

SPORTS

Friday

Best Bet

NBA Finals, Game 2: Philadelphia at L.A.
6 p.m., NBC

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Coming back to Mac

■ Bev Smith, Oregon's new women's basketball coach, brings to her alma mater an extensive knowledge of the game from a successful college and professional career

By Robbie McCallum
Oregon Daily Emerald

She left Eugene in 1982 as the greatest player in Oregon women's basketball history.

Today, Bev Smith returns as the Ducks' next hope to continue a winning tradition for which she laid the foundation.

Smith was named Oregon's new head coach Thursday, replacing the departed Jody Runge.

"It just felt right," Smith said. "I really look forward to being a Duck again. It feels like home."

The Salmon Arm, British Columbia, native played for the Ducks from 1978-1982 and helped lead to the team to its first NCAA playoff berth in school history. Smith left Oregon with a resumé a mile long.

Accolades from her collegiate days include two Kodak All-American selections, four first-team All-Northwest Basketball League selections, the No. 2 spot on the all-time scoring list, the single-game point, rebound and steals records, and much more.

Even after she graduated from Oregon with a bachelor's degree in human performance, honors continued to come for Smith. The team's most inspirational trophy was changed to the "Bev Smith Award," and she was inducted into Oregon's inaugural Athletic Hall of Fame class in 1992, where she is one of only four women's basketball representatives.

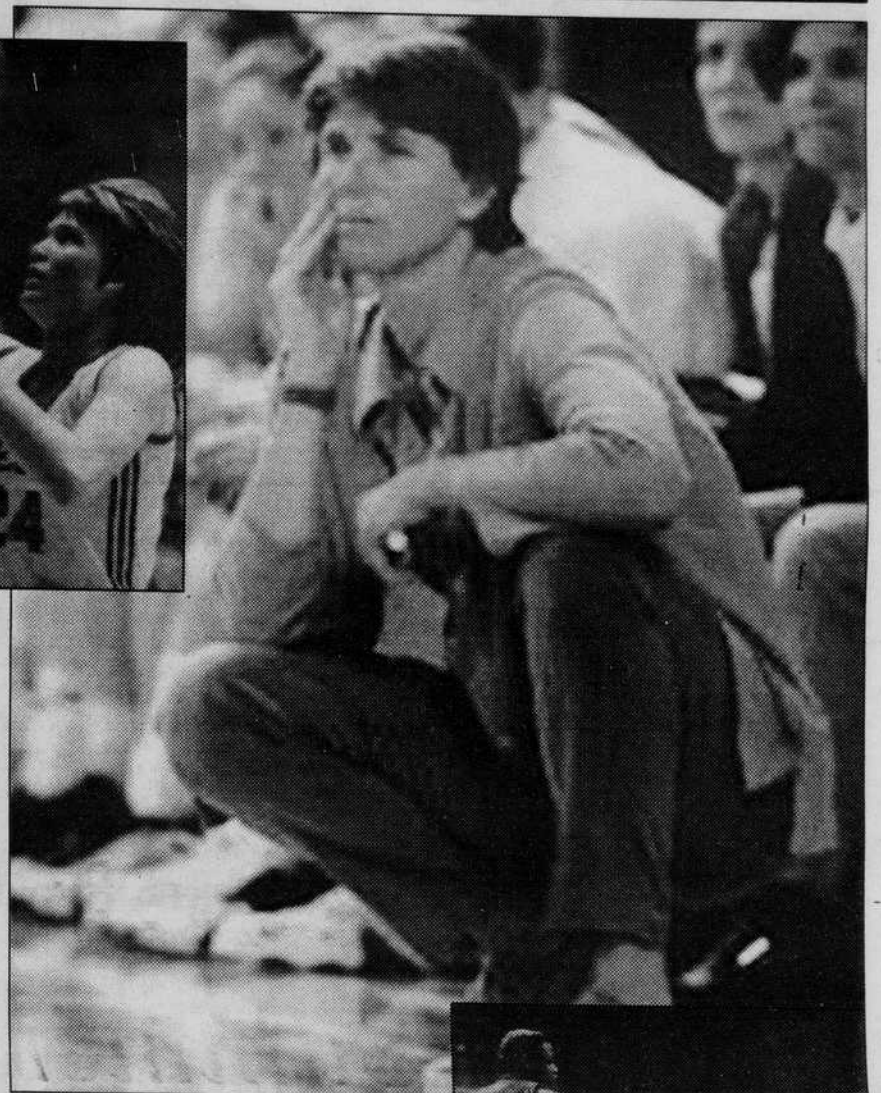
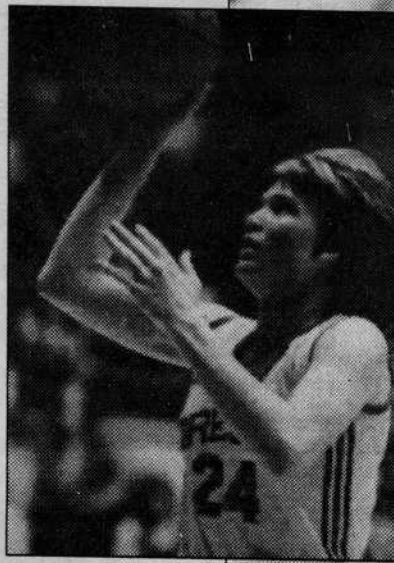
Smith was one of former head coach Elwin Heiny's first recruits and played in one of the most successful four-year spans in program history. In her tenure at Oregon, the Ducks compiled a 93-19 record. Smith led the Ducks to a women's National Invitational Tournament berth, two AIAW Tournament berths and the team's first NCAA berth in 1982.

