

San Diego State's Fisher back in the Big Dance

By Michael Rosenberg
Knight Ridder Newspapers

(KRT) Steve Fisher has finally put Michigan behind him. To the coach's admirers, that's not a surprise.

But the Michigan athletic department apparently has changed its views on Fisher. To the coach's admirers and detractors, that is a surprise.

In just three seasons, Fisher has taken San Diego State from a 5-23 record to this month's NCAA basketball tournament. His team will play Illinois in the first round Friday at Chicago.

Ten years after he first took the

Fab Five to the tournament and nearly five years after Michigan fired him under a cloud of a scandal, Fisher has succeeded without the school that shunned him.

But Michigan is not shunning him anymore, athletic director Bill Martin said.

Martin made it clear Tuesday that he thinks the Fab Five "left a wonderful legacy" at Michigan. That's a contrast to most comments that came out of the athletic department after Fisher was fired.

"Number one, they really set a stan-

dard for performance for Michigan," Martin said. "They brought tremendous excitement to it. Kids still know about the Fab Five that were probably too young to go to the games.

"I think they have left a wonderful legacy here. I'm pleased to see how over time they are reacquainting themselves with our team. I see nothing but the positives about that for the program."

Fisher was fired in October 1997, in the wake of accusations that several players, including Chris Webber, Jalen Rose and Robert Traylor, had received

large sums of money and gifts from Ed Martin, who has been charged with running an illegal numbers operation in Detroit-area auto plants. Ed Martin had been a frequent guest of the coaching staff at U-M games.

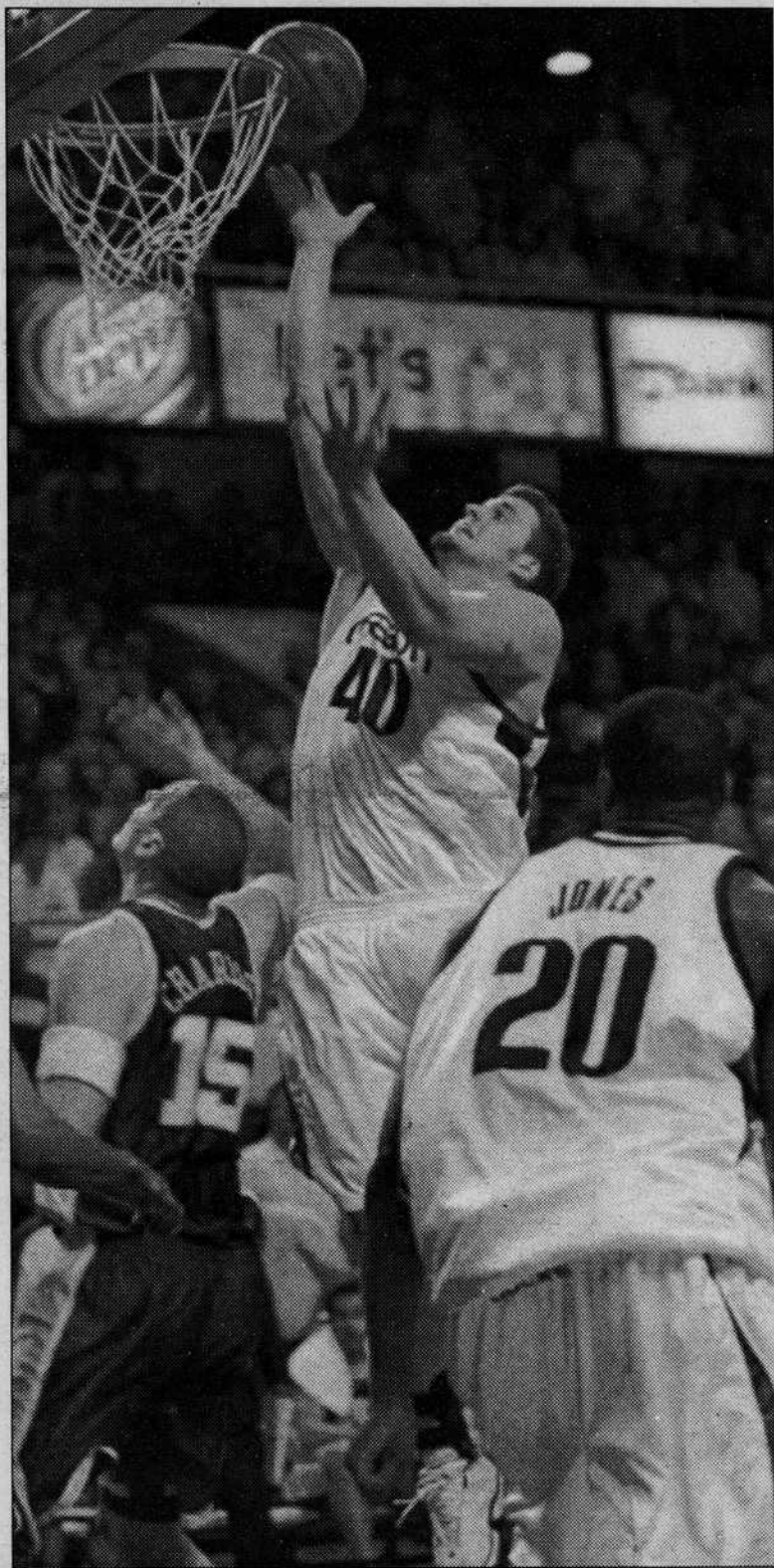
Is the Ed Martin scandal part of the Fab Five legacy?

"I don't think that is a part of the legacy at all with them," Bill Martin said. "I wasn't here during any of that time period ... That was just a separate issue. We haven't had an investigation of Michigan going on as long as I have been here."

Fisher has long maintained that he was innocent of any wrongdoing at U-M.

"I know he was very hurt by how the Michigan thing ended and how he felt he was treated," said San Diego State athletic director Rick Bay, himself a Michigan graduate. "Steve, he was not treated fairly there. I think he'll always feel sad about how it was handled. But nonetheless I think we're past it."

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Adam Amato Emerald

Oregon's Brian Helquist (40) is questionable for Oregon's first round NCAA Tournament game against Montana. The junior center strained his right knee on Feb. 28.

Men's

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Sac-Town, baby

The Ducks are ready for Sacramento. The question is, is Sacramento ready for the Ducks?

The Oregon team left for California after practicing Tuesday afternoon. The Ducks will practice today in preparation for Thursday's game, which tips off at approximately 2 p.m. The first game in Arco Arena will feature Pepperdine and Wake Forest. That game starts at 11:42 a.m.

Old pals

Thursday's Oregon-Montana game may look like a blowout on modern paper, but if you consult the history books, it looks like ...

still a blowout.

Oregon and Montana used to play in the same conference, the Pacific Coast Conference. In the more than 25 games in the series, the Ducks hold the edge, 21-4. The teams have met in nonconference games since they were in the PCC, but the last time they met as PCC members was in 1937. Oregon beat Montana three times that season, and the Grizzlies won one matchup.

That season, the Ducks played other teams like Union Oil, Multnomah AC and Astoria East. The season after that, in 1938-39, Oregon won the first-ever NCAA Championship.

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