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Jackson

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formerly a standout at Portland's Wilson High, was lured to the Utah program by Majerus.

But once he got there — despite the fact that Utah advanced to the NCAA Final Four in 1998 — he found a coach that diminished his confidence with every yell. He wanted out. Kent wanted him. And Jackson knows how fortunate he is.

Just listen to him compare Kent's shouting to Majerus'.

"With Coach Kent, I know what he's saying the whole time, and there's no reason to take anything personal," Jackson said. "But with 'Big Rick', there would be times where I would question that. Kent's style is more beneficial to me as a player because I can relate to him instead of thinking that the guy wants to fight me."

Majerus is known as a coach who wants things done his way or the highway. During a game in 1997, Jackson's sophomore season at Utah, the youthful guard attempted a no-look pass on a fast break — the type that would have sent McArthur Court into a frenzy. But oh, how that one upset the boss.

"I wanted to rip his heart out," Majerus told reporters after the game. "That Larry Bird, razzle-dazzle stuff was ridiculous. I told him, 'As long as you're at Utah, don't ever throw that pass again.'"

Majerus didn't need to worry because Jackson was on the move westward in spring 1998.

"Looking back, the main thing was that I wasn't ready to be coached like that," said Jackson, who averaged only 3.3 points per game at Utah. "The way he motivated people did just the opposite to me. When he raised his voice, it just made me go into my little shell."

Never one to hold back, Majerus wasn't tight-lipped about Jackson's departure.

"I wanted Dave to stay," Majerus told the Salt Lake Tribune in May of 1998. "But I also told him, 'You aren't good enough. I don't see you being a star.'"

It wasn't just Majerus' words of that turned Jackson away. It was Majerus' concept of a team. Kent preaches family; Majerus demands individuality.

"It's a major difference," Jackson said. "There was no family atmosphere at Utah, but that's the way Rick wanted it. He wanted everyone to pull their own weight, and if you're not, you're going to be in trouble."

And although Jackson was forced to sit out the mandatory one year for transferring in 1998-99 — as well as having missed

most of this season — he is embraced warmly in the Oregon basketball family.

"Even when he was out, he was always hanging around with us," senior point guard Darius Wright said. "We're like one family, and we've just always tried to keep his confidence up."

"I'm sure this is a rare situation where the whole team sometimes hangs out together," Jackson said. "On a Friday night, it's common to see eight or nine guys in one place playing video games. We're not bad guys — nobody's drinking or anything — but we do get into heated arguments over the games."

It is this type of unity that helps Oregon thrive. And Kent knows that when Jackson fully recovers from injury, the Ducks will be that much more enhanced.

"He is another piece to the puzzle," Kent said. "He is going to help us win basketball games, and the sooner he gets back on his game, the sooner we get that missing piece that falls into place."

Wright, for one, says that Oregon basketball fans don't really know what they've got in Jackson quite yet.

"Once he gets back to 100 percent, it's going to be wild," Wright said. "He can shoot, he can drive and he can defend. Last year in practice he was always the go-to guy for the other team. We always thought that if we could guard him, we could guard anybody."

Jackson is finally beginning to get back into game shape. He's played in the past four games, including a career-high tying 10-point performance against Stanford.

But as he talks about where he is health-wise, he grabs his right knee and adjusts his black brace that surrounds it.

"In my mind, I know where I can be as far as my potential," said Jackson, who had surgery to heal torn cartilage and tendinitis. "But my body is just not keeping up with me. So I just try to find my places where I can fit in and help out."

As the Ducks hit the home stretch in their best season in 61 years, Jackson's NCAA Final Four experience surely will help just as much as one of his clutch three-pointers or key defensive stops.

And the perfect way to end his up-and-down season?


"I tell you what would be sweet," said Jackson, sporting an ear-to-ear grin. "If we faced off with Utah in the tournament. Man, that would be a lot fun right there. Yeah, that'd be nice."

And wouldn't you know: Utah is 19-4. Oregon is 17-5.

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