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Williams

continued from page 9A

Ducks a 55-42 lead, their largest of the game. "Sometimes she's the biggest spark," senior guard Jamie Craighead said of Shreve.

Williams is expected to be in the lineup this weekend when the Ducks face the winner of the Oregon State-Hawaii first-round WNIT game, to be played tonight in Corvallis.

"Shaq has been struggling with the flu, and it kept her in bed for a few days last week," Oregon first-year head coach Bev Smith said. "She'll be fine, and we will be a loaded deck in our next game."

In the single-elimination WNIT, the Ducks said they were not panicked without Williams.

"I never felt like it was going to be our last game," Craighead said. "We know how to pick it up when we need to. I was never worried."

E-mail sports editor Adam Jude at adamjude@dailymerald.com.

Smith

continued from page 9A

NCAA Tournament season.

The other day, while finishing off a cheesesteak, an acquaintance couldn't stop asking me questions. His questions mirrored those that I've received in every great Oregon season.

"So, um, you like, get to go to all the games for free and talk to all the players, huh?"

"Well, yeah."

"Nice! And you're going to Sacramento?"

"Yep. Should be a fun weekend."

"Dude, that's so cool. You must have so many memories of going crazy on the road with all the Ducks fans. That must have been amazing to sit in the press box for the Fiesta Bowl. And now the hoops team! What a great time to be a Duck, huh?"

This is where the conversation usually comes to a screeching halt, and I change the subject to something else.

You see, what few understand — especially toward student reporters — is that being a sports writer means not being a fan. At all.

We watch the games through a much different lens.

For example, you all can probably remember where you were and how you felt when...

Darius Wright hit that remarkable three-point shot at the buzzer, capping a surreal six points in 2.8 seconds, to beat ASU in hoops, 76-74, in 2000.

When Keenan Howry passed the football to Joey Harrington in the

Holiday Bowl and Harrington stumbled, bumbled and almost fumbled his way into the end zone.

When UCLA kicker Chris Griffith missed his last-second field goal at the Rose Bowl in November 2001 for the Ducks' 21-20 victory.

And when Freddie Jones drove through lane and drilled a soft floater as time ran out at USC to give the men's basketball team the two-point win and at least a share of the conference championship.

While you were probably high-fiving your buddy and/or clanking your beer cans, my pen was touching paper as I absorbed the emotion all around me and thought of ways to describe what had happened.

So goes the job of a storyteller.

And the mood never changes after memorable defeats, such as the football Civil War loss in 2000, the basketball NCAA Tournament loss to Seton Hall and the football 49-42 defeat to Stanford at Autzen Stadium in October in as entertaining game as I have seen. (I'll never forget coming home that evening to my two depressed roommates.)

In a way, maybe I've missed out on a lot. After all, I always enjoy watching the Oregon student section at Autzen Stadium and McArthur Court go wild in celebration.

Although, I feel it's you who has missed out. I'll never forget the experiences I've had through my job, all the places I've seen and the athletes who have opened up to me and allowed me to tell their stories.

Because, in my opinion, that's the best part about this job: listening.

So yeah, I do root. I root for individuals and for great stories.

I doubt you appreciated watching freshman Stephen Clayton play this past fall on the football field as much as I did as he made play after play on special teams, much like he does everyday in practice.

Men's

continued from page 9A

won't affect them at all."

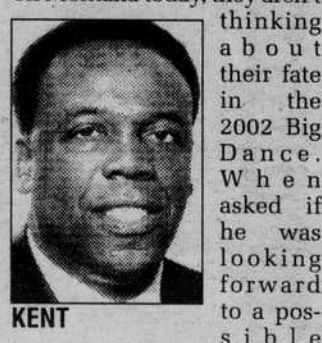
Perhaps the Ducks aren't feeling the pressure of the high tournament seed because they feel it's a reward for hard work on and off the court all season long. Ridnour said the players even talked about the tournament before the season started.

"We talked about making it to the tournament and going as far as we could," Ridnour said.

The Ducks see tough defense as important to a deep run in the NCAA Tournament. Oregon is a noted offensive team — the Ducks ended the season ranked first in the Pac-10 in scoring with 85.9 points per game — but will need to play defense to win in the postseason.

"We're going to stay with our defense," Kent said. "That's the key to our destiny."

As the Ducks get set to take on Montana today, they aren't thinking about their fate in the 2002 Big Dance.



KENT

When asked if he was looking forward to a possible matchup with Kansas in the Elite Eight, Kent responded immediately.

"Not at all," Kent said. "We're not looking any further than Montana."

E-mail sports reporter Peter Hockaday at peterhockaday@dailymerald.com.

Or watching senior Kristian Christensen being honored with his mother on basketball's senior night, knowing the hardship they've faced together and how strong a bond they've formed since the death of his father prior to Christensen's freshman season.

On the other hand, say there's a prominent athlete who everyone seems to adore, my perspective might be a little different because I've seen a side to that person that few others have.

It's all coming to an end, though, at least at the college level. By the time you read this, I'll be in Sacramento, getting ready to cover perhaps the best Oregon team since the NCAA championship team from 1939.

Odds are that the Ducks should have no problem with the 20.5-point-underdog Montana Grizzlies, and you'll be getting plenty of happy stories to read Friday morning.

Now, let's say the 15th-seed Grizzlies shock the nation and the Ducks by pulling off the huge upset. It'll be a sad day in Duckville, but you'll still get your stories, and I'll still enjoy my weekend.

It's all part of the strange numbness I've developed toward Oregon sporting events over these last few years.

But when Oregon does lose, and when my duties are complete here at the Emerald, I'll return home and climb up in my attic.

I'll dig through the piles and piles of junk I've collected until I find one thing, which I'll promptly dust off.

My yellow duck lips. After all, Oregon will always be my alma mater.

E-mail assistant sports editor Jeff Smith at jeffsmith@dailymerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Chuck Palahniuk

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