

Former Oregon athlete brings excitement to NFL

■ **PLAYOFFS:** Chad Cota has gone from longshot to fan favorite at Carolina

The Associated Press

MEDFORD — Carolina Panthers fans are learning what University of Oregon and Ashland High School football fans learned a long time ago — Chad Cota seems like he's always around the ball.

Despite being relegated to special teams and a role as a backup defensive back, the 6-foot-1, 191-pound Cota leads Carolina with six interceptions.

His interception sealed the NFC West title for the Panthers in an 18-14 win over Pittsburgh. Then last week against the Cowboys, Cota's interception of a Troy Aikman pass stopped a Dallas drive and led to a Panthers field goal in a 26-17 win.

"It's been crazy around here the last few weeks," Cota told the *Medford Mail Tribune* from Charlotte, N.C., this week. "The whole city is jacked up like you can't believe."

Carolina plays Green Bay Sunday for a berth in the Super Bowl. It's a remarkable achievement for an expansion team in only its second year in the NFL. Another expansion team, Jacksonville, plays New England this weekend for the other slot in football's greatest spectacle.

Considered a long shot to

make the club when he was drafted in the sixth round last year, Cota is doing what he's done since his days at Ashland High and Oregon, when he helped the former to a state championship and the latter to its first Rose Bowl appearance in 37 years: Make plays.

Last week's interception was Cota's fifth in the past six games.

"I've always prided myself on being able to read quarterbacks and get to the ball," Cota said. "So much of being a good DB [defensive back] is knowing what's coming and then reacting quickly."

Cota is playing more and more defense as coaches realize his affinity for the ball. His heroics against the Cowboys included sharing credit for bringing down Emmitt Smith on a third-and-goal play from the 2-yard line.

Commentators Jerry Glanville and John Madden have been singing Cota's praises and he has been a guest on ESPN radio the past two weeks.

"It hasn't gotten old yet," Cota said of his sudden celebrity status.

Well-wishers calling with encouragement have included former high school teammates, as well as Alex Molden of the New Orleans Saints and Herman O'Berry of the St. Louis Rams — who were defensive backs with Cota at Oregon.

ABL offers women opportunity

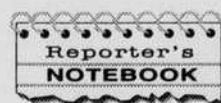
The American Basketball League is finally in existence, and judging from a recent Portland Power game, women's professional basketball is headed for a fast break into the changing world of professional sports.

As a Portland Power spectator, one might never know the Power are in second to last place in the league; with the second highest league attendance, the league's slogan must indeed be "It's a whole new ball game." The players are hyped as much as their NBA counterparts when the Memorial Coliseum goes dark, a spotlight beams over each player in the starting lineup and the sound system appropriately booms "I got the power." There is a certain finesse to the presentation and the package as a whole.

Women's salaries pale to those of the NBA men, but this league has finally created a place for female college basketball players to do their graduate work in the United States. Basketball standouts such as Stanford sensation and Lake Oswego native Katy Steding can now play close to home. And players aren't the only women benefiting from this new league — two out of three referees at the game I attended were female.

Indeed, the league is now a

segue into the world of basketball beyond college, and offers more opportunities for women in basketball as referees and coaches as well. The world of women's basketball could use more coaches with experience and the Jody Runge-type of hard-hitting, effective coaching.



ing. With players now extending their careers to the professional realm, there will be more women with an upgrade in basketball experience. Thus the level of girls' and women's basketball will increase as the league itself flourishes.

The American Basketball League players are similar to college players, just one step up competition-wise. During the game I watched, a center for the Portland Power repeatedly yelled "woo" when she was open momentarily, and other players argued with the referees and showed their frustration when calls for traveling, three seconds in the key and fouls were disagreeable.

But what made the \$15.50 ticket worthwhile was the hustle, shot accuracy and overall competitive nature of the women in this league. When one power for-

ward alley-ooped the ball to a center and almost dunked the ball, I knew the dunk could happen at some time in the near future. And when both teams shot better free throw percentages than the Blazer game I attended, I knew who I would rather watch.

Though the league is reportedly doing well, there is much talk about whether it's a passing fad, or the beginning of a new trend of acknowledgement and respect for women's sports. I doubt it will fail completely, but even if it does, at least it will have happened at all.

At the game, I saw numerous young, ponytailed girls cheering on their favorite players and probably aspiring to someday do what these women are doing: playing a good game of competitive hoops professionally in this country and earning satisfaction, money and respect in a league whose time has come.

Never before on the reader board had I seen the words "She shoots! She scores!" Now is the time for a league of their own.

Angie Suchy is the student activities editor for the *Emerald*. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper. Angie can be reached at asuchy@gladstone.uoregon.edu

CORRECTION

In the Jan. 9 sports special edition, it said the Oregon women's basketball team had lost three consecutive first-round NCAA games. The team actually had won its first-round game against Santa Clara in 1994.

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