

## Bracey

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this could be the same guy who wears number 42 for the Ducks and plays with the tenacity and intensity befitting of someone much more mean-spirited.

That this is the same guy that was kicked off his high school basketball team his senior year for getting in a fight, thus losing any chance of a college scholarship.

Or that this is the same guy who waited two long years following high school to enroll in Malcolm X Junior College in Illinois, which was, as he puts it, "a low budget school that had these little uniforms that the coach went out and bought."

But yes, this is indeed the same Bryan Bracey. The same Bracey that has landed in Eugene and immediately become part of the close-knit family that is the Oregon Ducks.

"You cannot hate Bryan Bracey," said Oregon head coach Ernie Kent, who earlier in the season referred to Bracey as a teddy bear. "When you meet him, you just learn to love him because he's such a warm-hearted human being that does keep this team pretty loose."

To describe Bracey as "pretty loose" is like saying that Michael Jordan was just an okay basketball player.

Not only does Bracey tear up opposing defenses — as he did against Washington last week for a career-high 23 points off a perfect 10-for-10 from the field — but he can also crack any teammate's straight face, at any given time.

"Man, the guy is hilarious."

Jackson said. "Bracey always seems to keep everybody laughing and reminds us that working hard and winning is supposed to be fun."

And he picks and chooses his times to be funny at just the right moments.

The media "probably doesn't get to see that side of him, but he's a really funny guy," sophomore guard Anthony Norwood said. "When there's a point in time during practice when everybody is mad or feeling down, he always finds a way to crack a joke and make everybody cheer up."

But tell this all to Bracey, and he just shrugs it off. No big deal, he says. It's part of being on a team.

"I feel you have to stay together as a team," Bracey says. "We can't always be serious; you gotta have jokes. Making people laugh is what I like to do."

He makes one point very clearly. When it's time to play, that smile of his is put on hold for a couple hours, and the competitor emerges.

It's that competitor in him that has adjusted to the fierce play of the Pacific-10 Conference basketball rather quickly. After averaging six points in non-league action, Bracey has thrived in the past four games, averaging 14 points in limited minutes.

"He has really come a long way," Kent said. "A lot of that has been to his credit because he has been so coachable. He is somebody that loves to be here and is very well-liked. And when it's game time and those bright lights are on, he is going to compete."

"To have his demeanor and his type of game is a nice compliment

## Bryan Bracey



Year: Junior

Position: Forward

Home town: Chicago, Ill.

Height: 6'7"

Weight: 215

Birthdate: August 5, 1978

Notable: A year ago, Bracey played for Malcolm X Junior College in Illinois and was a first-team all-conference selection in Region 4 of the junior college ranks a game ... He attended high school at Oak Park High School and made the Chicago suburban all-star team his senior year with an average of 20 points and eight rebounds per game.

to our team."

Bracey has a unique blend of raw talent and amazing athleticism. He was a two-guard in junior college but has been used at the power forward spot, a position usually reserved for the more bulky types.

One play, in particular, can describe everything that Bracey is as a player.

In the Dec. 18 game against Minnesota — in front a nationally televised audience — Bracey pulled off a play that won't soon be forgotten.

The Ducks' lead had been cut to 11 when guard Freddie Jones tried to feed Bracey in the post. Instead, the ball was picked off by the Gophers and went the other way until Bracey hustled down to the other end to steal it back. He tipped the ball towards the out-of-bounds line and lunged after it and then threw back to a teammate.

He found himself sprawled on the ground and quickly jumped up and darted to the other end of

the floor to rebound a missed lay-in by Jones, in which he dunked home in crowd-pleasing fashion.

"That's what I call that Dennis Rodman mentality of hustle, energy and effort," Kent said. "Of course without all of the other antics that come along with Rodman."

Bracey's smile grows larger when reminded of the play. He says there's nothing he loves more than electrifying the fans with a thunderous jam. Although Mac Court has already seen an impressive array of smooth reverse-dunks, Bracey says he has much more in store.

"I have so many more dunks that people haven't seen yet," Bracey said. "I got some windmills and some Dominique Wilkins-type jams where you cock it down. I'm just waiting for a fast break to do something and when I do, I'm going to bring the house down."

And that, Oregon basketball fans, is no laughing matter.

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