

Fighting over Equality

■ OUR OPINION:
In the wake of her new book, Professor Lauren Kessler differs with basketball coach Jody Runge on how to achieve a common goal

Journalism Professor Lauren Kessler probably wasn't expecting such a reaction to her new book on the 1994-95 University women's basketball team. It wasn't that *Full Court Press: A Season in the Life of a Winning Basketball Team and the Women Who Made It Happen* didn't warrant a reaction. It did. The surprising aspect is just where the reaction came from.

Before the book was even published, head coach Jody Runge spoke out against Kessler's portrayal of the team. And since then, at least one player has voiced her concerns over the author's reporting and writing methods.

One would expect criticism like this from people who don't want women's basketball to succeed, but coming from coaches and players within the sport, the protests are all the more intriguing.

Much of the conflict lies between Runge and Kessler. Both women desire more success and attention for women's basketball. Both women hoped the book would help achieve this goal. Now they aren't speaking to each other.

The dispute is ironic at its core. Both parties want the same thing but cannot agree on how to accomplish it. And both women have arguments that at least warrant discussion, if not validation.

Runge is unhappy with the way Kessler presented the relationship between her and her players. At certain points in *Full Court Press*, Runge appears downright cruel in her treatment of the women she is being paid to coach. And Runge also objects to the presentation of many of her players.

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Kessler, on the other hand, stands by her choices. She says describing the weaknesses and uglier aspects of the team and season will ultimately make both Runge and the players more admirable. On this point, Kessler is right — but for different reasons.

Runge says she feels “betrayed” by the author, to whom she gave complete access during the basketball season. Kessler “made herself part of our family,” Runge told *The Oregonian*. But then Kessler had the audacity to write not just positive things about the team, but everything.

In doing this, Kessler did her

job. As a journalist, one must report reality, not just selected aspects of that reality. The book is often very candid, and definitely not always pretty. But it's not supposed to be pretty; it's supposed to be true.

A season in the life of a Division I women's basketball team is not always fun. It's not even always exciting. And Kessler accurately presents this. Runge may feel betrayed, and perhaps she has a right to be surprised. She no doubt gave hours of her time, and much more of her privacy, to Kessler. And she most likely felt she should be rewarded for that. It's unfortunate she doesn't feel *Full Court Press* is a reward.

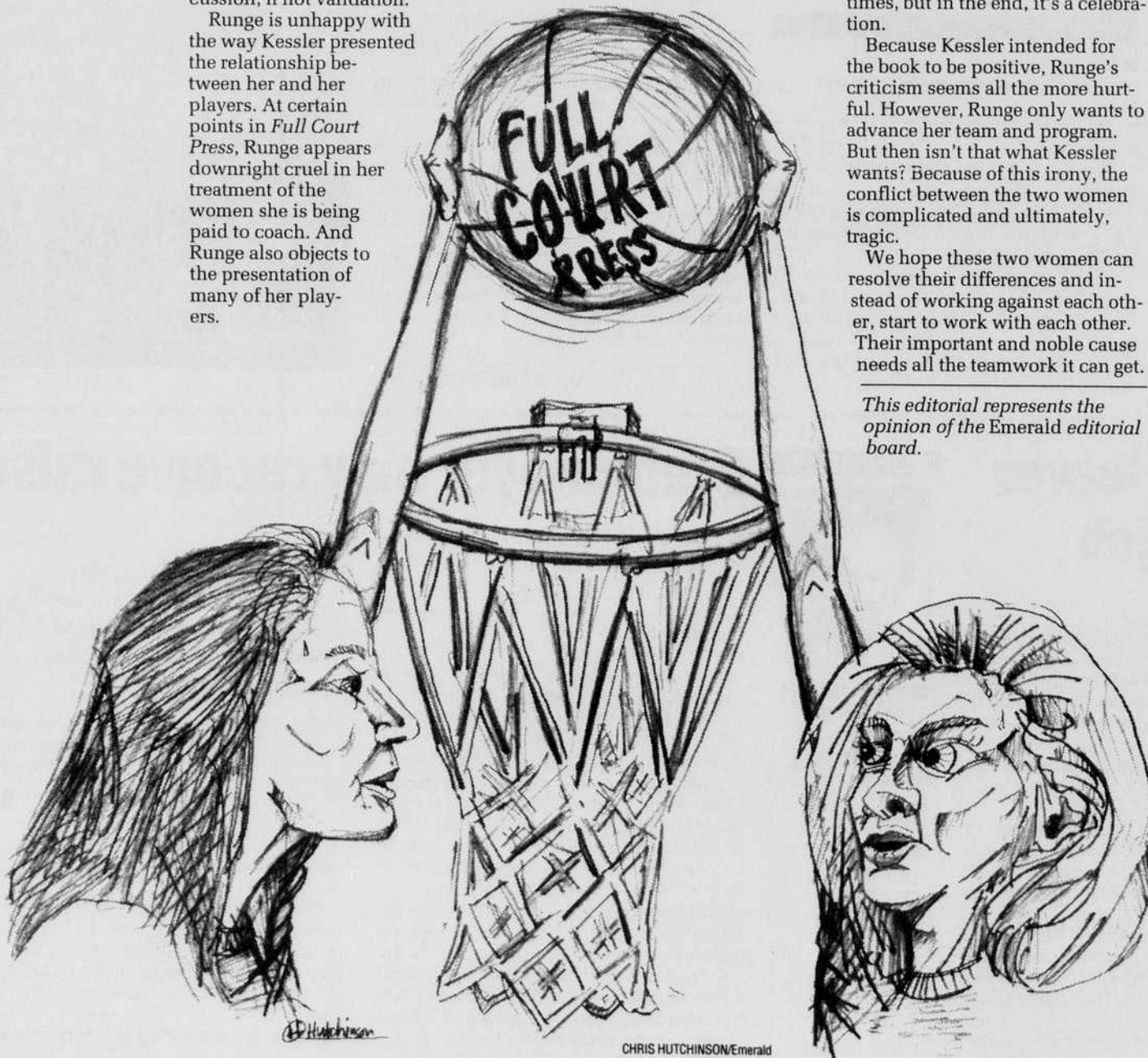
Kessler's book isn't perfect. Minor factual errors abound, and she often doesn't bother to identify characters by name. Her reporting method of placing thoughts in people's heads has also been questioned by at least one of the book's subjects. But her book is not mean-spirited, and generally speaking, it's accurate.

