to be built entirely of wood and was to have no trusses, girders or columns to obstruct the view.



STUDENT SEATING

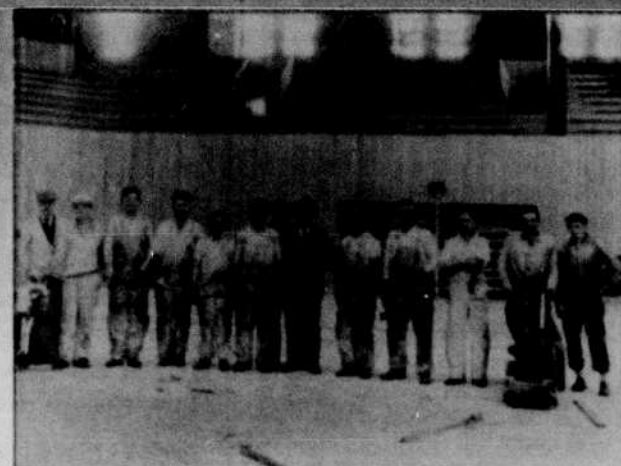
After reserved ticket holders complained about students blocking their view in 1994, students lost 98 seats.

Students nicknamed McArthur Court "The Igloo" because it was a large white building far away from other campus buildings.

HISTORY

1925

At the ASUO regular election, the students approved a building fund to construct a new basketball pavilion, to build additional seats at Hayward Field and to build a new student union building. Each student paid \$5 a term to the building fund.



1926

Planners discussed putting in two tiers of permanent bleachers rather than one tier and portable bleachers that were specified in the contract.

1927

Mac Court was finished with seating for 6,000 at the cost of about \$175,000.

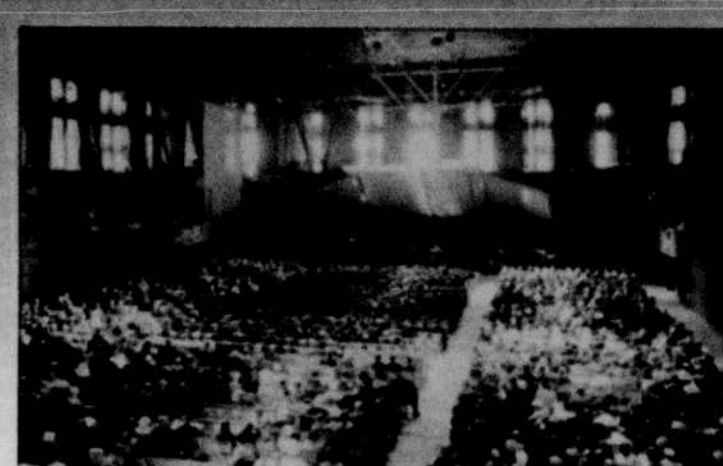


1949-53

New railway bleachers were installed between 1949 and 1953.

1950s

Graduation was held inside Mac Court.



1954

Plans to increase seating capacity to 10,000 were proposed. It called for the removal of four posts supporting the roof and the addition of a new truss-type roof structure which required only four corner posts, the addition of a two tier balcony and the addition of stairwell to extend up the outside of the building.

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Page Design by
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