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# PERSPECTIVES

## The sports curse



*In light of recent losses, fans need an explanation for the University's performance*

Oregon fans, feel my pain. There is a curse upon us. It teases us into thinking we are on the verge of being big time and then shoots us out of the sky like the Ducks we are.

The past five years arguably have been the best this University's athletic program has seen in its history. The football team has won more games than any other in the Pac-10 during this span, while the women's basketball team is on course for its sixth straight NCAA Tournament berth. The men's basketball team qualified for the NCAA Tournament in 1995 and made an appearance at the National Invitation Tournament in 1997.

I'd mention the other sports programs, but they are either consistently successful, such as the track and cross country programs, or are outmatched and never give us much hope anyway (volleyball, tennis, etc.).

The success of the football and basketball programs is encouraging, don't get me wrong. Compared to our dismal past, Oregon fans have more to celebrate right now than at any other time. But with this success comes increased expectations, which thus far have not been met.

I can accept our programs not meeting the lofty expectations. Every successful athletic program has to endure some close losses and

setbacks before it finally gets over the hump. But failing to meet those expectations because of fumbles, missed lay-ins and bonehead coaching decisions is simply unacceptable.

That is where the curse comes to play.

I have a great deal of respect for Oregon football head coach

Mike Bellotti. He is an offensive genius, great motivator and excellent recruiter. Bellotti, however, is not immune to the curse.

### Opinion



Aaron Artman

It attacked him three years ago when it engulfed his brain and forced him to hire defensive

coordinator Rich Stubler — an ex-Canadian Football League coach who took over a solid "Gang Green" defensive mentality and brought in his own philosophy. This philosophy, called the "edge principle," relegated the Ducks to a defensive doormat. Thankfully, the curse left Bellotti after the 1997 season when he fired Stubler.

The curse took some time off before terrorizing the hands of the Duck football players themselves. In the first half of the UCLA game last fall, running back Reuben Droughns fumbled the ball four times.

I can't really knock Droughns, though. After all, he was playing with a broken leg and still rushed for nearly 200 yards. But the debacle in the Aloha Bowl, where fumbles again doomed the Ducks, proves that the curse is not afraid to enjoy a little time in Hawaii if needed.

Nothing, however, could have prepared us for the latest manifestation of the curse.

Hey Ernie! Run for your life, call an exorcist, do something before it is too late.

The men's basketball team and coach Ernie Kent are facing the wrath like no program in re-

cent years.

The curse first showed its face in the form of missed lay-ins.

Why a person standing 7-foot-1 doesn't just dunk the damn ball is beyond me, but then again I don't understand why a person standing 6-foot-9 doesn't dunk the ball either. Could it be that Mike Carson and Flo Hartenstein are that vertically challenged, or could it be the curse?

Last week's series against Arizona and Arizona State proved that the curse has also attacked Kent's brain. Against Arizona, Kent kept the Ducks' best player, Alex Scales, on the bench for six minutes late in the second half before sending him back on the court for the final two minutes.

Coach Kent, if you are going to publicly complain about needing a go-to guy to win close games, then keep your best player on the court for at least the final eight minutes of the second half. A go-to guy can't emerge if he is on the bench getting cold during the crucial stretch of the game.

The Arizona game was bad, but Arizona State was an absolute fiasco of a basketball game.

The curse has never been more prevalent than last Saturday with Kent keeping the Ducks in their rainbow three-pointer offense against the Sun Devils' zone defense. It was the worst job on offensive adjustments I've seen at any level, and that includes nearly two years of covering high school basketball.

But when you are cursed, you're cursed. And, in the case of Ernie Kent and his future, as well as the future of other Ducks, it is far better to be cursed than bad. After all, at least the curse leaves us every once in a while.

It could be worse. We could all be Beavers. And that, my friends, is a real curse.

Aaron Artman is a columnist for the Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.



**CORRECTION**  
In the Jan. 21 article titled "African-Americans share stories about growing up in Eugene," it should have read that Lyllye Parker said: "I grew up in Eugene, Oregon, and if you asked me about the Negro experience of the time, I don't know what you are talking about. But I can tell you about my experience at West 11th, because that is what I grew up knowing."  
The article also should have said Lyllye Parker had never lived outside of Oregon for more than three months. The Emerald regrets these errors.