

## SPORTS

**Best bet**  
NCAA men's tournament,  
first round  
Thursday and Friday, CBS

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## In the end, hope beats out youth's blunders

This is the hardest thing I've ever had to write. I wish I was a poet. Then this would be just another sad sonnet, a piece to throw in the back of the scrapbook.

But this is more than that. This is a farewell to the memories of youth.

My slow-moving fingers trembling and eyes tearing, I can't seem to say what I feel. I'm not ready to let go. I can't let go.

It's like part of my soul has been ripped away from me, thrown to the ground and run over by a Sumo wrestler in a Hummer.

But I will gather the pieces that remain, clean up a bit and move on. And so will the game. It just won't be the same.

Kirby Puckett is gone — forever. And he took the best part of my youth with him.

I have his book, you know. Two copies. "I Love This Game," written in 1993. I read it in a day. I have nearly every one of his baseball cards. Posters galore.

And some great memories.

As a kid, I was the biggest Kirby Puckett fan. I even named my dog after my boyhood idol. Sadly, after 84 dog years, the four-legged Kirby is almost gone, too. I just hope my mom doesn't take that departure as badly as I've taken this.

I loved Kirby for his love of the game, his love of life. His chubby stature, his erratic, care-free swing. His charitable work with children.

His smile.

Now, there's nothing to smile about. His secret life has been revealed.

Unlike Kirby's book, it's taken me a while to read this week's Sports Illustrated, which details the former Minnesota Twins' star's "rise and fall" from legend to legal woes.

Reading the article was like voluntarily stabbing myself in the back, or pulling a half-dozen teeth. It hurt.

Not that I didn't know what it said. I'd already heard about the allegations. It's just finally hit me, I guess.

When nobody else gave Kirby and the Twins a chance in the 1991 World Series, I was there, Homer Hanky in hand. Where's Kirby now, when I need him? Yankin' his homer in a restaurant bathroom.

Kirby goes to court next week for an allegedly dragging a woman into a bathroom of a Minneapolis restaurant and assaulting her. He's also on trial, in my courtroom, for breaking a heart.

If convicted of fifth-degree assault, he faces up to a year in jail; his posters are already serving a lifetime ban from my walls.

His lawyers claim the case is only

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**Adam  
Jude**

Out in left field

## Pac to Pac

The Oregon men follow up their regular-season Pac-10 title from 2002 with a win over USC, 74-66, in the Pac-10 Tournament championship game Saturday

### Men's basketball

**Peter Hockaday**  
Sports Editor

Just like last year, the Ducks stepped off the bus at the Casanova Center and were greeted by a crowd of screaming fans.

Just like last year, the Ducks returned as heroes from Los Angeles. Just like last year, the Ducks won the Pacific-10 Conference crown.

Sure, there was one major difference. Last year, the Oregon men's basketball team won the Pac-10 regular season championship with two close wins at UCLA and USC at the end of the season. This year, the Ducks beat those two teams again, in the Pac-10 Tournament.

Oregon's ride through the 2003 Pac-10 Tournament ended Saturday as the Ducks (23-9, 10-8 Pac-10) beat USC (13-17, 6-12), 74-66, to win the Pac-10 Tournament title in front of a national television audience and 17,485 fans at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. Oregon, most likely headed to the NCAA Tournament before the game started, erased any doubt by securing the Pac-10's automatic bid with the win.

"To get these three wins means a lot, going into the tournament," Oregon's Luke Ridnour told KUGN-AM after the game. "Hopefully, we can build on this."

