

Of all Rich Brooks did for UO, hiring Bellotti was the best

GUEST COMMENTARY

George Beres

In 1995, Rich Brooks brought Oregon back to the Rose Bowl for the first time in 37 years.

Then he did the Ducks a big favor: He left to join the soon-to-be the St. Louis Rams, opening the door for Dan Williams and a perceptive University to promote Mike Bellotti as his successor.

Don't misunderstand. This is not a put-down on Brooks. I worked with Rich as University of Oregon Sports Information Director during some rough years. I re-

spect the man as a person and as a coach, and can appreciate what an achievement it was for him to get Oregon back to Pasadena on New Year's Day.

But he did something equally significant when he hired a little-known, small-college coach from California to be his offensive coordinator. With Bellotti on board, the Ducks evolved as a potent team on the attack. When Rich departed for the pro game's greener pastures (money), Mike was prepared to take over.

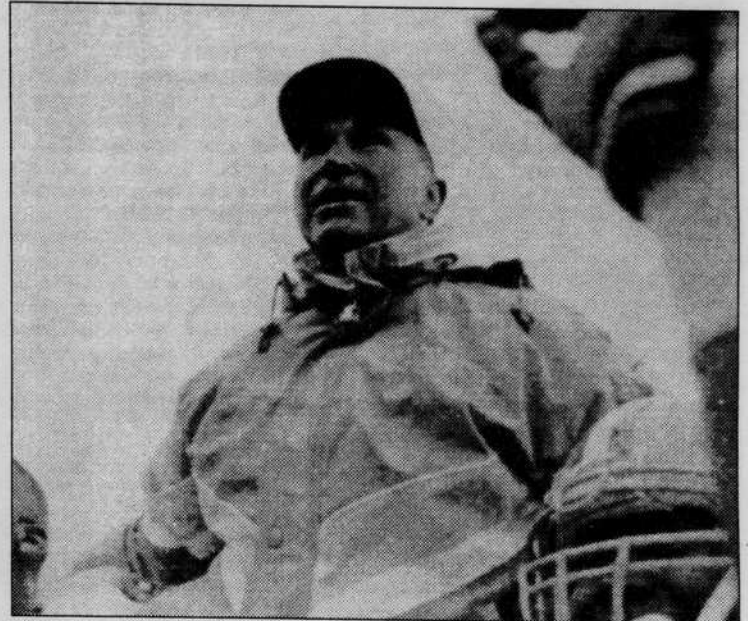
The personality contrast between the two men is clear. Rich is hard-bitten, but cordial enough. Yet in Eugene, he often was intol-

erant of meaningless questions from cub reporters (there are a few in the Oregon media market) who had an inadequate understanding of the game. Mike allows himself to be warmer and more accepting. When a reporter asks a question that resembles the proverbial sow's ear, Mike turns it into a silk purse (at least a facsimile) as he responds with respect, even to queries that might not deserve it.

Some said Brooks never forgot what he originally was: a Beaver, a hard-nosed player for Dee Andros — and also a capable college boxer. He needed that toughness to see him through some rough seasons at Oregon, and he gradually transmitted toughness to his teams. For that, Oregon remains in his debt — the playing field is named after Brooks.

But it is Bellotti who has made himself one of the most respected, likable head coaches in the business. Success against odds always makes it easier to like a person — and in six seasons Mike has brought a more concentrated success to the gridiron than Oregon has ever known.

His image on the T.V. screen — where he regularly is in view as the Ducks play many more games in front of the cameras — is just what the University ordered. He's in charge of himself and his team, and never emotionally out of control. His ability to sustain that discipline will be sorely tested as his team faces two up-and-down foes, Washington State and California. Against those two teams, the Big "O" on the Ducks' uniforms resemble the massive target the front runner always has on them.



Emerald

Rich Brooks led the Ducks to the Rose Bowl in 1995 before joining the St. Louis Rams.

Oregon has not been in that position often, and how Bellotti and his athletes respond then — and in the finale against a potent Beavers team in hostile Parker Stadium (OK, Reser) — will be the mark of this team.

Success holds other dangers, as we learned with Brooks. Whatever happens in the closing games, Mike will be the first choice of many programs, some far richer than Oregon, as they try to hire away a coach to revive them. Bellotti is well-rewarded at Oregon. His \$98,000 bonus this fall for record season ticket sales pushes him close to the \$600,000 figure for annual income.

Did he seek it? No. But Athletics Director Bill Moos probably

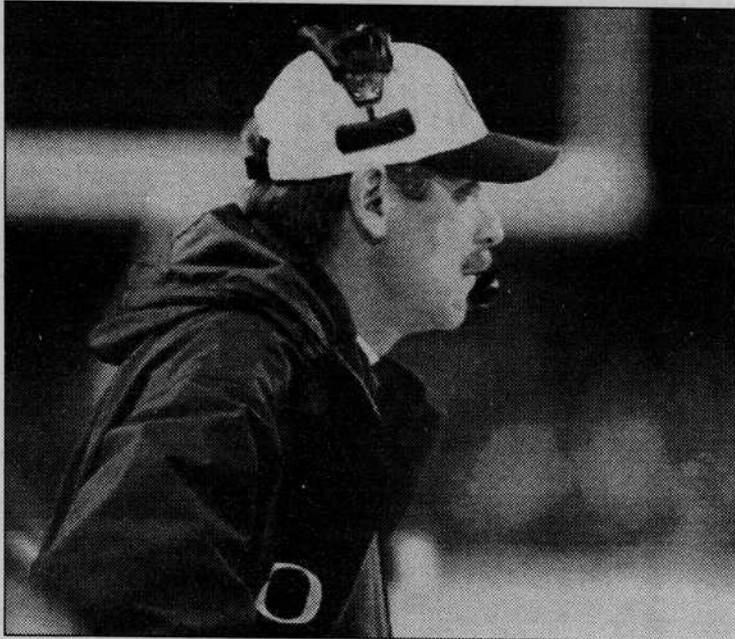
was aware he'd have to be fending off coach-buyers after another successful season.

So he gave Mike another incentive to stay. It probably wasn't needed.

For the kind of guy he seems to be, higher pay at a football factory should have marginal appeal, especially for one so well suited to the Oregon environment.

Mike also knows what we all know: He has the Oregon Ducks on a roll.

George Beres is the former Sports Information Director for Oregon. He is the author of the 1995 Rose Bowl book, "The Year of the Duck." A limited supply of the original book is now on sale at the University Book Store. He can be reached at gberes@oregon.uoregon.edu.



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Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti has a 46-21 record in six years at the University.



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