

# A Proven Winner

England's Ali Napier brings experience and a winning past to the Ducks

By Ryan Frank  
Sports Reporter

Tennis hotbeds Florida State and Washington State both recruited Ali Napier, a quarter-finalist of the British national doubles championship, out of high school in Surrey, England.

But Oregon offered her an opportunity that the other Division I schools couldn't: a chance to play as a freshman.

Napier suffered an Achilles' heel injury during her senior year of high school and was worried about making the traveling team if she chose a tennis powerhouse like Florida State.

But the Seminoles loss turned into Oregon's gain.

"She's got really as much potential as you can have, as any player in the country," said first-year head coach Jack Griffin of his No. 2 singles' player. "From a coach's perspective, she's got all the shots."

**ALI NAPIER**  
**YEAR:** Sophomore  
**HOMETOWN:** Surrey, England  
**TEAM SEEDING:** No. 2 singles player  
**1995-96 RECORD:** 18-9 singles; 10-11 doubles  
**1996-97 RECORD:** 0-3 singles; 1-3 doubles

And some of Napier's potential showed during her freshman season last year. She finished her first year as a Duck with 18 singles wins —

only one short of the school's top 10 single-season win total — and a No. 26 final ranking in the West region.

"I played number two and three last year, which was probably higher than I thought I would play," Napier said. "But I didn't lose to anybody badly, even when we played Arizona State and Arizona my matches were close."

Last season, Napier took three Pacific-10 Conference opponents to three sets before losing, including two matches against highly ranked Arizona State.

While posting only a 4-7 record against the Pac-10, which contains four perennially top-ranked teams, Napier excelled against non-conference players with a 14-2 mark.

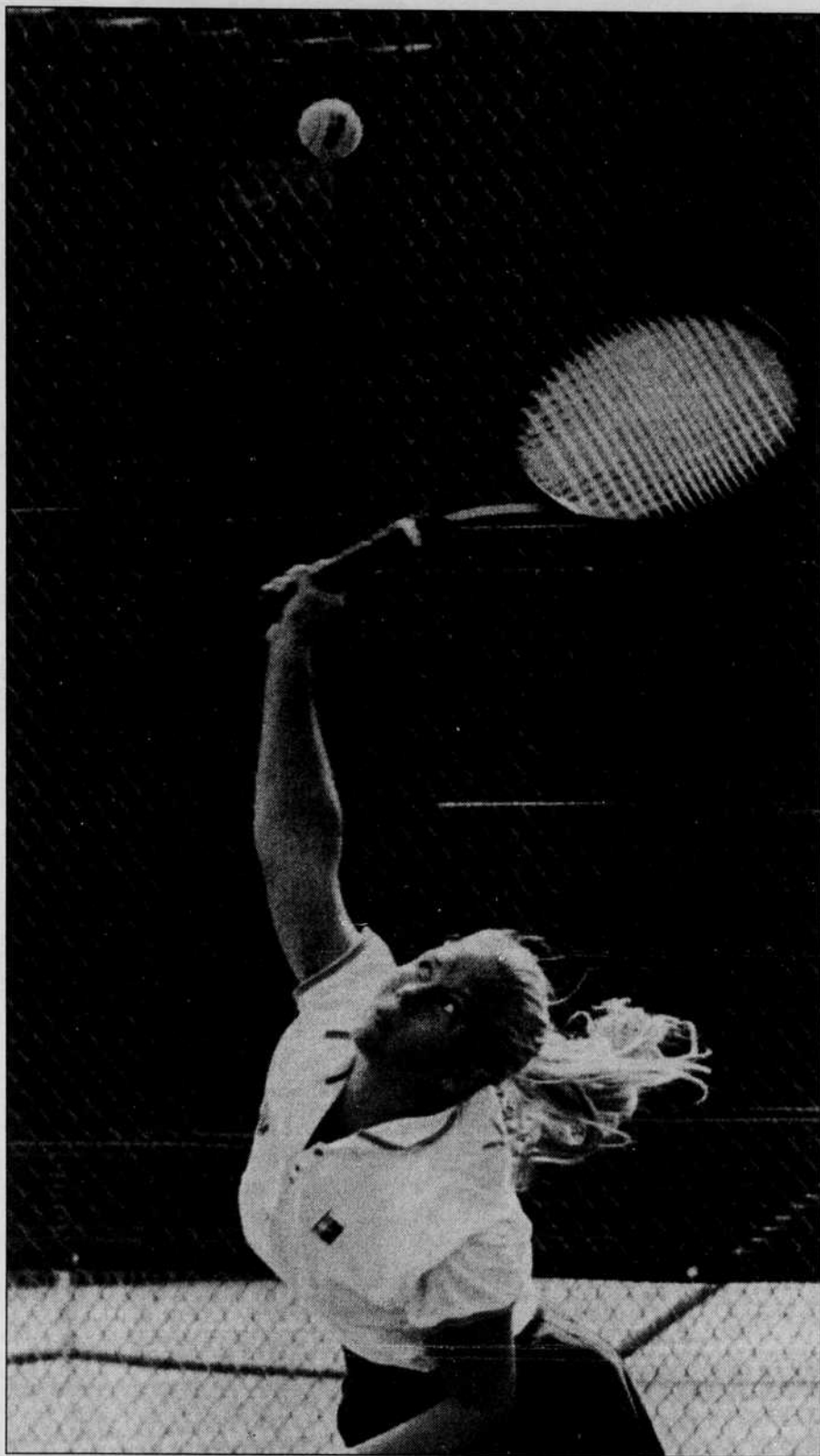
"Coming from England, she's played a fair amount of tournaments and she's coming in with probably more experience than an American kid would probably have who's playing just junior tournaments," Griffin said.

