

## Helquist

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is unreal. "The electricity in the air really gets you excited."

Finally, for the first time since he graduated in 1998 from University Christian High School in Jacksonville, Helquist feels settled.

It hasn't exactly been a smooth ride for the 6-foot-9, 275-pound junior center.

After averaging 18 points, 16 rebounds and three blocks per game at the prep level, he had high hopes for his college career. He chose to attend Louisiana State, but soon found out that, when being recruited, things aren't always what they seem.

"It was just a bad situation where I didn't really get along with the coach," Helquist said. "I was fine being away from home, and the school was great, but the situation with the basketball team just wasn't the right place for me."

So he went back to his hometown of Jacksonville and lived with his brother. He only planned on

playing one year for the junior college there, but he really appreciated the coaching of Greg Gierke and decided to stay another year.

Then came decision time once again, and this time he knew he couldn't afford to make the wrong one.



HELQUIST

Oregon assistant coach Scott Duncan knew Gierke, who told him about Helquist. Since the Ducks lost Bryan Bracey, Julius Hicks and Flo Hartenstein at the end of last season, acquiring height with experience was a premium for Oregon head coach Ernie Kent.

Duncan told Kent about Helquist. Kent flew to Florida and made an impression on Helquist and his family. Helquist flew to Eugene, and the Ducks made a profound impression on him. And that was that.

"As soon as I met all of the guys, I was sold," Helquist said. "And

coach Kent was really genuine. I had been through the whole recruiting process before and could tell when somebody is just blowing smoke at you. But they were very up front with me.

"It all came together and I just knew."

He came across country and worked out with the team throughout the summer and moved into a two-bedroom apartment at the University Commons with fellow transfer Robert Johnson. The two bought a foosball table and a ping pong table to host contests among teammates. Life was good, and he was a part of the tight-knit Oregon basketball family.

"I hang out with him a lot, and he has an awesome personality," center Chris Christoffersen said. "He can talk with everybody and can make anybody laugh when he jokes around."

All that was left for Helquist now would be to get adjusted to the higher level of basketball.

Helquist's first breakout game came against Louisville on Nov. 24 when he scored 10 points. He

matched that total in Oregon's win over Stanford. And just last week, he notched 10 again in a game at Washington that showed, more than any other, how pivotal a role he plays.

Against the Huskies, Christoffersen picked up two early fouls and was relegated to the bench. Helquist came in and ended up playing more minutes than Christoffersen that day, while keeping the Ducks at the same intensity level.

"He has played some really good basketball in the last four or five games," Kent said. "He's finding his rhythm. When you look at him and Chris together, that's a nice combination for us to have that a lot of other teams don't have the liberty of having — two big guys like that who can score."

The post-play will play a pivotal role when the Ducks host the L.A. schools this week. Tonight, 6-11 center Dan Gadzuric will be a handful, and on Saturday Oregon will need to contain high scoring, 6-7 seniors Sam Clancy and David Bluthenthal.

With Helquist by his side, Christoffersen believes the Ducks are up to the challenge.

"It's like a tag team to have me and him as a one-two punch," Christoffersen said of Helquist. "Brian is as good, if not better, than I am in almost all the areas on the court. A lot of people think he's out of shape because of how big he is, but he's not. He can run with the best of us."

"He's a big part of our unbelievable depth, and that's what's going to make the difference in the Pac-10 this year."

Helquist hopes so. He would love to be a part of a championship team. Mainly, though, he's just loving the fact that he's arrived at his destination without having to worry about where he's going to play next.

"It was a great opportunity for me, and I knew there was something about this place when I came on a visit," Helquist said. "I made the right choice. And, man, it feels good to make the right choice after making a mistake my first year. It feels like home."

"It's everything they said it would be."

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## Ludwig

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overwhelming choice of our players who took part in the interview process. I think he is going to be excellent."

Ludwig was in Eugene during the weekend to officially interview for the job and was told of his selection on Tuesday evening. He will stay in Fresno throughout this week to "take care of business at home" and said he will arrive in town sometime next week.

"I'm chomping at the bit to get up there," said Ludwig, who played, graduated and coached at Portland State in the 1980s. "I can't wait to dedicate my full attention at Oregon. Coach Bellotti did a lot of background checks and liked the things he saw at Fresno State."

Coincidentally, Fresno State head coach Pat Hill last said goodbye to an offensive coordinator in 1997 when Tedford left the Bulldogs to join the Ducks. Ludwig, who also replaced Tedford in '97, becomes the eighth assistant under Hill to leave.

Ludwig's salary was reportedly \$100,000 last year while Tedford made

\$175,000 with incentives. When Ludwig officially takes over for the Ducks after finalizing his contract, his annual base salary will be \$135,000.

"It's part of the business," Hill told the Fresno Bee. "People in the Fresno State program are in big demand and that's good. But until we get to the point where we can match dollars and other stuff, these things are going to happen."

Ludwig sees a lot of similarities with Fresno State and Oregon's programs and doesn't expect to be surprised by any of the hype around the Ducks after experiencing the increased interest in the Bulldogs last season.

There is sure to be a lot of publicity surrounding Oregon's second game of the season, on Sept. 7 at Autzen Stadium, when the Ducks host Fresno State.

"I've heard a lot about that in the last 48 hours or so," Ludwig said.

But that's in the future. He said the immediate focus needs to be making "the transition as smooth as possible for the players."

"We want to hit the 2002 football season with full speed," Ludwig said.

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## Men's

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so that's why we're putting so much emphasis on this game."

The Ducks couldn't stress enough the psychological importance of beating UCLA and USC at home this weekend.

"These are the biggest games of my career," Oregon center Chris Christoffersen said. "If we can get two wins this weekend, then we're in the driver's seat for the Pac-10 championship."

On the court, mismatches abound on both sides of the ball. Will Bruin freshman guard Cedric Bozeman be able to contain explosive Duck guards Luke Ridnour and Freddie Jones? Can Oregon's forwards hang with the talented Jason Kapon and Matt Barnes? Will Christoffersen play with Bruin center Dan Gadzuric like he did last year? Can UCLA go as deep into its

bench as Oregon?

Can the Bruins handle Mac Court?

"We need to bring Mac Court to another level because we need this team to go to another level," Kent told radio station KUGN after last week's win over Washington State. "We need this crowd just rocking at every free throw, every defensive stand, every time out. It should never die down in there."

UCLA is also trying to go 2-0 in the second half of the conference after a first half that was anything but consistent. Three weeks ago, the Bruins handily defeated then-No. 1 Kansas, then struggled to beat Arizona State before falling to Arizona and Stanford in consecutive games. Earlier this season, UCLA beat Alabama and Georgetown, but lost to Pepperdine and struggled with California-Riverside.

The Bruins are led by Kapon's 18.4 points per game, but get 15.4 from guard Billy

Knight, 14.8 from Barnes, 10.3 from Gadzuric and 9.4 from sixth man T.J. Cummings.

The key matchup tonight could be Gadzuric and Christoffersen. The two big men average nearly the same amount of points and rebounds per game. Oregon's big man said he feels he can better against Gadzuric than against smaller centers around the league.

"I don't know why, but I feel like I match up better with bigger guys," Christoffersen said. "I'm just more comfortable, defensively and offensively."

But really, every matchup will be important tonight. Because this game is as big as Christoffersen and Gadzuric piggybacking. This game is as big as... well, you get the idea.

Oregon and UCLA will tip off at 7 p.m., and the Ducks will face the Trojans, who are co-leading the conference with Oregon, at 3 p.m. Saturday.

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