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Senior spends memorable 4 years at UO

As I write my final column here at the Emerald, let me begin by saying my initial thoughts were to write about the trials and tribulations of college life and my most memorable moments over the past four years at the University.

After writing hundreds of sports stories over the past two years, I figured I'd try to take a different path and stay away from a sports-related column. But after racking my brain for hours, I came to the conclusion it just can't be done.

When I thought of my best memories at Oregon, nearly all had something to do with sports (other than every moment I've spent with my simply amazing girlfriend, Caroline, who has put up with me for the majority of the past four years — through the countless hours I spent in the Emerald newsroom, the late nights and many phone calls saying I'll be "just another hour" and the innumerable weekends spent covering sporting events).

First of all, I would like to thank my parents for some brilliant timing in bringing me into the world when they did. It set me up perfectly to be a part of perhaps one of the most memorable four-year spans in Oregon sports history.

Who would have thought that any student could go to Oregon for four years and not suffer through at least one losing football season? And have the Ducks participate in back-to-back New Year's Day bowl games?

During the summer between my senior year of high school and

my freshman year of college (in 1994) I was razed unmercifully by friends and family for deciding to go to that "other" school in Eugene rather than going off to Corvallis to support the mighty Beavers.

"The Beavs are gonna be unstoppable in a couple of years," friends would say.

"The Ducks just suck, they might not even win a game in the Pac-10 this year," they added.

And after the Ducks were shellacked by Hawaii and Utah to begin that 1994 season 1-2, I was a bit worried.

But the rest is history. Less than four months after first setting foot on campus, I found myself sitting (standing, actually) in the Rose Bowl with at least 40,000 other maniacal Ducks fans screaming our collective heads off.

And about those Beavers — does 27 straight losing seasons and counting ring a bell?

I'll admit, I was spoiled that freshman year. Easily the most memorable occurrence was Kenny Wheaton's interception against Washington that sparked the run for the roses. And the 10-9 win over Arizona a week later was certainly unforgettable. The Rose Bowl topped it all off.

Moving on to basketball season, the highlight was easily the Oregon men's stunning upset of UCLA and my introduction to the madness of McArthur Court just three days after the excitement of the Rose Bowl. The Ducks went on to earn a trip to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in decades.

Admittedly, I had some incredibly high expectations for the next few years after starting off my collegiate experience with Oregon teams going to a New Year's Day bowl and the NCAA tourney in the same year.

I was brought down to earth some in the next three years, but they sure weren't bad by any means.

My second year was highlighted by the football team's trip to the Cotton Bowl and the win over Washington at Husky Stadium.

Kenya Wilkins' last-second shot to beat Stanford topped off a solid basketball season, the Ducks' second-straight winning season, although they were robbed of a trip to the National Invitation Tournament.

The next two years were less significant on a national level, but just as important for Oregon.

A couple of 6-5 football regular seasons closed out my years as a Duck. But I won't ever forget the domination of Air Force in the Las Vegas Bowl that ranks right up there with my most memorable experiences of being a fan at Oregon.

The other most memorable games I've attended while at Oregon were every victory over UCLA in men's basketball (all three sweet in their own way), the oh-so-close effort of the women's basketball team against Stanford in 1997 and the women's victory over No. 7 Arizona on Natalie Hughes' near-last-second shot that sent Mac Court into a frenzy.

When I look back on it all, not too many people can say they went to Oregon when the Ducks had four winning football seasons, went to the NCAA and the NIT while putting together three (nearly four) winning seasons in men's basketball, went to four straight NCAA Tournaments in women's hoops and saw the retirements of two legendary coaches (Bill Dellinger and Ron Finley).

It's a span of four years I'll never forget.

Goodbye, everyone.

ODE SENIOR



Alex Pond

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