Napier also teamed up with Shanelle Kaneshiro last year at No. 1 doubles where the pair finished with a 7-10 record and a No. 12 final ranking in the West region.

Before coming to Oregon, Napier was undefeated as the team captain and No. 1 player at Kent Sevenoaks High School for three seasons. And before leaving Europe, she defeated the No. 37 singles player in the world in the International Tennis Federation tournament.

"I was at a good tennis school, so that was good," Napier said. "But I've played a few of the top 50 players in England, it just makes me feel like in England there is no one who I can't go out and have a good chance against."

Griffin said that Napier has brought ex-



Ali Napier, the Ducks' No. 2 singles player, recorded an 18-9 record last season, including a 14-2 record against non-conference opponents.

perience to the Ducks that has set an example for the rest of the team.

"I think definitely the level in the Pac-10 is as good or better than what she was facing over there," Griffin said. "I am sure that the other players on the team had never faced that sort of competition and I think she showed the other players on the team that these [Pac-10] players are beatable."

While Napier is winless in two singles matches this season, she has competed against two highly ranked players while bothered by a wrist injury.

In the first round of the Duck Classic on Oct. 4, she held a commanding 5-2 lead over Colorado's Sandra Fischer before losing 7-5, 6-4. Then in the All-American Championships two weeks ago, UCLA's Elizabeth Schmidt easily handled Napier in a 6-1, 6-2 win.

But she didn't leave the Championships

without a win. Napier and Kaneshiro earned a first-round doubles win over a pair from UCLA.

Napier, a right-hander, has been hampered by an injured left wrist that has been more of an annoyance than a problem.

"I had it a few years ago. I think it is just a nick in the cartilage," Napier said.

"The only thing her wrist injury affects is her two-handed backhand," Griffin said. "So we are trying to take care of that right now, but it is a pain and not a huge deal. It is not going to stop her from playing for too long."

As far as the future, Griffin expects nothing but improvement out of his No. 2 singles' player.

"I would say when she is a senior she'll be a top 50 player in the country," Griffin said. "That is reasonable. I think she could even do better than that. I feel pretty strongly about that."

## Rider gets into trouble again: Surprised?

I was less than shocked to open the paper on Tuesday and find out that the Blazers are having some problems with one of their newest team members, Isaiah Rider.

Apparently, Rider missed Portland's exhibition game with Seattle up in Corvallis because he went to the wrong place to get on the team bus. Sounds like an honest mistake. It could be overlooked, but shouldn't be.

First of all, this isn't even close to the first time that Rider has done something idiotic. He has already missed a shoot-

around before a game in Sacramento. He was supposed to be a celebrity judge at a slam-dunk contest at Barlow High School this past weekend but didn't show up.

Rider was no saint in Minnesota either. As a rookie, he kicked a lady at the Mall of America in Minneapolis over an argument about an autograph show. He repeatedly missed games and practices as a Timberwolf.

So Rider was traded to Portland for James Robinson, Bill Curley and a first-round draft pick. That's cool, give the guy a fresh start. Maybe a new team and a new city will give him a place to start his life and career over with a better attitude.

Maybe not. Rider still spent his summer in Oakland, the site of many past problems. Coach P.J. Carlesimo has blamed Rider's friends in Oakland for getting him involved in situations that he shouldn't be in.

No offense to Carlesimo, but why would you want a guy on your team who can't be his own man and learn to say no to his friends when they are doing something illegal? I mean, the man is 25-years-old. He either needs to get out of Oakland or start taking some responsibility for his actions.

How many 25-year-olds do you know get arrested for gambling on the street? How many do you know get caught with four illegal cellular phones and marijuana in his pockets? These may seem like fairly minor infractions, but that isn't the worst of them.

Rider was arrested in June of this year for allegedly raping a woman. The charges were eventually dropped, but he was later named as a co-defendant in another alleged rape of a woman who was allegedly drugged with narcotics laced with a hallucinogen.

Is this somebody who is a good influence on a team that includes 18-year-old Jermaine O'Neal? Over the summer, Carlesimo said he wasn't afraid of Rider and O'Neal being on the same team, just as long as they didn't become best friends.

Obviously, Carlesimo doesn't have a lot of faith in Rider as a person.

But where does he fit in as a player? Portland is a better team than Minnesota. Rider is going to have to prove himself as a team player if he expects to prove himself as a person. And he isn't going to do that by missing a game. In fact he will end up missing two because he has been suspended one game for not making it to Corvallis.

There is little the Blazers can do now. Who is hurt more when Rider doesn't play: the player or the team? I guess that will be determined in the next eight months.

Andrea DeYoung is the assistant sports editor for the Emerald. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.