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Best Bet
NBA Finals: New Jersey
at Los Angeles
6:00 p.m., NBC



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Youngsters beginning pro careers too early

I can't believe kids these days. A recent Sports Illustrated article featured 18-year-old Brandon Hancock, who finished high school in December to enroll early at USC. Hancock weighs 242 pounds, has a body fat percentage of about 5, and runs the 40-yard dash in 4.5 seconds. His bench press is the fourth best on the USC football team and he is treated like a deity around his alma mater, Clovis West High.

He is a football machine when most high school seniors think only about the next movie to watch and when they have to go work at the local burger joint.

As a 22-year-old student, one of the many to live their sporting dreams vicariously through others, I am stunned by the number of professional athletes younger than I am.

Eighteen-year-old Ty Tryon, and Kobe Bryant and Rafael Furcal — who are both 22



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(although there has been controversy surrounding Furcal's actual age) — make the average college student look like a failure.

Whatever happened to being well-rounded?

When I was growing up alongside thousands of other New England-area children, we all played baseball, football, hockey, basketball and soccer — making sure to play whiffleball, skip rocks and climb trees. How many trees has Bryant climbed in his life?

We threw snowballs. We jumped off cliffs. We got dirty. I would be shocked to hear that Tryon, an Orlando native who became a pro golfer at 17, has ever really gotten dirty.

Tryon, who was born June 2, 1984, has yet to miss a cut on the PGA Tour, has acted in commercials with golf legend Arnold Palmer, received congratulatory messages from President Bush and has his own official Web site at www.tytryon.com.

What did you do by the time you were 18? (That question is posed to everyone except the one 18-year-old student who will graduate from the University next week).

Kids are too specialized. Tryon's father had his son swinging a club when he was six months old. Hancock's teammates at USC have dubbed him "Super Swole," because his overly inflated arms and the hours spent in the gym can't allow him much time for other pursuits.

As much as I like to see new talent come into professional leagues, my heart will always lie with the old veterans. I'll listen to and appreciate stories about Tryon, Furcal, Bryant, Tiger Woods, Darius Miles and now Hancock. But my favorites are guys like Carlos Baerga, who has been in pro-

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Jonathan House Emerald

Junior Carrie Zografos (35) set the school record in the steeplechase this year. The Portland native failed to qualify for the NCAA Championships — as did every Oregon runner — but the season was still considered a success by Oregon head coach Tom Heinonen.

Ducks 'confident' for next season

■ The Oregon women's track team improved in 2002, but look to next season as a breakout year

By Hank Hager
Oregon Daily Emerald

After an eighth-place finish in the 2001 Pacific-10 Conference Championships, and 60th at the NCAA Championships, the Oregon women's track and field team entered the 2002 season with a sense of anticipation.

After all, the Ducks couldn't finish much worse than No. 60 in the NAAs, their worst showing since the competition began in 1982. And yeah, entering 2002, they had two low showings at the Pac-10 Championship, finishing eighth in 2001 and ninth a year before that.

Not to mention, Oregon would be receiving a group of highly talented athletes, the likes which included transfers Becky Holliday and Mary Murphy, as well as freshmen Katie McKeever, Roslyn Lundeen and Elisa Crumley.

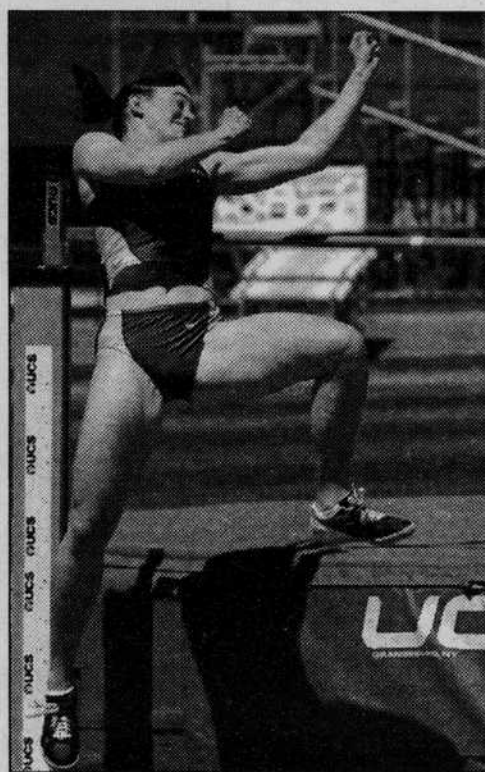
In its 2002 showing, Oregon finished sixth at Pac-10s and 27th at the NCAA version.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg. "We got 62 of 67 points by underclassmen in the Pac-10 meet," head coach Tom Heinonen said, alluding to the team's bright future. "By any measurement, we're better than we've been."

It was a season of newcomers for the Ducks. Of the nine points scored by the team at the NCAA Championships in Baton Rouge, La., eight came from Holliday and Lundeen. Incumbent star Mary Etter topped off the team's week in the Bayou with a single point in the discus throw.

Holliday, a transfer from Clackamas Community College, came in and immediately made her presence known in the pole vault. She is now the school's record holder at a height of 14 feet, 1 1/4 inches.

However, she wasn't too pleased with her



Courtesy Washington State Media Services

Jenny Kenyon is one of two graduating seniors and will be missed in the heptathlon.

season and said she would give herself a grade of a "C."

"I just wasn't happy with my performance this year," she said.

Holliday, the recipient of the 2002 Lynne Wingbiger Award as the most outstanding Oregon women's track athlete, will be the leader of the team's pole vault contingent next season, a group that includes two-time All-American Niki Reed as well as up-and-comer Kirsten Riley. It is a group that should send three to the Pac-10s and could possibly do the same at the NCAA version.

"I was confident I would get there this year, but I know next year, without a doubt, I'll be there," Riley said.

Crumley and Lundeen, two of the squad's more prominent freshmen entering the season, didn't disappoint, and coupled with veterans Sarah Malone and Charyl Weingarten, helped put Oregon's javelin unit on the map once again. It is a group that will return all four members.

"The freshmen throwers hit the ground running," Heinonen said. "They were great from the very beginning."

Only Lundeen scored points from the javelin group in the NCAA Championships, but is looking for much more next season. But that doesn't mean she wasn't happy with her 2002 performance.

"I've moved up from last year, and I'm happy because of my consistency," she said. "The (elbow) injury just took away from me a little bit."

Overall, Oregon excelled in the team's field events. Etter took home the team's high point athlete award, while sophomore high jumper Rachael Kriz was the team's most inspirational athlete.

Both are expected to return, although Etter has said she may redshirt next season, and compete again in 2004 — the same year as the Olympics in Athens, Greece.

"I haven't really talked about it with my coach yet, but I'm on the five-year plan," Etter said. "If I were to go next year, it would be four years in a row. They're going to want me competing in the Olympic year."

In what has traditionally been the strong point of the program, the Oregon running squad has fallen on hard times. Only one athlete — Eri Macdonald — earned an NCAA provisional mark, although she just missed going to the championships.

However, Heinonen praised the specific efforts of junior Janette Davis — a participant in the 200 and 400 — as well as Alicia Snyder-Carlson, one of the squad's 800 runners, and a

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