

Dion

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More than a week after her last collision with the floor, one doctor had OK'd her to practice all-out and another hadn't, so all she got were those two drills.

Jenny Mowe, herself having been shelved for almost an entire season because of injury, sat on top of the trainers' table, trying to lift her teammate's spirits.

"Hey, Linds, look under the cap. Didja win anything?"

Dion looked down at the little orange Gatorade cap and glumly read aloud: "Winner."

"Oh! Wow! You won! That's great Linds! Right?"

Dion just frowned harder.

...

There are players, people, who are put-the-ball-in-my-hands, I'm-gonna-will-us-to-victory type of leaders.

And there are leaders of the more outspoken, say-what-needs-to-be-said variety.

And then there are individuals who defy stereotype.

People who bring it differently, on a kind of Taoist tip. Lao Tzu once put it down like this: "A leader is best when people barely know she exists ... a good leader, who talks little, when her work is done, her aim fulfilled, people will say: 'We did this ourselves.'"

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The concussions are only the half of what Dion has gone through this season.

She also tore the meniscus in her left knee less than a month in but has played on it since. Her knee isn't going to stop hurting until she either has surgery or just stays off of it until it's better.

Basketball season doesn't exactly allow time for either of those things, so the injury continues to taint Dion's junior season, similar to how a torn anterior cruciate ligament ruined her junior season in high school.

The injuries are a residual, really, of the way the 5-10 small forward from Fresno, Calif., plays. Reckless. All-out. Every day.

"That's what my teammates expect," said Dion, whose grandfather, former Fresno State head football coach Jim Sweeney, was the 16th major college coach to win 200 games.

"That's what I'm supposed to be doing. I don't know any different than to try to make something happen. It's my mentality, the way I was raised, growing up watching how [Bulldog football players] played; that's all I know."

So even on one leg, and despite the bouts with loopiness, Dion has been one of the most integral components of an Oregon team (22-7 overall, 13-4 Pacific-10 Conference) that is a win away from heading back to the NCAA Tournament as conference champs.

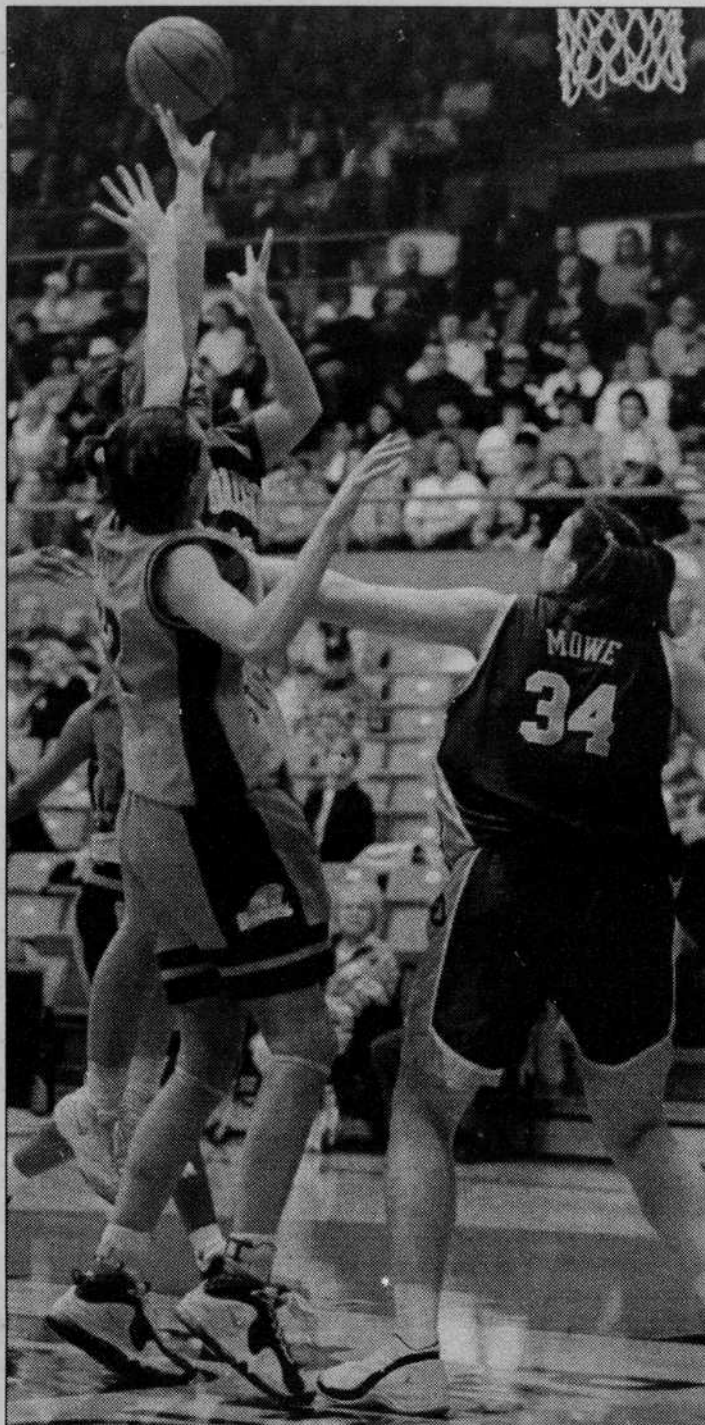
When she's in the starting lineup, the Ducks are 18-4. When she's not, they're 4-3.

