

Seniors honored at banquet

■ Alex Scales, Darius Wright and A.D. Smith share co-MVP as the Ducks celebrate season

BASKETBALL NOTES

By Jeff Smith
Oregon Daily Emerald

In a night filled with laughter, hugs and tears, the Oregon men's basketball team capped a banner season with the annual awards banquet on Monday night at the Eugene Hilton Hotel.

In front of a large gathering of family, friends, workers and alumni, the Ducks handed out their postseason awards, and honored the teams three dedicated seniors.

In a vote that was cast by the players themselves, seniors Alex Scales, A.D. Smith and Darius Wright were selected as co-Most Valuable Players.

Head coach Ernie Kent proudly presented each individual with their awards after the trio helped the program capture its most wins in 55 years. A year ago, both Scales and Wright were also voted co-MVP.

It marked only the third time that players shared the honor, with Doug Little and Ron Lee being the first to do so back in 1973.

Eugene-native Smith, who easily had the most family with him, won the Academic Award as well as the Harry Ritchie Scholar Athlete Award.

Assistant coach Greg Graham then presented the John Warren

Most Inspirational Player Award, which surprised many in attendance — including the recipient.

Junior guard Kristian Christensen, who played in only two games but provided an emotional lift throughout the season with his positive attitude, received the award.

Other players earning accolades were sophomore guard Anthony Norwood as the Jesse Nash Most Improved Player and Wright as the Best Defender.

Norwood was the perfect choice after starting his first season at Oregon slowly, before becoming a key contributor off the bench late in the season. He tallied a total of 20 points against Oregon State and Seton Hall. His performance against the Pirates in the NCAA Tournament was perhaps his best of the year, as he scored seven points in a three-minute stretch to push the game into overtime.

But aside from the personal distinctions, Monday night was about celebrating a season, a team and a community.

The Master of Ceremonies for the evening was radio announcer — a.k.a. "Voice of the Ducks" — Jerry Allen. In a speech to the crowd, Allen showed true emotion in asking the team to sign a basketball for him. He said in his 13 years of broadcasting Oregon athletics, he had never come across a team that was this "special."

The night also included senior speeches, in which Scales, Wright and Smith spoke to the onlookers. Smith went first and had the crowd at his mercy in his lengthy goodbye that included tributes to past and present teammates and coaches. He told humorous behind-the-scenes stories, and genuinely thanked everyone for their love and support through the years.

While Smith's speech kept going, Scales and Wright produced a few laughs when they sat down on the steps of the stage, while waiting for their turn.

Scales, who admits he doesn't talk much, also showed his comedic side when he whispered into the microphone to ask everyone to tell Kent to change his flat-top hairstyle.

But then he whispered even softer with a smile, "But don't tell him I told you that."

One of the highlights of the banquet was the season highlight video narrated by Allen and orchestrated to the tune of current hip-hop favorites.

The night concluded with Kent's closing remarks. The coach expressed his gratitude to everyone and his excitement for next season.

A season in which he adds a recruiting class that was ranked number one in the West.



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