

Runge

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knee.

So you promise yourself you'll ask about some of what you've heard, when you get the chance.

They might be hard questions, but you'll do it ... Why, Coach, are strong, successful women so often labeled bitches?

But when you get your chance, you don't do it.

And so you still don't know.

You still can't nail down Jody Runge. Possibly because you're not supposed to do so. Partly because you haven't been invited to do so.

But please, an author trailed Runge for an entire season, wrote a book and couldn't even completely do it.

Regardless, now you have a feature to write.

Runge and Litz — assistant coach Fred Litzberger, the man behind the curtain who doesn't ask to be paid any attention but has as much to do with the phenomenon of Oregon women's hoops as anyone — graciously give you a half hour of their time.

And what do you do? Ask questions that you already know answers to.

Which is OK, you try to tell yourself. That stuff alone leaves more than enough to write about.

There's no shame in writing a fluffy, informative feature piece on how amazing their program is.

Because it is, undeniably, amazing.

When Runge was hired seven years ago, Oregon basically sucked.

The Ducks had lost 16 of their last 19, and had finished their worst Pac-10 season in last place, 3-15. They hadn't made an NCAA appearance in six years.

Former athletic director Rich Brooks gave Runge a one-year contract for \$42,000 and what was, more or less, a laundry list of things to accomplish.

No. 1 on Brook's list: "We would like to be a competitive program in the Pac-10 ..."

Competitive? The Ducks have never finished lower than fourth in the Pac-10 during Runge's tenure.

No. 2: "We would like to see interest regenerated ..."

Interest? Attendance at McArthur Court had increased by at least 20 percent for four straight years, before growing by 670 fans

per game this season, to a conference-best 5,712.

"When I was flying out here to interview for this job, I was reading that there had been 5,000 people for a game here for the Chinese national team," Runge said. "So I just thought that if you could win at this institution, the crowd would come. And that's what's happened."

No. 3 on the list: "We would like to become a team that has a chance to win the conference championship ..."

Championship? Oregon now has two of them, with more foreseeable.

No. 4: "... and has a chance for postseason play..."

Postseason? Every season with Runge at the helm, the Ducks have made the tournament.

Brooks asked for a lot from the first-time head coach with the one-year contract. But, he said, he didn't expect it to happen overnight.

It did. "She did an amazing job," current athletic director Bill Moos said, "inheriting a team that had losing records and immediately turning it around."

Could she have expected such a swift turnaround?

"Well, yeah," Runge tells you. "That's what we came here to do."

When she initially appeared on the scene, people who knew Runge told people who were just meeting her in Eugene that they should expect her to work incredibly hard, to be humble, to find ways to win and never to take crap from anybody.

True that.

Runge made it clear, that until she succeeded, she wouldn't concern herself with contractual issues. Until she succeeded, that fact that her salary was half that of some Pac-10 coaches didn't matter.

Well, she succeeded.

She brought in Litz in her second year, who she had met while they were both working — along with men's coach Ernie Kent — at Colorado State in the late '80s. Litz as a men's assistant. Runge as a women's.

"I might as well have been with the men's team, all the time I spent down in Fred's office," Runge said.

"All the things I really liked about coaching I stole from him, so to be able to hire him was just unbelievable."

Litz does a lot for this team. Much more than most people realize.



One of the top academic teams in the nation, Runge's teams have dominated the Pac-10's academic squad three of the past four years.

"He's a great teacher, so I let him teach," Runge said.

Teach, scout and schedule practice, conditioning and individual work in the spring; he does everything dealing with the X's and O's.

"He'll put in hours and hours that are totally under-appreciated by someone who doesn't know the program well," former point guard Cindy Edamura said. "It's admirable."

It also doesn't allow much time for sleep — "the problem, I think," Edamura noted with a chuckle.

Neither Litz nor Runge are players' coaches.

They're not easy to play for and they don't try to be.

"The last thing I want as far as practice is concerned, is for my kids not to be ready," Runge said. "If they're not going hard, I'm gonna get on them. They might not like it but at least I know they're going to be prepared."

Look what demanding so much from these women got them.

Runge recruited solid, confident, motivated people who found

ways to handle it all.

"We're not looking for bad kids, trouble-makers or people who don't have basketball as a priority," Runge said. "Some kids are one-sided in relationships; they know how to take but don't know how to give, don't have team skills."

Her traditionally blue-collar, defense-oriented teams continually got better.

So Runge succeeded, and true to her word, her financial situation became an issue.

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