Smith played on three Canadian Olympic teams along with former Oregon teammate Allison Lang-Robertson in 1980, 1984 and 1996. Canada finished fourth at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.

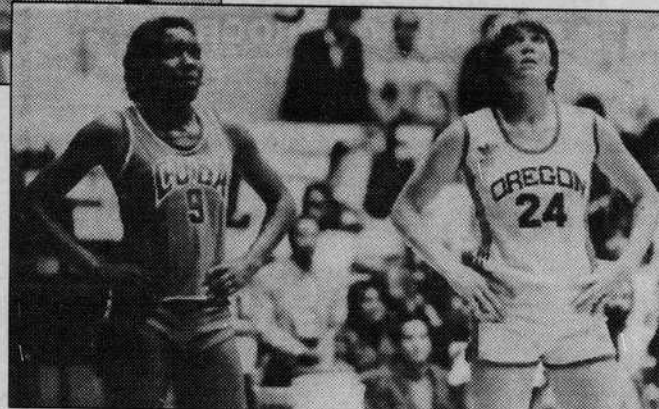
During that time, Smith also played professional basketball in Italy for 15 years. She helped lead Vivo Vicenza to the Italian National Championship and the European Cup in 1993. Smith retired from professional basketball in 1996 after the Atlanta Olympics.

Smith's coaching career began in 1985 as a player-coach for Ferrara of the Italian League. Three years later, Smith became a full-time head coach at the

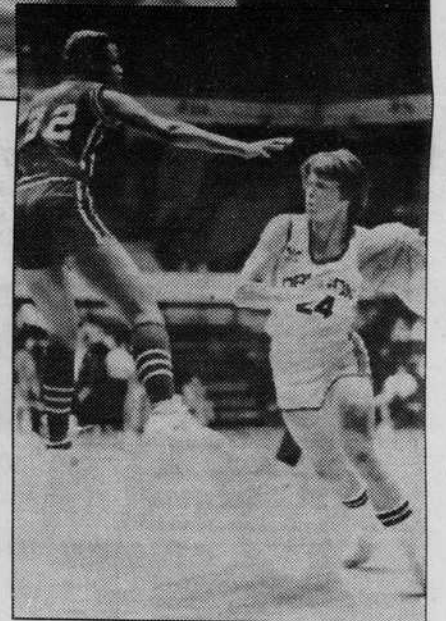
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Courtesy of Oregon Media Services



Small photos, Emerald archives
Bev Smith was an intense player when she played for Oregon between 1978-82, and said she will have that same competitive attitude as a head coach.



