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# Ducks behind strong leader

Men's basketball coach Ernie Kent says the 2000-01 season as a reloading year rather than a rebuilding one

By Jeff Smith  
Oregon Daily Emerald

The phone calls kept coming. Then came the e-mails.

"Coach, I just wanted you to know that Bryan Bracey has been clearly holding his own in Chicago in a talented league that includes many pro players."

"Coach, the two Lukes (Jackson and Ridnour) were real impressive in helping their high school All-Star team beat some talented foreign teams down at the Global Games in Dallas, Texas."

"And coach, Freddie Jones just scored 82 points in a summer Pro-Am game up in Portland."

All Oregon men's basketball head coach Ernie Kent had to do was simply sit in his office and he would hear of all the hard work and dedication his returnees and new recruits were putting in over the summer.

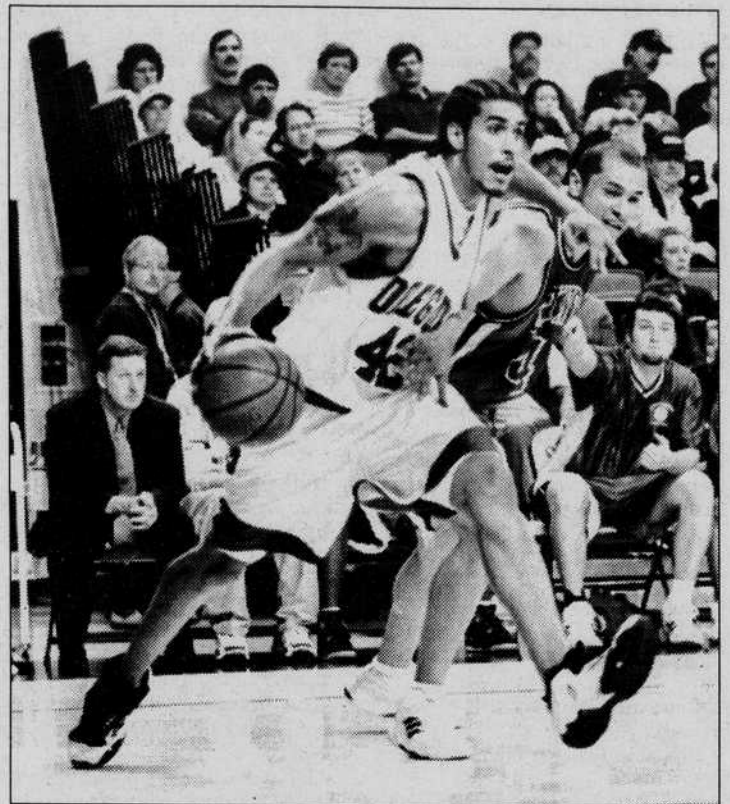
"Man, from what I've been hearing, everyone really went after it and has themselves ready for the upcoming season," said Kent, who also stressed not to make too big a deal out of Jones' scoring totals as it was just a summer league game and you never can tell what type of defense he was playing against.

Kent specifically wanted to mention the names of sophomore guard Anthony Norwood, senior guard David Jackson and senior centers Flo Hartenstein and Julius Hicks.

Hartenstein had some aches and pains last year, but is healthy again and Hicks has fully recovered from the mononucleosis that sidelined him for a few games last year. Kent did say that Jackson is still recuperating from his banged-up knees, but that he is looking forward to eventually seeing him out there at full strength.

"I thought we had a very positive summer," Kent said.

But the biggest story of the sum-



Senior forward Bryan Bracey will help coach Ernie Kent lead the Ducks to Pac-10 glory.

mer was not the accolades of the team, but rather the news that the coach could be leaving his alma mater.

On the night of July 11, the news leaked that Kent was Notre Dame's No. 1 candidate to fill the Fighting Irish's head coaching vacancy. For the next 30 hours after the story broke, there were new rumors and updates on the hour on many nationally acclaimed sports Web sites.

Kent flew to Washington, D.C., and interviewed with Notre Dame athletic director Kevin White on July 12, and the word on the street was that he was gone — poised to become the first African-American coach in Notre Dame history.

But that night, Kent confirmed what most people in the Eugene area hoped: That his love and desire for Oregon hoops was just too strong to leave, and the program that he

had going here was equal, if not better than Notre Dame's.

"It was really a compliment to all of us here at Oregon to attract attention from a school of that stature," Kent said. "When you look at the entire program, you realize that we're definitely on the up and up and that atmosphere that the student body makes in The Pit is a big reason why."

Jackson, the 6-7 forward from Creswell High, admitted that half the reason he chose Oregon was because of Kent and he said that he wasn't really sure what he would have done had Kent left. He's just relieved the situation ended with Kent staying.

"Ernie Kent is a great coach and has got this program on the rise," Jackson said. "Eugene loves the guy and Kent always said that this was

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