

GRETZKY

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his belt.

Gretzky's resume includes eight first-team all-star selections and five second-team nods in his illustrious NHL career. He stands atop the all-time leader board for assists, goals and points. And he got there in far fewer games played than the former leader, and childhood hero of Gretzky's, Gordie Howe. Howe's old records took 1,767 games to accomplish while Gretzky has blown by the legend in just over 1,100 games.

Things weren't always so easy for Gretzky, though. While Gretzky, who couldn't even grow a mustache when he moved over from the defunct World Hockey League, was a serious scorer from day one in the NHL, his maturation process took a little bit longer to adapt. As a boy in a man's game, Gretzky was criticized for his immaturity in his early years — after being knocked to the ice he once threw his gloves at the player in disgust — but looking back now, it all seems pretty irrelevant.

Considering all the problems that sports has seen lately — strikes, contract squabbles, holier-than-thou attitudes — perhaps it's Gretzky's mild demeanor and off-ice behavior that truly makes him "The Great One."

I guess the assertion could be argued, but Gretzky already has proved that he is the greatest team-sport athlete of all time. Sure you could argue that Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson and Joe Montana are worthy of such a grand title, but it's Gretzky that single-handedly turned his sport around. It's Gretzky that has single-handedly preserved

the integrity of the game through the good times and the bad. So as remarkable as the Jordans, Johnsons and Montanas are, they're simply no Wayne Gretzky.

In 1988, Gretzky shocked the world with the announcement that he had requested a trade to be with his new wife Janet in California. What is this? After 10 years with the Edmonton Oilers, with whom he had won four Stanley Cups, how could he leave?

Wayne Gretzky sent a message loud and clear, that even as important as hockey was in his life, he was his own man. And he did what he had to do.

This is such a refreshing difference from the asinine individualism of other sports figures. Dennis Rodman's antics, while mildly amusing, are an embarrassment to the NBA, the Spurs and himself. A little eccentric behavior goes a long way, but a lot does an ass maketh.

Throw in the Strawberrys, the Mike Tysons, the Dexter Manleys, the list goes on and on, and Gretzky's magical, yet quiet career has been a very special one.

On the field of competition, Gretzky has been given the Lady Byng trophy four times as the NHL's most gentlemanly player. While this is not exactly the most coveted award in the goon-riddled NHL, it still speaks volumes of his class. If winning the Lady Byng wasn't a cool thing to do before, it most certainly is now that The Great One has one or two on his shelf.

The game, and the sporting world in general, will miss this guy when he's gone.

Chris Metz is the sports editor for the Emerald.

Women's future starts tonight

Mark McTyre
Oregon Daily Emerald

The games of weeks gone by are in the past for the Oregon women's basketball team, and all that stands in front of the Ducks now is the future.

The future holds one of two things for the Ducks, either airline tickets to the NCAA tournament or prime front-row seats in front of a television at home. The Ducks will get a glimpse of what the future might hold for them starting tonight against the visiting Arizona State Sun Devils.

"We need to take care of our business," Oregon head coach Jody Runge said. "And we need to win all of our games if we're going to do that (make

the tournament)."

Happy to be back home at McArthur Court, the Ducks are looking for revenge for two early season losses to the Arizona schools.

"We're very pleased to be back home," Runge said. "Our kids are very fired up about getting some pay-backs for not taking care of business on the Arizona trip."

The Sun Devils (8-14 overall, 2-11 Pac-10) and the Wildcats (10-15, 5-8), combining for a 3-19 road record, will be walking into Mac Court with the worst road records in the Pacific-10 Conference.

In both of the losses, Oregon left itself digging too big of holes to climb out of. In Arizona State's case, the Ducks

did so after squandering a 17-4 lead. Despite shooting 52 percent from the field against the Sun Devils, Oregon was unable to overcome a rebounding deficit while allowing the home team to shoot 60 percent (9-15) from beyond the three-point arch. In the Arizona game, poor shooting (41 percent), poor defense (48 percent) and poor rebounding (43-30 deficit) were too much for the Ducks to offset 27 Arizona turnovers in the four-point decision.

"I just think we have to play much more aggressive defensively," Runge said of what her team needs to do to win. "We can not let them get hot from the outside as they did last time."

MEET

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ing to Finley, having lost to the teams already does not necessarily put the team in a bad position.

"I think it will help," Finley said of the experience of having already wrestled Oregon State, Arizona State and Bakersfield. "I think it puts you in an underdog role."

"I would hate to have someone on my heels, knowing you just barely beat someone last time and that they could beat you. I think it almost works against you."

Junior Kevin Roberts, ranked third in the Pac-10 in the 118-pound weight class with a 22-4 overall record, hopes to finally capture the 118-pound title that has eluded him in each of the last two seasons. And second-ranked redshirt freshman Jeremy Ensrud, who holds a 20-5 record, looks to compete for his first Pac-10 championship in the 126-pound weight class, while sophomore Scott Norton, ranked second in the 150-pound weight class, is also a contender for a title.

"I think everybody is focusing and I think every-

body will try and do their best, just because this is their chance to qualify for the nationals," Finley said. "So, I think you will see some pretty darn fine wrestling."

According to Finley, however, senior Cory Sonnen, who has a 17-6 record and is ranked fourth in the 142-pound weight class, might have the best chance at claiming a title. In a match earlier this season, Stanford's No. 1 Jay Jackson narrowly beat Sonnen with a questionable take-down late in the third period.

"Cory is bigger and stronger than Jackson," Finley said, adding that Sonnen has a good of a chance as any wrestler to win the 142-pound title.

The team has been hurt this season by injuries to senior Matt Sprague and junior Peter Stayner. Sprague, who suffered a shoulder injury earlier this season, will wrestle at 158-pounds, but Stayner's back injury will force him to miss this meet.

"Without those two healthy," Finley said, "that is two mainstays and two starters right out of our lineup and we just don't have the backups at this point to make up for it."

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