

Oregon scores big with signing of Bill Moos

It was March 17, and the Oregon men's basketball team was hard at work in their first round NCAA Tournament game against Seton Hall.

The Pirates had stormed out to a 10-point lead against the Ducks, and the Oregon faithful were getting nervous.

Among the fans seated in the HSBC Arena in Buffalo, N.Y., were football head coach Mike Bellotti, Nike CEO Phil Knight and Oregon athletic director Bill Moos.

Bellotti and Knight were sitting in respective aisle seats in the third row behind Oregon's bench, and Moos was nervously watching from a seat directly in front of Knight.

But the nervous anxiety was momentarily relieved when Duck guard Anthony Norwood drilled a three-pointer to cap a 9-0 run and trimmed the lead to one point with about four minutes remaining in regulation.

At that moment, it would have been tough to differentiate Bellotti, Knight and Moos from any other Duck fan in the building.

And that's the point exactly.

A great coach is a coach who is willing to cheer on and care

about a team other than his own.

A great alumnus and donor is someone who truly appreciates what his money and presence means to the programs that he helps.



Jeff Smith

A great athletic director is someone who goes the extra mile — however many miles that may be — to be there for one of his teams.

But take one of those important ingredients out of the mix, and there is a great fear among many that there would be a Jenga effect, where all the pieces come crumbling down.

Obviously there was the possibility of that occurring when Knight decided to pull his financial support from his alma mater.

There were rumors that Moos would decide to jump ship to more attractive offers — a rumor that was further strengthened

when a local newspaper columnist asserted that now was the time to leave.

Also under question was the tenure of Bellotti, and whether a potential delay in the Autzen Stadium Expansion Project would lead him to pursue other opportunities.

But on Tuesday, all questions and rumors were answered — emphatically.

Oregon vice president Dan Williams announced that Moos has agreed to sign a four-year contract extension that will pay him approximately \$300,000 annually.

My response? Job well done! Moos' signing is huge, and it shows to everyone that the Oregon athletic program is stable and committed to a bright future.

When reached on Wednesday, Moos was his usual humble self, but it was evident that he is extremely honored by the contract.

"I am very flattered that they have the faith in me to lead us into the future," Moos said. "This is such a great place to be, and we've accomplished a great deal. But I believe the greatest days lie ahead."

Sure, some may view that last

statement as simply saying "the right thing," but I believe he truly means it.

Yes, Knight's money would have helped. Yes, the absence of Knight's dough presents a huge challenge. But it is challenges like this that Moos thrives on.

"We have the highest caliber of coaches and student-athletes," Moos said. "Now we all have some challenges ahead of us, but they are challenges that I want to be a part of."

Moos admitted that if it was up to him he wouldn't have announced this extension at this time. He said he accepted the deal back in January, but he chose to keep it under wraps until it went into effect this summer. President Dave Frohnmayer and Williams, however, thought this would send a great message to everyone: Oregon is putting its best foot forward.

"Duck athletics is an integral part of the University of Oregon, and Bill Moos is an integral part of Duck athletics," Frohnmayer said in his released statement.

He certainly is.

Moos is knowledgeable about each of the sports teams under his guidance, and he still is

amazed at the type of year the Oregon program had.

"This has arguably been the greatest season in the history of Oregon athletics," Moos said. "Fourteen out of 16 programs participated in postseason, and we have a great nucleus coming back."

Moos proceeds to mention how Oregon already has broken a football season ticket record for next season at a clip of 26,000-plus, and has set a Duck Athletic Fund record at almost \$6 million.

He rattles off how great it is that Rick Gamez has guided the softball team to back-to-back NCAA appearances and how eager he is to see Carl Ferreira in his inaugural season as volleyball coach.

"We have some great things happening here," Moos said.

At the top of that list, most certainly, is the signing of Moos to a long-term deal.

Congratulations, Bill. We're lucky to have you.

This will be a decision you will not regret.

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Southern Miss pitcher slices through lineups

By Ralph D. Russo
The Associated Press

HATTIESBURG, Miss. — By the time Southern Mississippi pitcher Courtney Blades was 12 years old, she had worn out her first catcher.