"We're a very different basketball team without her," head coach Jody Runge said. "Her absence forced other players on this team to step up, and that's been great for them. But getting Lindsey healthy will be the difference in the opportunity we have to make a statement nationally."

So Dion is resting — as much as possible. A couple drills Tuesday. A couple more Wednesday. A whole half of practice today. And then, Friday, it's game time. Oregon State. Sell-out crowd. Pac-10 title on the line.

And Dion, bum knee or not, is gonna bring it.

"She's a warrior," Runge said. "One of the toughest human beings I have ever been around," as-



Emerald

Lindsey Dion continues to rise over every obstacle this season has presented.

assistant coach Fred Litztenberger concurred.

"The most stubborn, hard-headed person I've ever met," fellow junior Brianne Meharry said.

It's all related, right?

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Last Saturday, with the Pac-10 title at stake, the Ducks rallied from a 22-point second-half deficit in Tuscon, against No. 20 Arizona.

"We weren't nervous," Dion said. "It was like, 'We just need to fix this.' It was frustrating for a bit, but then it was just so exciting."

A true team effort, of course. No comeback of that magnitude wouldn't be, not at this level.

But the run did have its stars. Shaquala Williams, not unexpectedly, came through with 16 points and several key steals in those 10 1/2 minutes. More surprisingly, freshman Courtney Moore subbed in for Dion and contributed 11 in the run — but only after Dion kick-started matters with a couple assists, including a length-of-the-court pass to Jamie Craighead.

Two days before that, Dion helped Oregon get past Arizona State with a career-high five steals to go with 14 points on seven-of-seven shooting.

Not bad considering the woman has a torn meniscus.

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Before every home game this season, Dion has taken it at the other team.

Not physically, but literally.

Poetically. Though it's not "poetry, poetry."

"I take the word 'Stanford,'" Dion reluctantly explained, "and I write it on the dry erase board. I write something about Stanford

for every letter, that, in a sense, fires us up. And yeah, sometimes it's funny or mean. But it's just me being goofy. My teammates really, really like it, so I'm gonna keep doing it."

"She's definitely a silent leader," Meharry said. "She's not very vocal but she's always gonna do the little things."

"In my 31 years of coaching, she is the best example of a leader who lives by example, on the court and off," Litztenberger said.

"The consummate do-the-right-thing-all-the-time kind of leader," Runge said.

"I'm not vocal," Dion said. "I'm just out there playing hard, making sure I keep everyone in the game, making sure no one is dragging. Basically, my role is just making those hustle plays — and you're always going to get a high five from me, whether you do a good or bad job."

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After practice this Tuesday, Dion reclined, attached to an electric stem machine in the trainer's room below Mac Court. She talked about, once again, only getting in on a couple of drills at that day's practice. But she was in a better mood than before, chatting about wanting teammates to rely on her during the next few weeks.

"They haven't been able to depend on me like I want them to; that's been hard."

And she grinned.

"I think I'm learning a lesson in patience," she said. "I have to take it easy if I want to play."

As much as anything, that's something that would please her teammates.

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