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Year of the Duck

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Those doubts soon turned into the most impressive win in school history as the Ducks blew out the Buffaloes, 38-16, and claimed their highest-ever season-ending ranking — No. 2 in the polls.

"This is the best place there is, football wise, in the Pac-10 and maybe even in the country," Oregon Athletic Director Bill Moos said after the Fiesta Bowl. "I am very proud that we got out in front (facilities-wise). We'll continue to stay initiative, we'll continue to invest in our success, we won't rest on our laurels. We'll have some new surprises."

Moos soon delivered on his promise — perhaps even surprising himself — as the Ernie Kent-coached basketball team quickly jumped into the picture, and the Ducks went 16-0 at McArthur Court to capture the program's first Pac-10 title in 57 years.

Oregon's fast-paced, highlight-reeled season continued into the NCAA Tournament, where the Ducks received their highest-ever seed at No. 2. After defeating Montana and Wake Forest in the first two rounds, Oregon needed a last-second shot from Freddie Jones to defeat Texas in the Sweet 16. The Final Four was not to be, though, as No. 1 Kansas out-dueled the Ducks, 104-83, in Madison, Wisc. The Ducks ended the year ranked No. 6, their highest-ever ranking.

"I don't think I've ever, ever, been around a team like this before," Kent said after the Elite Eight loss to Kansas.

Bev Smith could easily have said the same after her first year as head coach of the women's basketball team. Smith inherited a program that had been to eight straight NCAA Tournaments, but a team that had been through a controversial battle to oust former coach Jody Runge.

At first, Smith's tenure was filled with inconsistency as the Oregon women struggled to find their game. But after ending the NCAA Tournament streak, the Ducks settled for the Women's National Invitation Tournament and made the most of the opportunity.

Thanks to two game-winning baskets by sophomore Cathrine Kraayeveld, Oregon won five games in the WNIT, four of which the Ducks hosted at Mac Court, including the national title game against Houston.

Senior Eugene Harris capped off the wrestling season with a fourth-place finish at the NCAA meet, finishing his final season 33-5.

KENT

By April, the Oregon success baton was handed off to the men's track team, which finished second at the Pac-10 Championships on May 19 — despite being without Santiago Lorenzo and John Stiegeler, 2001 national champions who went down with injuries this year. For the team's success, Martin Smith was named the Pac-10 Coach of the Year.

SMITH

At the national meet, Becky Holliday led all Oregon athletes with a third-place finish in the pole vault, while Jason Hartmann, Micah Harris, Elisa Crumley and Roslyn Lundeen all earned All-American accolades.

Still not convinced about "The Year of the Duck"? Oregon's tennis teams may provide the best insight. A perennial bottom-dweller, the women's team defeated Washington in late March to secure its first Pac-10 win in two years. Further, the Oregon women advanced to the NCAA Tournament, where they upset No. 18 UNLV before losing in the second round.

The Ducks were ranked No. 33 to end the season. Like football and men's basketball, it was the highest-ever ranking for the women's tennis program — and cemented the 2001-02 year as the best in school history. Period.

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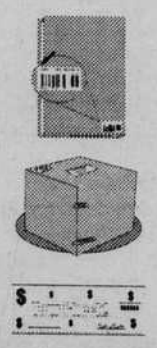

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