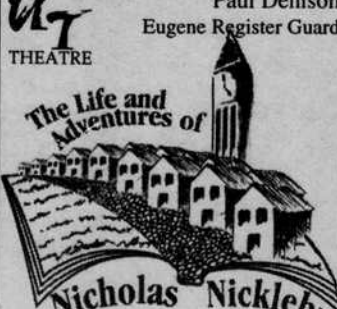


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**Sports brief**

**Oregon soccer hires former North Carolina star as coach**

Beth Sheppard, a four-year North Carolina standout from 1995 to 1999, has signed on as a member of the Oregon soccer coaching staff. The Tar Heels co-captain for two years will serve primarily as Oregon's recruiting coordinator beginning on June 1.

Sheppard's coaching experience includes her work at the North Carolina girls' soccer camp for four years in addition to assisting with summer clinics at Tennessee and Houston.

During her career with the Tar Heels, they won three NCAA Championships and five ACC titles.

"We're looking forward to having her experience, enthusiasm and knowledge help continue our progress and development," Oregon head coach Bill Steffen said in a released statement.

**NY could be better without Ewing**

■ The Knicks are 5-1 against the Pacers without Ewing, but Van Gundy insists they're better with him

By Chris Sheridan  
 The Associated Press

PURCHASE, N.Y. — Patrick Ewing wasn't talking Tuesday, depriving the basketball world of his insight into the big debate surrounding the New York Knicks: Are they a better team without him when they're playing the Indiana Pacers?

The Knicks have won two games in a row without Ewing to tie the Eastern Conference finals 2-2, and it's unknown whether Ewing's sore foot will be pain-free enough to allow him to play in Game 5 Wednesday night at Indianapolis.

Some Knicks fans, citing New York's 5-1 record against Indiana in the last two postseasons when Ewing has been injured, are hoping he'll continue to sit.

Such a notion infuriates coach Jeff Van Gundy, who has described the theory as "asinine" in recent days. When he was asked about it

following Game 4, Van Gundy gave such an impassioned response that he almost couldn't get the words out of his mouth fast enough.

Asked again after practice Tuesday, Van Gundy would barely discuss it.

"I've done that enough," he said. "I'll let the foolish remain foolish and not even try to educate them."

There is no bigger Ewing loyalist than Van Gundy, and any anti-Ewing talk is considered blasphemy in his mind.

"What makes me laugh about that number (the 5-1 record without Ewing) is how the media can manipulate it," Van Gundy said.

Ewing's availability for Game 5 will be a game-time decision. Ewing tested his sore right foot during warmups Monday and decided the tendinitis was too painful. With backups Chris Dudley and Kurt Thomas playing center, New York defeated Indiana 91-89 in Game 4.

"We were able to do more of what we're comfortable doing, like drive to the basket," Knicks guard Allan Houston said. "But the key is being able to do both. If Patrick's in, we've still got to be able to do those things but pick our moments. It's a fine

line, but ultimately if we can do it, it's going to make us the best team."


The Knicks' record without Ewing looks good over the past two seasons, but injuries have actually reduced his availability against the Pacers for the past three seasons. He had a fractured wrist in 1998 and Achilles' tendinitis in 1999.

Over that span, including Game 2 this season when Ewing played just seven minutes, the Knicks are 2-6 against the Pacers with Ewing, 5-2 without him. Included in those five playoff losses is Game 5 of the second round in 1998, when Ewing played his third game after returning from a broken wrist. Many felt Van Gundy stuck with him too long, playing him for 34 minutes, as the Knicks were eliminated.

That memory, along with the sight of the Knicks operating a more fluid, uptempo offense in Games 3 and 4, are among the factors fueling the with-or-without debate as the 37-year-old Ewing again chases the championship that has eluded him throughout his 15-year career.

Of the three injured Knicks, Ewing was the only one to sit out Game 4.


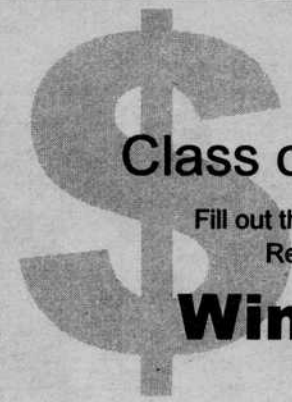
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