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ESPN issues a challenge to SI

It's "not your father's sports magazine," in the words of its editor in chief, John Papanek. ESPN, The Magazine is what it is. And its objective is to take a sizable bite out of the sports magazine market that Sports Illustrated has had cornered for so many years. Maybe even (gasp!) supplant SI as the reigning authority in sports magazines.



Tim Pyle

Nonetheless, some of the basics of The Magazine are quite different from SI. ESPN's venture into the publication world is biweekly and will, again in the words of Papanek, "look ahead, not behind to last week's events, the results and highlights of which we expect you will have already got from 'SportsCenter.'"

With Disney's deep pockets backing it and its own television station to promote it, The Magazine at least has the reserves to be a contender for SI's heavyweight crown, if nothing else.

As one would expect, those advantages have shaped a clever advertising campaign. However, The Magazine has yet to make good on Kevin Garnett and Stephon Marbury's "all nude, but tastefully done" promises made in TV ads.

Upon first glance, The Magazine looks more like "The Advertisement" with the first 10 pages of its first two issues (and the first six of its third and most recent issue) adorned with two-page spread ads that promote everything from Tommy Hilfiger to Valvoline.

When one couples the oversized, tabloid pages with the

abundance of ads, it appears — at least to this candid observer — as if Rolling Stone magazine had a sudden identity crisis and decided to leave rapper Snoop Doggy Dogg behind for the "Big Dog," Glenn Robinson of the Milwaukee Bucks.

These oversized pages are apparently conducive to The Magazine's attempt to shout out to the "Generation X-ers" it so desires to lure. From front to back, the pages are filled with tons of photographs of every size imaginable and flashy design.

Bill Bellamy is assuredly scrambling to keep up with The Magazine in the running for "best dressed" in the next MTV awards.

In keeping with a recent entertainment trend, The Magazine is taking nudity boundaries to the limit as well. From shots of HIV-positive Tommy Morrison in bed with his wife and a closeup of the Elvis tattoo on Morrison's right cheek (I'm not referring to his face) in the premier issue, to a partial look at Peyton Manning's jock in the most recent issue, The Magazine is entering a brand new (or should I say "nude") world for the industry.

ESPN, as one viewing of any highlights on its TV network will show, also tries to capture the lighter side of sports. In its magazine, this comical aspect is portrayed by "The Jump," a department full of witty observations and funny facts.

All these optical and comical spectacles aside, substance is what the real sports fan is after.

With an assortment of qualified, experienced writers, The Magazine has it.

The Magazine has managed to snatch many former SI writers — Tom Friend, Curry Kirkpatrick, Tim Kurkjian and Rick Telander, to name a few — and has its own

considerable well of talent to draw from in ESPN's "SportsCenter" crew and play-by-play announcers and analysts.

Peter Gammons, Dan Patrick, Chris Mortensen, Mel Kiper Jr. and Dick Vitale are among the ESPN TV personalities to contribute to the first three issues.

However, SI still has the top dog of sportswriting and a lot of more-than-capable sidekicks to back him up.

ESPN tried to steal Rick Reilly from SI, but Time Inc. editor in chief Norman Pearlstine decided no magazine of his would be treated like the Montreal Expos. Pearlstine was willing to pay the price to keep his star to the tune of \$450,000 a year, a back-page column and a three-script movie deal at sister company Warner Bros.

Reilly's back-page column, which has been in every issue since SI introduced its new design (was it hearing footsteps?) on Feb. 16, was something SI should have implemented long ago. Reading his weekly column, no matter what the topic, offers me — and I'm sure many of his other devout readers — one of life's simple, dependable pleasures.

The Magazine and SI may see each other as direct competitors, but they will more likely end up co-existing rather than battling until death.

In fact, that's just fine with me because there is never too much of a good thing (i.e., sports publications). I already have a subscription to both and think they complement each other well.

But one thing is certain in the latest — and perhaps strongest — attempt to knock SI from its sports-world pedestal:

SI is still king of the hill.

Tim Pyle is a sports reporter for the Emerald.

UO: Bellotti pleased with kicking game

Continued from Page 9

placements for tight ends Blake Spence and A.J. Jelks and tailback Saladin McCullough.

"I like the enthusiasm and hustle we've had on defense," Bellotti said. "I like the fact that we seem to be communicating and taking more pride in what we do."

The Oregon defense was last or near last in the Pacific-10 Conference last season in all the major defensive categories and allowed 421.3 yards of total offense per game. Rushing defense was the main problem for the Ducks as they gave up an average of 185 rushing yards a game and allowed 23 touchdowns on the ground.

Bellotti said he has seen some improvement on the defensive side of the ball, thus far, in spring practice.

"I have [seen improvement] from the standpoint that I think the kids are seeming to have fun," he said. "They're playing with enthusiasm, and we are not making as many mistakes in my opinion."

The defense has received a fair share of criticism the past two seasons, something Bellotti said he thinks has motivated the defensive players.

"That rap that's hung around their heads for a year or two is something I think that's brought our defense together and they've said 'Hey, we've got to prove people wrong, and the only people who can do it are us,'" Bellotti said. "It's very much like how our offensive line responded to the challenge last year of people questioning their ability or credibility."

The defensive line was one of the Ducks' glaring weaknesses last fall, and according to Bellotti, those positions are still up for grabs.

"There are eight or 10 guys [on the defensive line] that are still really vying for starting positions," the coach said. "I think at times Saul Patu has looked good but needs to be more consistent. I think Masi Heamish is much improved over last year. Buddy Smith is much improved, and Jason Nikolao, who played as a true freshman, is getting better and better every day."

Moving to the offensive side of the ball, the depth chart still reads just about the way it did last season at quarterback, with Jason Maas and Akili Smith at the top followed by A.J. Feeley and redshirt freshman

Joey Harrington.

"I don't think our quarterback situation has sorted itself out very much," Bellotti said, "other than the fact I think Jason Maas has operated the team the best."

Smith, who rejoined the team April 7 after being suspended in mid-February by Bellotti for violation of team policy, has not yet returned to the spectacular form he displayed at times last season.

"He's not up to par with the rest only because he's missed several weeks of conditioning," Bellotti said. "But I think Akili is a great athlete and he, although looking rusty, can still do some things. I'm excited to have him back out here working, and I think he's very appreciative of the opportunity to get back out here and play football."

According to Bellotti, senior Kevin Parker has risen to the top of the list of candidates to replace McCullough at tailback, although he cautioned "there is a lot more to be done this spring."

Bellotti also noted that transfer Ruben Droughns and incoming freshman Herman Ho-Ching, both expected to join the team in the fall, could also make a case for playing time at tailback.

The other major area the Ducks need to address before the 1998 season begins — the kicking game — has been a pleasant surprise to Bellotti so far.

"I was most impressed with our kicking game [in Saturday's first scrimmage of the spring] in terms of the long field goals that we attempted and the one that we made by Nathan Villegas at 47 yards and the 50-yarder by Dan Katz that was only a yard short."

Oregon kickers connected on just 10 of 15 field-goal attempts last season, including a miss of a short last-second attempt by Joshua Smith at Southern California that cost Oregon the game.

"I already think we've improved dramatically in that category and will improve on kickoffs and that kind of thing," Bellotti said.

At tight end, Bellotti said Jed Weaver has clearly separated himself from a lengthy list of players vying for the starting job.

"But we need to develop two and three at that position, so there's a lot of work to be done there," Bellotti said.

Spring drills continue through May 2.