Oregon Daily Emerald

SPORTS

Tuesday
April 13, 1999

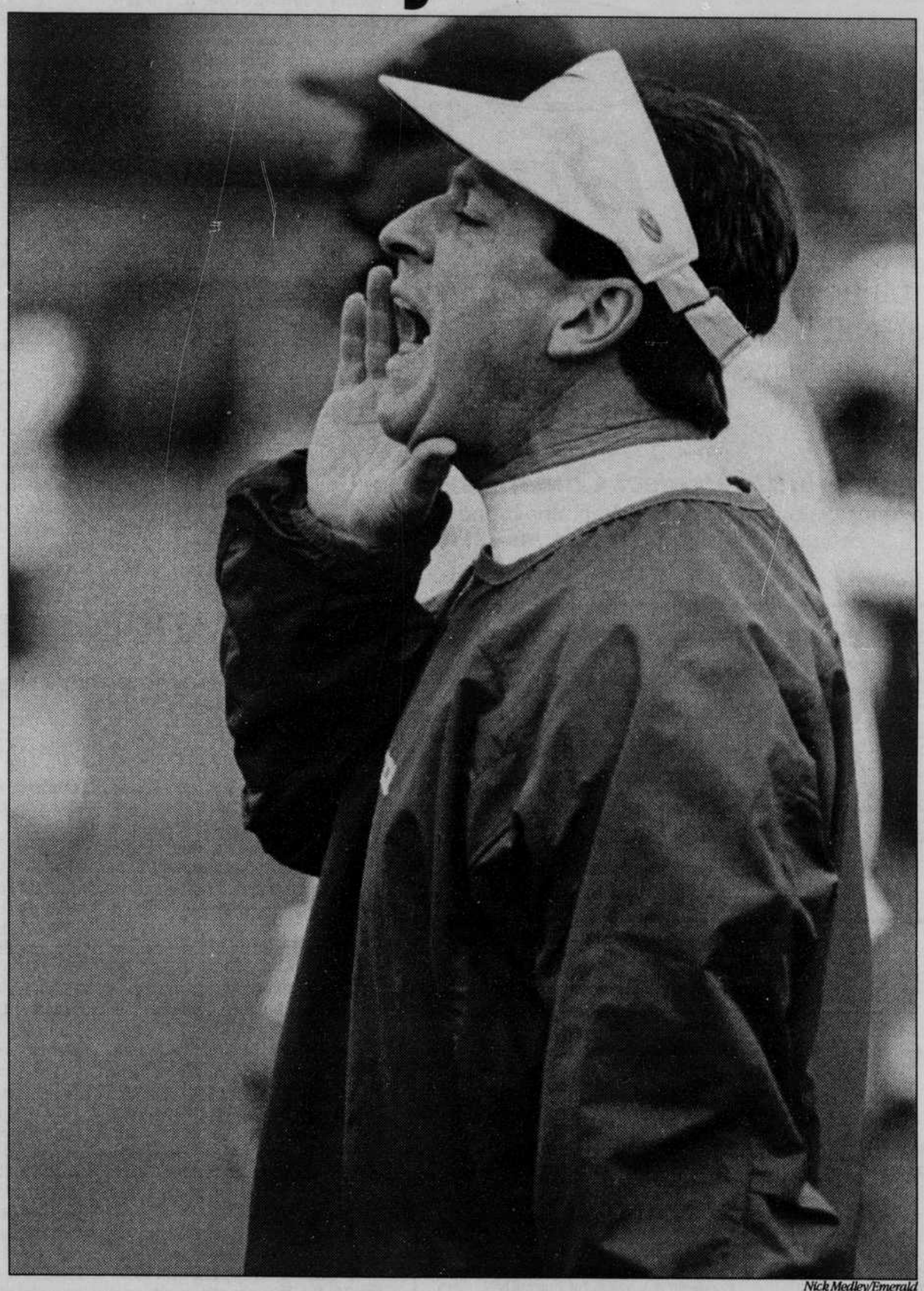
Best Bet
NBA Basketball
L.A. Lakers vs. Portland
5 p.m., TNT

SPRING FOOTBALL

Defense deadly under Aliotti's guide

"There were things here that I liked, and there's stuff that I like that I brought with me. So we're not really keeping the same system, but a similar system."

