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Thomas Patterson Emerald

First-year Oregon head coach Bev Smith was a two-time All-American in the early-1980s while leading Oregon to its first NCAA Tournament in 1981. In her first collegiate coaching job, Smith's "dream job" is to lead the Ducks back to the tournament for the ninth straight season.

By Adam Jude
Oregon Daily Emerald

It's hard not to like Bev Smith. Two decades ago, Smith put Oregon women's basketball on the map. Now she's back to continue her legacy.

The most renowned player in program history, Smith set school records in 10 categories and still holds career marks in assists (443), rebounds (1,362) and steals (349). The Salmon Arm, B.C., native is second on Oregon's career scoring list with 2,063 points and was an All-American in 1981 and 1982.

"I don't have a lot of memories of wins and losses, I just remember that our team, playing at home at Mac Court, was ready and willing to do anything to defend Mac Court and win," Smith said about her playing days.

The fiery competitor in Smith is still apparent now when she roams the hardwood at McArthur Court, not making the plays, but calling them.

But the road back to the Pit was a long and tenuous one.

Smith, 41, was a member of the Canadian national team for 15 years — she was called the Larry Bird of Canadian women's hoops by former coach Don McCrae — before retiring after the 1996 Olympics. She also played overseas, where she got her first taste of coaching in an Italian league.

"It was very difficult," she said of her first coaching gig. "As a player, you don't realize the teaching and the learning process that you have to provide for your athletes."

After years of practice, including a four-year stint as head coach of the Canadian national team, Smith has now molded into a fine-tuned coach, said Oregon assistant Dan Muscatell.

"Bev is a very good coach," Muscatell said. "She knows what she wants and she teaches to gain that."

"She is also very good organizationally. For a one-to-two hour practice, she prepares for at least that much."

BACK AT MAC

After two decades away, former Oregon star Bev Smith returns to McArthur Court

Getting the chance to coach at her alma mater may not have happened if last year's squad had not rebelled against former coach Jody Runge. In a highly-publicized controversy, eight players met with Athletic Director Bill Moos last March and asked that Runge be fired. Two months later, Runge resigned.

"Is there any more pressure that can be more extreme than the pressure you put on yourself?"

Bev Smith
head coach

"A decision was made — I don't know if it was the right or wrong decision, I just know I was given the opportunity to coach at Oregon," Smith said.

Before anything, though, Smith had to gain the team's trust.

"All we asked from the players was to learn from the past," she said. "I think the healing process is just the time for them to get to know the coaching staff and learn who we are, how we coach and how we care."

"They don't really care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Senior guard Jamie Craighead said that Smith quickly gained re-

spect and inspired the team to work harder.

"She's real big on communicating with us," Craighead said. "We're going to accomplish everything because we worked hard for it, not because we're the best athletes, but because we're going to work harder than every team."

"She's sticking with us, we're not necessarily her players — she didn't recruit us — but I hope we're going to do her justice."

While she inherited a program that has made an impressive eight consecutive NCAA Tournaments, Smith took on a team that looks much different than in the past. Four starters departed from last year's squad and six freshmen were brought in this year.

"I think we've really taken some steps and gotten ourselves in a position where we've won some games and established our identity," Smith said. "We still have miles to go. I'm happy, but not satisfied. Any time you're not perfect, you have to keep striving to be perfect."

Perfect may describe the situation that Smith and men's basketball coach Ernie Kent are in. It's rare enough to have a coach return to his or her alma mater, but to have both Oregon coaches be former Ducks?

"It's really special," Kent said. "There may not be another program in the country that can say that. I think that speaks volumes about the University of Oregon."

Smith said she loves having the high expectations.

"Certainly when you're a coach, there's a lot of external pressure," Smith said. "But is there any more pressure that can be more extreme than the pressure you put on yourself?"

If her accomplishments as a player are any indication, Smith has already showed that the Ducks are in good hands.

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