

Hughes: Runge pleased with senior

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by averaging more than three steals a game and has tied her career-high of five steals against Oregon State last Friday.

What makes Hughes' defensive improvements so impressive is that her offensive production has only gone up.

Despite having to handle the offense from the point guard position, Hughes, 22, is the team's leading scorer with 15.4 points per game — seventh in the conference — and is often at the center of opposing team's defensive schemes.

"It's difficult to be a scoring point guard," Runge says. "You've got to create more of the shots for yourself than you do by coming off a screen to get open."

Sonja Curtis, Hughes' teammate and roommate, says Hughes has talents that are rarely seen in the college game today.

"I've played with people who have parts of her game, but no one who's had everything," Curtis says.

Lin Laursen, Hughes' junior college coach, knows exactly what Runge and Curtis are talking about. Hughes left Central Arizona Community College as an All-American and was the player of the year in her conference.

"She had a mind of an assassin," Laursen says. "Nat can pick you apart with her mind. She looks like she can't stand up and chew gum at the same time, but she was a player."

Oregon

■ **NOTES:** Is tied with Arizona for third place heading into this week's games ... has won five of last six and 10 of last 12 ... leads the Pac-10 in free-throw shooting in conference play ... Natalie Hughes leads the Ducks with 15.4 points per game

Stanford

■ **NOTES:** Leads the all-time series with Oregon 21-3 and is riding a 21-game winning streak over the Ducks ... has won 13 straight and 18 of last 19 ... Forward Olympia Scott leads the team with 17.9 points per game and 7.7 rebounds per game

As Laursen says, Hughes doesn't look to be a typical basketball "thoroughbred" with her knocked knees and inch-thick knee pads. But scoring, and now defending, are not a problem for the 5-foot-10 guard.

"I've always been a scorer. You always get your name in the paper," Hughes says with a smile.

With the scoring and defense Hughes brings, she has been more than Runge expected.

"She's been all that we expected and more," Runge says. "I don't think there are a number of kids that can score 25 points a game from the point guard position."

With the season-ending in-

juries Oregon's key players Brienne Meharry and Jenny Mower have suffered, Hughes' point production has been essential.

"I think, basically, she's carried our team so far," Curtis says. "In a lot of tough games, she's been scoring in double figures and has been carrying us."

Hughes began her basketball career in her native Australia, where she was the first female in the country to be named Junior Basketballer of the Year in 1990 and where she played for the Rockhampton Rockettes of the CBA in 1994.

Her parents are in Eugene this week from Australia to watch their daughter play her final two home games of her college career.

Asked if it was hard to send her daughter to America, her mother, Diann, can't talk about it. Her eyes begin to well with tears, and she says she is proud of her daughter and that she wanted her to go to America to see other parts of the world.

As a child, Hughes dreamt of coming to America to play basketball. Why? She's not really sure. Something about the United States has always appealed to her, and she plans to pursue a career in basketball here after this season.

Considering the way Hughes has proven herself on both sides of the court this season, her dream would not be such an unlikely end to the long trek that began years ago in Australia.

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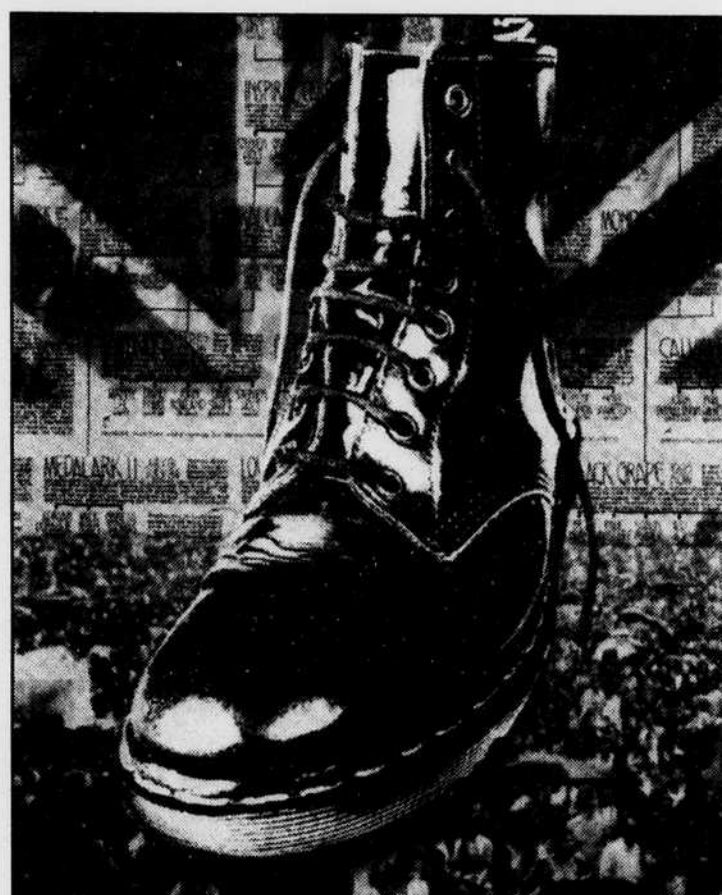
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