

Sports, life: a night with ESPY



TWO MINUTES FOR CROSS-CHECKING

PETER HOCKADAY

LAS VEGAS — Sports is my life. Monday was my night. Let me tell you a story. I have this sister named Caroline, who knows this guy, who hooked me up with a pair of tickets to the ESPY awards Monday night at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

For a helpless sports addict like myself, it was the perfect cure for those February blues.

You see, ESPN's yearly sports awards show was similar to the town it took place in — an all-out blitz of the senses. I felt guilty participating in such a sinful sports delight, as any gambler might feel a twinge of guilt for an all-nighter in front of a slot machine.

There was Jack Nicklaus. There was Sheryl Swoopes, Tony Hawk, Eddie George and Josh Heupel. There was even Don King, for God's sake.

Like drug addicts around Vegas on Monday night, I got my fix of superstar athletes and sports icons.

Green Bay Packers wide receiver Antonio Freeman, who won the ESPY for the Most Spectacular Play of the Year, said it best:

"You look around in the Green Room and see Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus and Don King, just to name a few. It is just a pleasure and delight to be around these people," Freeman told ESPN.com. "It's breathtaking, really."

But the ESPYs were more than just star gazing.

One of the things I love about sport is that those who participate in it love to glorify it, and they take the fans along for the ride. NFL Films productions, movies like "Hoosiers" and the Olympics' Opening Ceremonies all elevate sports to a level beyond a simple football game, state basketball championship or track meet. They give life, meaning and a little validity to the sports world.

By simply celebrating sports, the ESPY awards accomplished the same feat. Audience members seemed to have an understanding and acceptance of why they were there — for the love of the game. Guys carried six-packs of beer to their seats, audience members hooted and hollered during acceptance speeches as if they were in a Miller Lite commercial, while host Samuel L. Jackson threw Frisbees and NERF footballs into the crowd during ad breaks.

But the ESPY's captured the gut-wrenching side of sports as well. Who could resist Pete Sampras weeping during an acceptance speech for record-breaking performance of the year, as he recalled his parents' presence at the Wimbledon final that marked his 13th career Grand Slam victory? Who had a dry eye when Cathy Freeman accepted the Arthur Ashe Courage and Humanitarian Award, and every word sounded as if it came from some deep inner passion to change the world?

Really, though, the night belonged to Tiger Woods. The awards show authenticated the golfer's dominance of his sport and the sports community as a whole. Not only was Tiger the fan favorite, but he gave sports fans the Comeback of the Year and the Championship Performance of the Year. Woods' four ESPY's meant he broke Michael Jordan's career ESPY record. Tiger now has 11, validating his rise to the top of the sports world.

Woods' performance almost overshadowed another golfer — not really a surprise, since he does it on the course all the time — who received the ESPY Lifetime Achievement Award. Jack Nicklaus, the "Golden Bear," seemed out of place at the young, hip ESPYs, but his award meant a lot all the same.

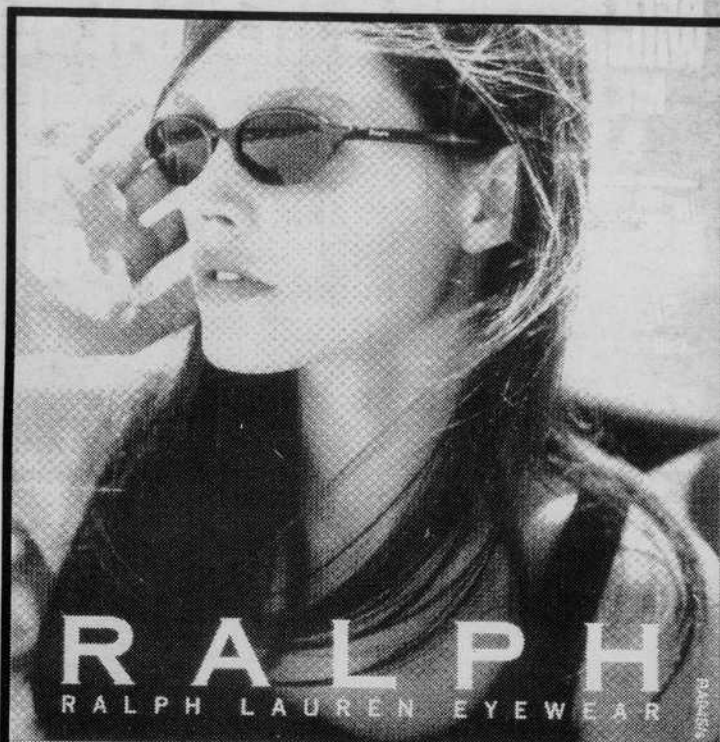
When it comes right down to it, I was simply awed by the awesome spectacle of the ESPY awards.

It was just like ESPN touted before the awards show: "If sports is your life, than this is your night."

Well, I'm a sports guy, from my baseball cap to my tennis elbow to the spikes in my shoes. Because of that, Monday was a night I will always remember.

Thank you, Caroline.

Peter Hockaday is a sports reporter for the Emerald. He can be reached at phockaday@yahoo.com.



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Oregon football hires one more from pros

■ The Ducks are now fully staffed after employing their final assistant coach, the Giants' Mike Gillhamer

By Jeff Smith
Oregon Daily Emerald

For the second time in three days, the Oregon football team hired an assistant coach from the NFL.

Mike Gillhamer, who has spent the last three years working with the NFC Champion New York Giants,

was chosen to coach the Ducks' defensive secondary Wednesday, according to Mike Bellotti, Oregon head coach.

Gillhamer joins Robin Ross, who was hired Monday by Oregon from the Oakland Raiders to be the Ducks' special teams and linebackers coach.

"For us to add a second coach from a NFL playoff-level organization is a tremendous statement about how the Oregon football program is perceived by other coaching professionals," Bellotti said in a released statement.

Gillhamer fills the final coaching vacancy and will take over for Bob Gregory, who left to take over the defensive coordinator position at Boise State. Gillhamer's contract will pay him an annual salary of \$90,000 and will last until June 30, 2002.

He has 13 years of experience coaching college defensive secondaries but spent this past season guiding the Giants' running backs in their Super Bowl season. He cited the opportunity to move back to the defensive side of the ball as one of the main reasons for returning to

the college level.

"I felt this was a great opportunity to go to one of the top-10 college programs in the country and get back on defense, as well as go to a great place to raise my family," Gillhamer said.

Gillhamer, 44, made a strong impression in New York and helped the Giants' ground game earn a No. 3 ranking in rushing with an average of 125.6 yards per game. Needless to say, his presence will be missed in the professional ranks.

"Mike has done a great job in the four years he has been with the Giants," New York head coach Jim Fassel said in a released statement on the Giants' Web Site. "I have high regard for Mike and his coaching ability, and I wish him nothing but the best at Oregon. This gives him a chance to work on the defensive side of the ball, which is his first love."

Gillhamer began his coaching career at the College of the Sequoias from 1979 to 1983 and then moved onto Weber State in 1984. He served as the defensive backs coach at Utah (1985-89) and San Jose State (1990-93) and then accepted a position with Nevada to coach the defensive backs in 1994. He was promoted by the Wolfpack to defensive coordinator in 1995.

His final collegiate coaching spot was as the defensive backs coach for Rutgers in 1996 before heading to New York in 1997.

"I've known Mike quite a while from his days as a coach on the West Coast," Bellotti said. "So I've been aware of his expertise as a defensive backfield coach. Mike is very detailed oriented, a great teacher, an excellent recruiter and understands the techniques required to be successful in the secondary."

"[He's] a great fit for us."

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