



Adam Amato Emerald

Ernie Kent started as a freshman at the University in 1973 and is now the most successful coach in program history after four years.

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

The results tell his story, sort of. Ernie Kent is simply the best coach — through four years — in the last half-century of Oregon men's basketball. He has gone to the NIT Final Four and the NCAA Tournament. Five Oregon coaches went their entire careers without tasting the madness of March.

"It means a lot to me to have people come up to me on the street and tell me this is the best basketball team they've ever seen at Oregon," Kent said. "That tells me we're doing something special, and I've always wanted to make this program the best it's ever been."

But Kent's success as a coach tells only half his story. The rest runs through his veins. The rest of the story is rooted in green and yellow.

Kent started his Oregon career as a scrub-faced freshman in 1973, and played four years of varsity basketball under coach Dick Harter. He was a member of the "Kamikaze Kids" — nicknamed for their physical and flashy game play — which included All-Americans Ron Lee and Greg Ballard.

Though he is absent from Oregon's record books, Kent's time in a Duck uniform had several lasting effects. He carries a strong desire to keep McArthur Court small and loud, as it was his Kamikaze Kids, by some accounts, that first packed "the Pit" and got it rocking. Kent also carries a sense of Oregon basketball history, which he tries to impart on to his current players.

"He wants us to know about the time he spent here, and how he wants to get the program up to the level it was when he was here with the Kamikaze Kids," sophomore guard Luke Ridnour said.

Fast forward 20 years: Kent, after doing time as an assistant at Colorado State and Stanford, a head coaching stint at St. Mary's and with a traveling team in Saudi Arabia, returned to Oregon in 1997. Two years later, the Ducks made a run to the semifinals of the NIT and reached college basketball's pinnacle, the NCAA Tournament, in 2000.

Kent led the Ducks to that NCAA Tournament by preaching the values he learned at Oregon.

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ALL HIS DUCKS IN A ROW

A former Kamikaze Kid, Ernie Kent has brought his success to the Oregon bench



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