Winning may not be everything, but it sure helps



OUT IN LEFT FIELD

ADAM JUDE

Let me start off by saying that Bev Smith will be a great coach for the Oregon women's basketball team. In fact, I think in time she will prove to be one of the best coaches to ever roam the McArthur Court sideline.

But her selection Thursday was not because she has an established, successful coaching career.

She is in her fourth year as the coach of the Canadian National Team, which is a great statement about her desires and motivations. But the reason she was hired as the fifth Oregon coach in the program's 28-year history is because of what she isn't.

She isn't Jody Runge, by any means.

Athletic Director Bill Moos must have known, perhaps unconsciously, that Smith was going to be his choice when she was the

first to interview for the position three weeks ago. The Register-Guard's hype and unbalanced coverage about the former Duck star only made Moos' decision even easier and perhaps unavoidable.

The community loves Bev Smith because she put Oregon women's basketball on the map. Now she — the new driver of a bus that had previously run off course and found a couple of trees smashed in the engine — has the chance to put Oregon women's basketball back on the right map.

Moos saw the opportunity to change the image of Oregon basketball and he took it. He said, during the mess of the last three months, that the win-loss record was not the most important part of being successful. He stuck to his guns.

Once Bev Smith and her soft-spoken, thick Canadian accent walked through the doors of the Casanova Center, Moos knew he couldn't pass on the storybook return, even if all Smith had on her resumé was "potential."

Even if Pat Summitt, the Tennessee coach who is perhaps the best in the country, had wanted the job, Moos may not have changed his mind.

The next best thing to Pat Summitt did walk through the doors of the Cas Center and

declare her interest in becoming Oregon's head coach. Elaine Elliott could not be reached for comment, but it's my guess — and this may be going a little too far — that she would say that she did not get a fair shake at this position.

And you're talking about a coach who, in 18 years at Utah, has a 346-148 record (.700), nine NCAA Tournament appearances and numerous "Coach of the Year" awards. And all this in a city, like most places, that couldn't care less about women's hoops.

Elliott established something great at Utah, and maybe she just couldn't leave Salt Lake City. But my guess is that she likes Eugene, and more importantly, likes the incentives and attention the city gives to Oregon women's basketball.

Smith, on the other hand, has yet to prove her abilities as a consistent coach. And now, to her delight, she is being thrown into the college ranks for the first time.

She is a people-person — a player's coach, if you will. She is enthusiastic. She is energized. She's going to run her own practices.

The previous coach did none of these things.

"When she said she was going to run practice, I was like 'Wow,'" said

forward/center Alyssa Fredrick, who will be a senior next year.

Smith's enthusiasm was very apparent at Thursday's press conference (and she even said she was trying to hide her emotions). Her love for the game of basketball as well as for her players will be the focal point of her tenure.

"Yes, I will run practices," said the 41-year-old from Salmon Arm, British Columbia. "The best part of this whole thing for me is getting on the floor. I'd even get out there and play myself a couple times to make my athletes feel good about their players' abilities, 'cause [my game is] pretty bad now."

Athletes feeling good about themselves? What is going on here? No Oregon women's basketball coach, at least in the last eight years, has ever said such a thing. Moos, watching his new employee speak with ease to the media, was smiling from ear to ear.

A toast is probably in order. Smith and Moos already made their celebratory comments, but probably neglected to congratulate each other on one thing: potential.

So, here's cheers to hope.

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