

Earning it

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Ernie Kent loves the Ducks, and said that Notre Dame picked up on that love.

stars at local Churchill High School and his daughter McKenzie, 14, was named after Oregon's McKenzie River. Kent's wife, Dianna, was raised in the nearby town of Mapleton.

So it shouldn't have come to much surprise that Kent decided to stay. But with all of the rumors floating around that Kent was all but gone, the news that he's staying still carried some shock value.

On the University campus at about 10:30 a.m. on Friday, junior Matt Cook was sitting on a bench near the library. When asked his thoughts about Kent, he stressed how nervous he was, as he had not quite heard the news.

"It really hasn't hit me yet that our Coach K could leave," Cook said. "I mean, this place loves him and he loves us. Why would he abandon us?"

When interrupted and told of Kent's decision, a smile broke out on Cook's face and he immediately

high-fived his buddy sitting next to him.

"Oh wow!" Cook said. "I knew all along he wouldn't leave us!"

Cook's reaction was the consensus of Eugene. Perhaps the most interesting place to be these past few days has been on the University's and Notre Dame's on-line message boards, where fans have been discussing the situation in depth.

At 7:36 a.m. on Friday morning, news was starting to break that Kent was staying, and "Cold Duck" seemed to sum up the mood of Oregon fans the best.

"I'm very impressed that Ernie Kent is turning his back on all that money," the message read. "How often do you see that in big time sports these days? This can only strengthen his position with his players as well. I know I'm a much bigger fan of Ernie's now. The Ducks are fortunate to have him."

The message boards were even visited by fans from Notre Dame

and in-state rival Oregon State.

"I'm a Notre Dame fan who learned about a coach (and a program) who I knew nothing about before this whole thing," the Irish fan named "Scooper" wrote. "Kent seems like a classy guy. I will keep an eye out West to see how you do this year."

"I have been a die-hard Beav fan since I was 5 so please understand posting on this board is not easy for me," wrote "Beav4Life." "But I'm compelled to because of Ernie Kent. What class. Your university is fortunate to have a loyal, sincere and respectable coach. I'll still never root for you."

And that was that. Kent makes his way across the nation to interview for a job that would have made him the first African-American coach in Notre Dame athletic history, given him national exposure and the possibility to move even higher up in the coaching ranks. It was also a job that would

have put him smack dab in the middle of the rich prep basketball recruiting areas of the Midwest.

But he's not going. He stayed at Oregon. He proved he's a Duck. And wouldn't you know, one day after turning down the job, he picked up right where he left off and went back out there on the recruiting trail.

"I want to thank Kevin White and Notre Dame for all of their interest in the Oregon program," Kent said. "Notre Dame and I felt that because of this commitment to Oregon that is still in my heart, it was best for both parties that they move in another direction."

So on Friday, White named Delaware coach Mike Brey as the Fighting Irish's new men's basketball coach.

And Oregon got the chance to declare once again that Kent is its coach for today, tomorrow and the many days and years ahead.

All's well that ends well.

Upward swing

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and Rockies have met this season and both know the importance of setting the tone for the rest of the season.

"This is going to be a big series," said second-baseman Blake Blasi after Sunday's win. "We just have to go in there and keep the consistency from our pitchers and hopefully scratch out some runs here and there and get some wins."

Scratching out runs has been getting the job done for the Ems as of late.

In the fourth-inning of Sun-

day's game, left-fielder Pete Graham laced a double down the left-field line with no outs. With the score tied up at 2, Sheaffer didn't want to take any chances so he made sure to get his runner home.

He had Dionnar Martinez lay down a sacrifice bunt, moving Graham to third.

Then Blasi hit a fly ball right at Spokane right fielder Ben Cordova, who caught it and delivered a perfect strike to home that beat out the incoming Graham, who had tagged up from third.

But Spokane catcher Scott Walter hesitated and then got drilled by a charging Graham, who knocked the ball out of Walter's glove.

Hard-nosed baseball at its best.

It also would be the last run that the Ems pitchers would need. Wilton Chavez, Scott Tranchina and Albright combined to hold the Indians scoreless in eight of the nine innings.

Chavez overcame early struggles to pick up his fourth win in as many games.

"He gave us what we expected today," Sheaffer said. "He got us late in the game with a lead, and we weren't going to give him a chance to lose the game. Tranchina and Albright then did a great job."

One could also credit Sunday's win to the defensive play of Jackson. In the top of the fourth in-

ning, the Indians had runners on second and third when Darren Fenster hit a tailing fly ball near the right field line. Jackson hustled over and snagged it to end the inning.

Then in the top of the seventh, Jackson performed a rare double play when he caught Marco Cunningham's fly ball and then gunned down Fenster at third with a perfect throw.

"Yeah, that was a big out," Sheaffer said. "There's no doubt about it."

Now the Ems find themselves in the middle of a pennant race with every series gaining importance along the way.

"You can't look beyond any

team right now," Sheaffer said. "Shoot, we've only got six weeks left, so it's more or less September to us."

Notes: Closing pitcher Rich Barker completed his month long rehabilitation assignment with the Emeralds and was sent back to AAA Iowa of the Pacific Coast League. Barker, who spent some time with the Chicago Cubs last season, finished his Ems campaign with a 3.27 ERA and a league-leading four saves in 11 innings of work.

The Emeralds also promoted pitcher Frangil Cordero to Lansing of the Midwest League. Cordero was 1-1 with a 2.96 ERA in his 24.1 innings of work.

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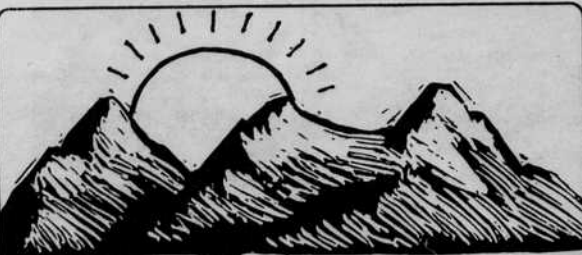
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