Sitting on a bucket in the backyard, Margaretta Blades served as batterymate to her daughter until it became too dangerous to stop the youngster's array of diving and jumping pitches.

"The speed wasn't too bad, but the ball would break so much," Margaretta said. "I said 'This isn't going to work no more.'"

Ten years later — now with speed as nasty as her movement — Blades has become the NCAA's K Queen.

She broke her own single-season strikeout record this season, which stands at 632 in 376 2/3 innings heading into Thursday's first day of the Women's College World Series in Oklahoma City.

Blades also became the NCAA's career leader in strikeouts on the last weekend of the regular season when she surpassed California's Michelle Granger, who struck out 1,640 from 1989-93. That mark is at 1,742 and counting as Southern Miss (61-11) and Blades prepare to face Arizona (57-7).

"She's up there with a lot of the best I've seen over the years," said Louisville coach Sandy Pearsall, a Conference USA rival who has played and coached college softball for 16 years.

Blades only had two scholarship offers after a fine high school career. So, how did the lanky 5-foot-11 slinger go from practically unrecruited to virtually unhittable?

"I had an awesome coach," Blades said.

Southern Miss coach Lu Harris was heading Nicholls State's softball team when she signed Blades out of high school.

Harris left Nicholls State in 1998 to take on the job of restarting Southern Miss softball, a program that had been dropped in 1992, and Blades followed "just to be with her again. I knew nothing about the school."

Led by Blades' dominating

pitching and Harris' coaching, Southern Mississippi went to the Women's College World Series last year.

Harris says the increased movement on Blades' pitches is what has turned her into an All-American. Blades, in turn, credits Harris with showing her how it's done.

"She taught me a lot," Blades said. "She taught me what a four-seam riseball is."

Thrown at between 62-65 mph from 43 feet away from home plate, Blades' riseball looks like a 90-mph fastball thrown from 60 feet, 6 inches.

"What makes her very unique is she comes with so many things at you," said Pearsall, whose team didn't score and managed just five hits in three games against Blades this season.

Blades idolized Atlanta Braves pitcher Greg Maddux growing up. Now, she does a pretty fair impression of the four-time Cy Young award winner.

"She's going to set you up," Pearsall said. "She's going to get ahead, and then she's going to have you chasing balls. That's where she's got you."

Blades' repertoire also includes a dropball that breaks straight down, a curveball that breaks away from righties, a screwball that moves in on a right-handed hitter and a changeup thrown with nearly identical arm speed but about 10 mph slower than her riseball.

Despite all Blades has accomplished — her 50 wins this season ties the single-season NCAA record — some question whether she'd be as untouchable if she played in a stronger league such as the Pac-10 and Big 12.

Two of Blades' losses came early in the season to Pac-10 foes Arizona and Washington.

Harris looks at it differently.

"She would have been pitching at a different level all her life," Harris said. "She would of had the best level of pitching coaches. I think she is incredibly talented, and she could have been incredibly successful in those conferences. She is no where near her potential."

Club Sports brief

Women's ultimate heads to nationals

With memories of a hard-fought victory against Stanford fresh in their minds, members of the Oregon Club Sports women's ultimate team look forward to playing more tough games at the College Nationals in Boise, Idaho, this weekend. The Ducks survived the hardest competition to

reach the Nationals since 1998, said coordinator Michelle Greenberg.

Oregon has several members from the last trip to the nationals, and Greenberg says they should provide a good core. The Ducks, currently ranked eighth in the nation, will be in the same group as top-ranked UNC-Wilmington. No. 10 Brown University and No. 30 Notre Dame are in the same pool.

The challenge is big, but

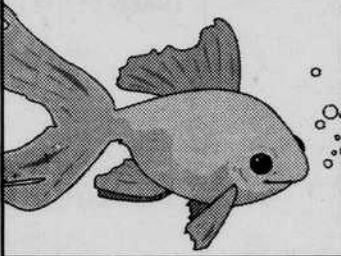
Greenberg said the team is ready to play their hearts out.

"We are playing awesome right now," Greenberg says. "At Regionals, we played better than I've ever seen this year's team play before."

Led by Robin Birdsong, who is nominated for the Callahan award given to outstanding college players, the Ducks try to win the whole thing, an accomplishment never achieved by the women's team.

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