Nick Aliotti
Oregon defensive coordinator



Nick Medley/Emerald

Nick Allioti returns to Oregon this year as defensive coordinator after spending three years with the St. Louis Rams and last year coaching the UCLA defensive squad. In 1994, Allioti's Gang Green defense led Oregon to its first Rose Bowl appearance in 37 years.

Gang Green founder Nick Aliotti has returned to Oregon as defensive coordinator

By Mirjam Swanson
Oregon Daily Emerald

Four years ago, Nick Aliotti recruited most of the seniors who make up Oregon's current defense.

Now, this spring, Aliotti is coaching them for the first time.

"He's the guy who recruited me," defensive back Michael Fletcher said, "so it's good to have him back. Everybody is fired up about him. We're excited to see what we can get out of him."

After Aliotti had a successful 1994 season — in which his memorable Gang Green defense led Oregon to its first Rose Bowl appearance in 37 years — he departed for a position with the NFL's St. Louis Rams.

Aliotti's tenure in the professional ranks lasted three years before he decided to return to college football last season, when he became UCLA's defensive coordinator.

But while the Bruins made a run at the national championship, their defense struggled. UCLA allowed opponents to gain 433 yards per game, 99th out of 112 Division I-A programs.

Aliotti was berated by the Los Angeles media and fans, and then he was also publicly criticized by UCLA's head coach, Bob Toledo.

Now, Aliotti is back in Eugene, ready to put last season's controversies behind him and to help Oregon try to win another Pacific-10 Conference title. He inherits an experienced defensive squad that has steadily improved in the past few seasons.

Last season, Oregon finished sixth in the Pac-10 in total defense, a marked improvement from the season before when the Ducks permitted more than 29 points per game.

"We're going to have eight or nine of our starters back," Fletcher said. "The seniors, we all grew up together. It's that cohesiveness that will just bring everything together."

Aliotti plans to continue those improvements by implementing a scheme that might be somewhat more aggressive, but shouldn't stray too far from what the Ducks have run recently.

"We're keeping the terminology the same," Aliotti said. "But we're kind of marrying the two systems. There were things here that I liked, and there's stuff

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True confessions from a fan turned admitted sports fanatic

Opinion

Tim Pyle

Hi, my name is Tim. And I'm a sports nut.

It all began back in the third grade when I exchanged my Spiderman comic books for a subscription to Sports Illustrated.

Actually, maybe it began before that.

There was that dominant Chicago Bears team that finished the 1985 regular season 15-1 and then blew out New England, 46-10, in Super Bowl XX.

I can remember when they played Miami on Monday Night Football that season, which ended up being the Bears' only loss. I bet my dad something like $5 that the Dolphins would win.

But after that game — because of the Bears' ferocious defense, or because of their intriguing mix of personalities that included Jim McMahon, Walter Payton, Mike Ditka, and William "The Refrigerator" Perry, I don't know — I became fascinated with Chicago, the NFL and football in general.

Then, there was the 1986 World Series that pitted the New York Mets against the Boston Red Sox.

I can remember cheering wholeheartedly as Mookie Wilson's grounder trickled through Bill Buckner's wickets, and the Mets went on to win the championship behind young, seemingly eternal stars Darryl Strawberry and Dwight Gooden, and the leadership of seasoned veterans Keith Hernandez and Gary Carter.

Of course, there were the hometown Blazers.

In countless hours of driveway practicing, I tried to model my jumper on Kiki Vandeweghe's sweet stroke and my finishes on Clyde Drexler's gliding finger roll. Drexler became forever my favorite NBA player when he obliged mine and about 300 other kids' autograph requests after a victory at Memorial Coliseum.

And the Blazers took my love to new heights when they clinched the 1990 Western Conference Finals to advance to the NBA Finals. My leap for joy coincided with Buck Williams' underhanded launching of the game ball into the Phoenix horizon at the buzzer.

Despite Portland's loss to Detroit in the finals that season, Blazermania lasted on into the 1992 NBA Finals against the Chicago Bulls.

Finally, Drexler and Michael Jordan would be paired in the finals' matchup I had long desired.

But it was almost over before it started as Jordan stole the show in game one with a barrage of three-pointers and a knowing shrug and sly smile at the NBC broadcasters.

At that point, I wanted to shoot Jordan.

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