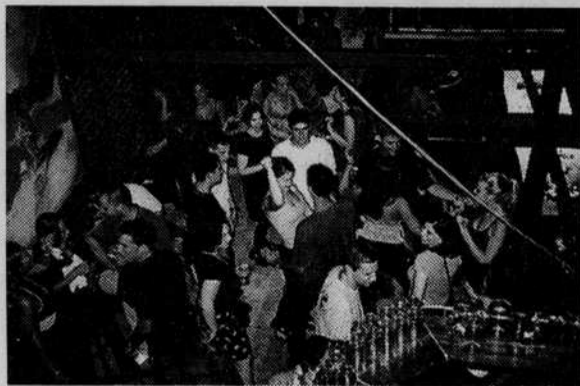


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Others are canned, Bellotti safe at UO



THE HOME STRETCH

ROBBIE MCCALLUM

As head football coaches around the Pacific-10 Conference are canned left and right, Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti finds himself in one of the safest positions in the conference.

The week following the end of regular season play has not been a good one for many Pac-10 coaches. Three head coaches were fired or driven out following the 2000 season. Arizona State's Bruce Snyder was fired three weeks ago while the Sun Devils prepared for rival Arizona, another team looking for a new head coach. Long-time Wildcat head coach Dick Tomey resigned last week following a loss to Arizona State and lame-duck Snyder.

On Monday, Southern California announced that head coach Paul Hackett would be relieved of his coaching duties, much to the enjoyment of the webmasters of www.FirePaulHackett.com. (I'm not making this up. This is an actual Web site.)

Many in the media and on the sports chat shows predicted the firings weeks ago. All three teams had mediocre seasons, which looked to be do-or-die years for the three coaches.

It just goes to show that a Pac-10 coaching seat is a shaky one — except at Oregon.

Bellotti has seen nothing but success in his tenure at Oregon. In six seasons at the Ducks' helm, Bellotti has compiled a 48-22 record and .686 winning percentage. Oregon teams have also enjoyed five bowl games and winning records in each of these seasons.

Bellotti has also done what no other coach in school history has done — guide the Ducks to three straight post-season berths. His winning records have moved him to third on the Oregon all-time win list behind only Rich Brooks and Len Casanova. What's more impressive is that both coaches spent more than 16 years at Oregon, while Bellotti has been here only six

years. Bellotti has won with Rich Brooks' recruits, watched them graduate, and then won with his own recruits. And he did it more effectively than the inconsistent Brooks, who coached several 2-9 teams to go along with his 8-4 squads.

The closest Bellotti has come to failure is a 6-5 campaign in 1996 that saw no bowl game.

It seems that Bellotti has truly found the recipe for success at Oregon. And that recipe is this:

1. Cultivate a young quarterback, recruiting every two years, and have him wait in the wings until he is given the starting nod in his junior year (Tony Graziani, Ryan Perry-Smith and Joey Harrington, for example).

2. Complement the quarterback with a junior college running back (Saladin McCullough, Reuben Droughns, Maurice Morris). Those three backs in particular were quick to learn the Bellotti system and made an immediate impact on the Oregon win column and the school record book.

3. Protect offensive weapons with a scrappy but effective front line. The Oregon offensive and defensive lines have taken criticism and their fare share of injuries through the years, but the bottom line is that they have gotten the job done. Standouts over the years include Tasi Malepea, Caleb Smith and Saul Patu.

4. Punish offenders with stingy defense (remember Gang Green?) Support a scrappy front line with a thieving secondary (Kenny Wheaton, Reggie Jordan, Rashad Bauman and Michael Fletcher, to name a few).

Bellotti and his staff have shown the ability to achieve success by plugging in one player after another. Lose a quarterback to graduation, put in a sophomore. Lose a back to the NFL draft, entice another JC star.

With the tradition that Bellotti has built at Oregon, it looks as if we will see no drop-off in talented recruits. In the future, look to see even more success in Oregon football with Bellotti at the helm.

If Bellotti is to leave Eugene, it will be via the NFL, not the Pac-10 hotseat.

Robbie McCallum is a sports reporter for the Emerald. He can be reached at coach_robbie@lycos.com.

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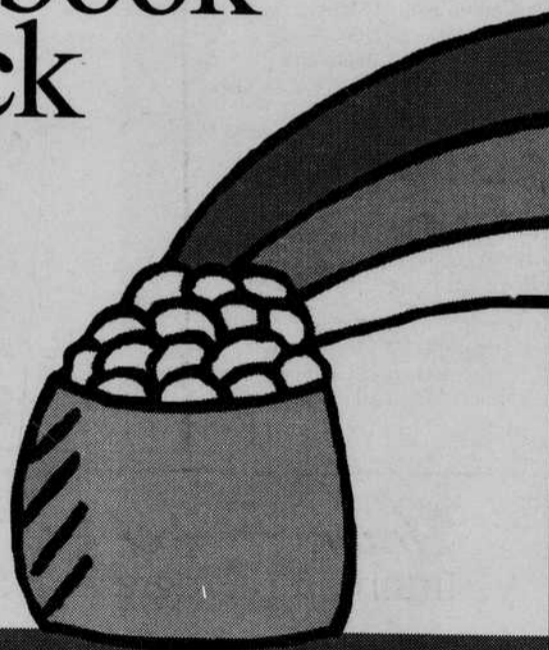
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