On one level, Runge should be speaking out. As a coach, she wants to protect her players from anything negative. And Kessler's descriptions could be perceived as threatening. But really, Kessler's book can only help present and future players. It is blunt and ugly at times, but in the end, it's a celebration.

Because Kessler intended for the book to be positive, Runge's criticism seems all the more hurtful. However, Runge only wants to advance her team and program. But then isn't that what Kessler wants? Because of this irony, the conflict between the two women is complicated and ultimately, tragic.

We hope these two women can resolve their differences and instead of working against each other, start to work with each other. Their important and noble cause needs all the teamwork it can get.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

Overheard

“This business is very corrupting, and I don't want him to be a part of it. As much as I can keep him away from it, I will.”

Rosie O'Donnell on why she won't have her adopted son on her television show

“We are so very thankful that we have been recipients of this opportunity to prepare for membership in Their Kingdom, and to experience Their boundless Caring and Nurturing.”

An excerpt from the *Heaven's Gate* Internet page

“These ratings should come with their own advisory. Warning: These ratings may make parenting harder.”

Joanne Cantor, communications professor, on how ineffective television ratings systems are at monitoring what children watch, as quoted in *The Los Angeles Times*

“There can be no advance in the peace process unless we see a total disavowal of terrorism and actions by the Palestinian Authority against terror organizations.”

David Bar-Ilan, aide to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, on the Mideast peace process

“The crusher is that ‘Jerry Maguire’ was the only studio film that deserved to get a Best Picture nomination.”

Veteran screenwriter William Goldman on why 1996 was “the worst year in Hollywood history”

LETTERS

Nike University

On the Friday before Spring Break, the President announced that he was accepting Phil Knight's offer of a \$40,000 raise to make the office of the President nationally competitive. The acceptance of this corporate salary boost is both unacceptable and unethical. We cannot have corporations paying the salary of administrators.

The administration knew this would be an unpopular idea, so they tried to hide it by making the announcement over Spring Break. This offer and Frohnmayer's subsequent acceptance spits on the line of integrity that separates philanthropic efforts from straight out prostitution of University control.

Try as it might, Nike Corporation cannot take the place of the Oregon Legislature. There must be a statewide effort to raise the academic bar on this campus. With a Presidential Knight Chair, Nike Corp. now has more of a say in campus politics than students or faculty or maybe even the Oregon Legislature. This raise may make the presidential salary more competitive, but it has flushed the credibility of the office right down the toilet.

The president's office should have had the sense to refuse money that clearly interferes with the goals and duties of that office. This must be undone. The President must return the money he accepted.

If the University feels we need to remain competitive on a national level, let us find another way to do it. Make the Oregon Legislature do their job. It is hard to argue that we are not the University of Nike when Phil Knight gets to write checks directly to Frohnmayer's pocket.

Ben Unger
ASUO Student Senate