

About a boy from Blaine

Luke Ridnour will always be a small-town boy, as a trip to Blaine reveals

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BLAINE, Wash. — It's hard to believe, but the folks here don't miss Luke Ridnour. They don't fight for seats at the local bars when their version of Jimmy Chitwood appears on national television.

This tiny border town can't miss Ridnour. He may live 400 miles away in Eugene, but he's ever-present here — and not just because of all his high school records.

Blaine sees Ridnour all the time. If not his retired Borderites' jersey hanging from the rafters at the Blaine High School gym, then on eight television screens at the Wheelhouse Tavern or on the big screen at Pastime Tavern. And if not in those places, then Blaine surely can't miss all 100 feet of Ridnour in New York's Times Square, though that seems like another planet to Ridnour's 3,770 former neighbors.

So, you see, Ridnour is everywhere. He can't be missed because there's nothing to miss. In fact, Ridnour misses Blaine more than Blaine misses Ridnour. There's perhaps something twisted in that, but that says something about Ridnour, Oregon's point guard who relishes the small-town virtue of hard work rather than the spotlight.

"He's our star," says Miranda Ziegler, 21, Pastime's bartender and a high school classmate of Ridnour's.

Ridnour quickly became a star in Eugene, too.

Since donning a Duck uniform in the fall of 2000, the 6-foot-1,175-pound junior has started every game of his Oregon career. As a freshman, he became the first Duck to be named the Pacific-10 Conference Freshman of the Year. Last season, in leading Oregon to the Elite Eight, Ridnour was a first-team all-conference selection and honorable mention All-American.

This season, he became a member of Oregon's 1,000-point club, and is in the top-five in three career categories for the Ducks (assists, steals, and three-pointers). The resume goes on.

As impressive as his statistics are, Ridnour's leadership, unselfishness and faith are what truly amaze his teammates.

"He's well-humbled and well-grounded," fellow junior guard James Davis said. "He's the most down-to-earth guy I know. He puts God first in everything he does."

All of the accolades, the hype, the Paul Bunyan-size billboard — Ridnour doesn't care much for any of that. As "the ultimate gym rat," as Kansas head coach Roy Williams called him last month, Ridnour just wants to play basketball, and credits all his success to God.

"The Lord's blessed me with skills and I've just taken that and love to play," Ridnour said. "I truly feel most comfortable when I'm on the court."

Which has a lot to do with being from Blaine, where Ridnour said, "There's not a lot else to do."

Perhaps as equally impressive as Ridnour's devotion to Christianity is his desire to be the best on the basketball court: "I want to win more than anything and I'm not going to let anything else get in the way," he said.

Ridnour is known for a tireless summer-workout regime.

"He has a constant work ethic," said Jay Anderson, an Oregon junior forward and one of Ridnour's roommates. "He doesn't stop. Sometimes we have to force him to take breaks."

Anderson said Ridnour's work is contagious, making everyone else on the team better.

"He's the type of person that if there's one dinner roll left at the table, he'll give it to you," Davis said. "I admire him. He's a special person."

Tim McBride can't wait any longer. He's already lit another cigarette and asks Ziegler, the bartender, for another Miller Lite.

"Let's get the game going," McBride scoffs at the TV.

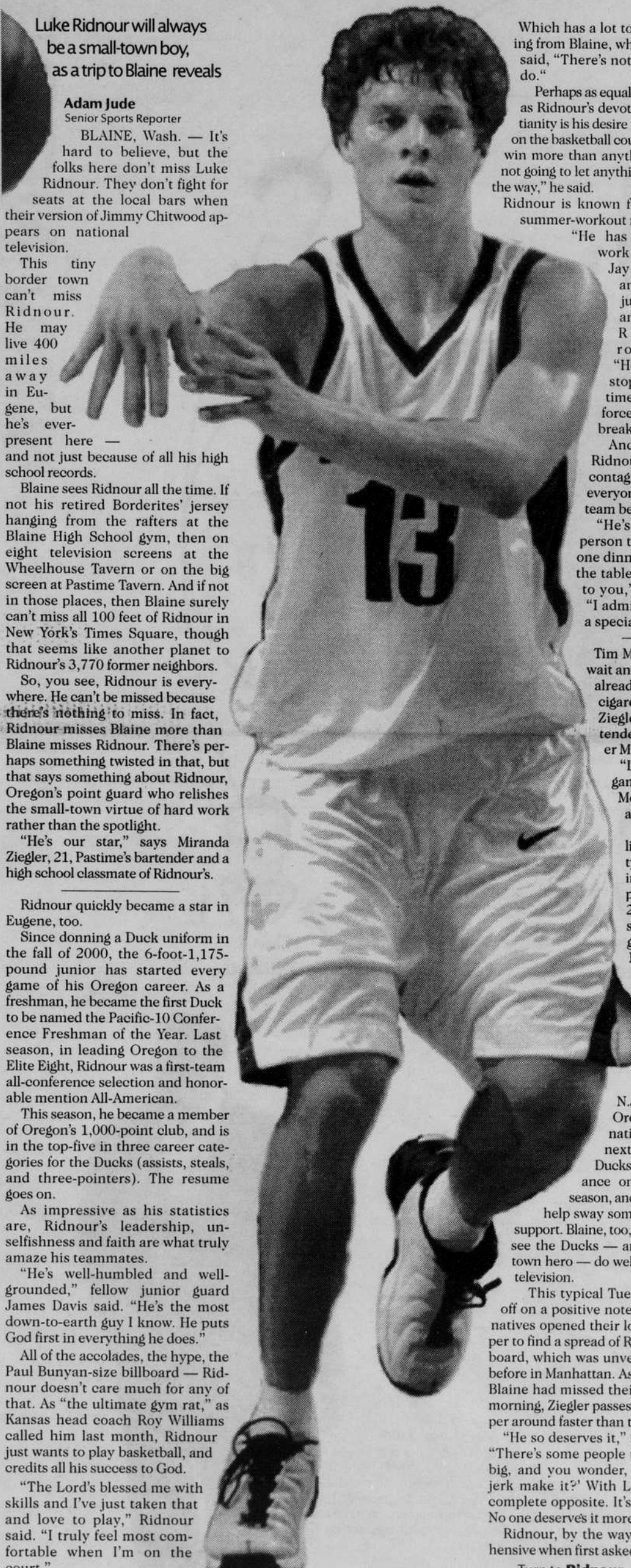
It seems like an eternity — though, in reality, it's probably been 20 minutes — since Gonzaga defeated North Carolina State in the first game of the Jimmy V. Classic in East Rutherford, N.J., and the Oregon-Cincinnati game is next. It's the Ducks' first appearance on ESPN this season, and a win would help sway some East Coast support. Blaine, too, would like to see the Ducks — and its hometown hero — do well on national television.

This typical Tuesday started off on a positive note. The Blaine natives opened their local newspaper to find a spread of Ridnour's billboard, which was unveiled the day before in Manhattan. As if anyone in Blaine had missed their star in the morning, Ziegler passes the newspaper around faster than the pints.

"He so deserves it," Ziegler says. "There's some people that make it big, and you wonder, 'How'd that jerk make it?' With Luke, it's the complete opposite. It's about time. No one deserves it more."

Ridnour, by the way, was apprehensive when first asked to be on the

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