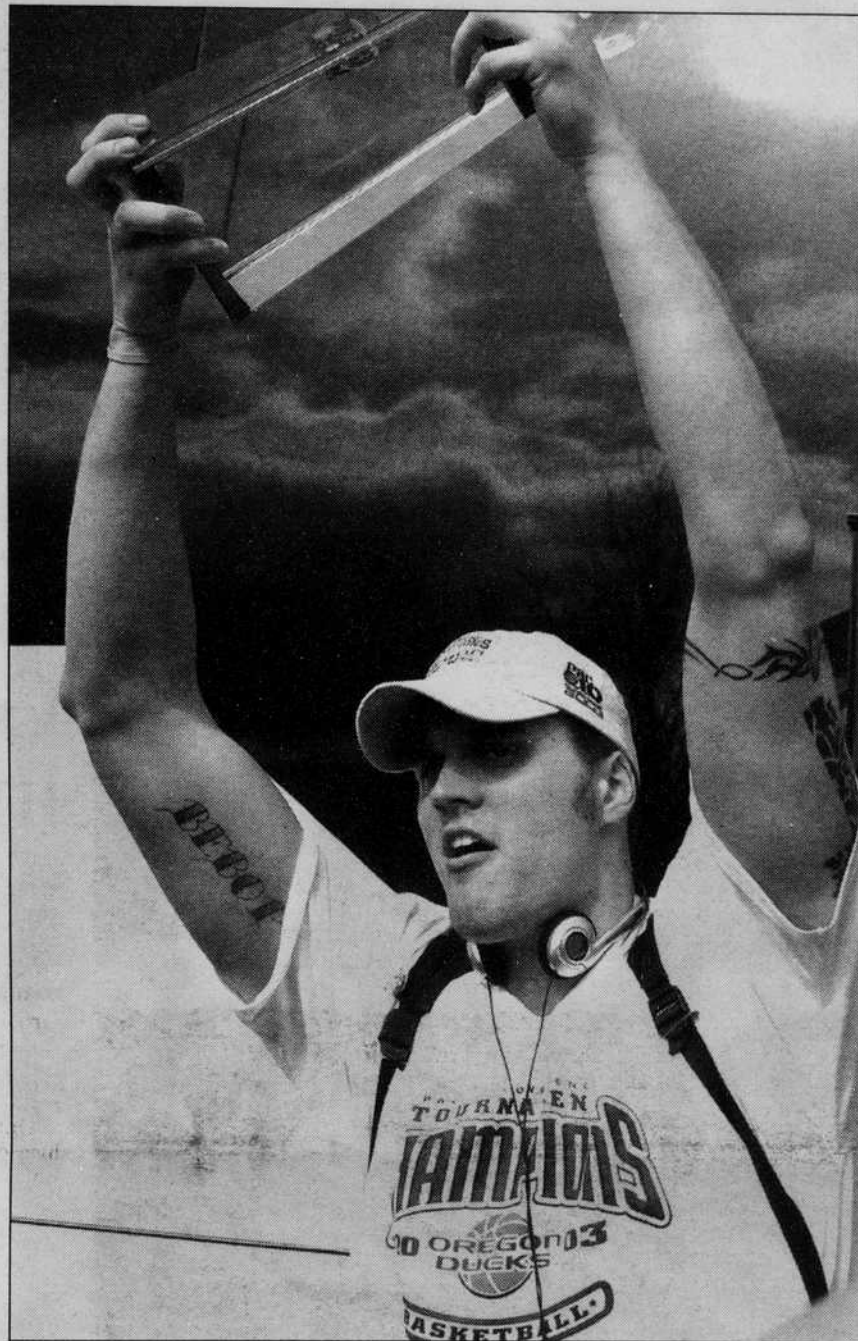
Ridnour was named MVP of the Pac-10 Tournament after scoring a team-high 18 points in the title game. Luke Jackson added 17 points, and four Ducks scored in double figures. Ridnour, Jackson and James Davis were named to the six-member All-Tournament team after the game.

Oregon, a No. 5 seed, became the lowest-seeded team to ever win the Pac-10 Tournament. Previously, no team ranked lower than No. 2 in the eight-team tournament had won the title.

Ridnour said the team was the theme for the Ducks in Los Angeles.

"After playing two tough games (Thursday and Friday), our team really responded," Ridnour said. "We played smart, real hard. We did get tired at the end of the game, but we were able to fight through that. That right there will get you ready to

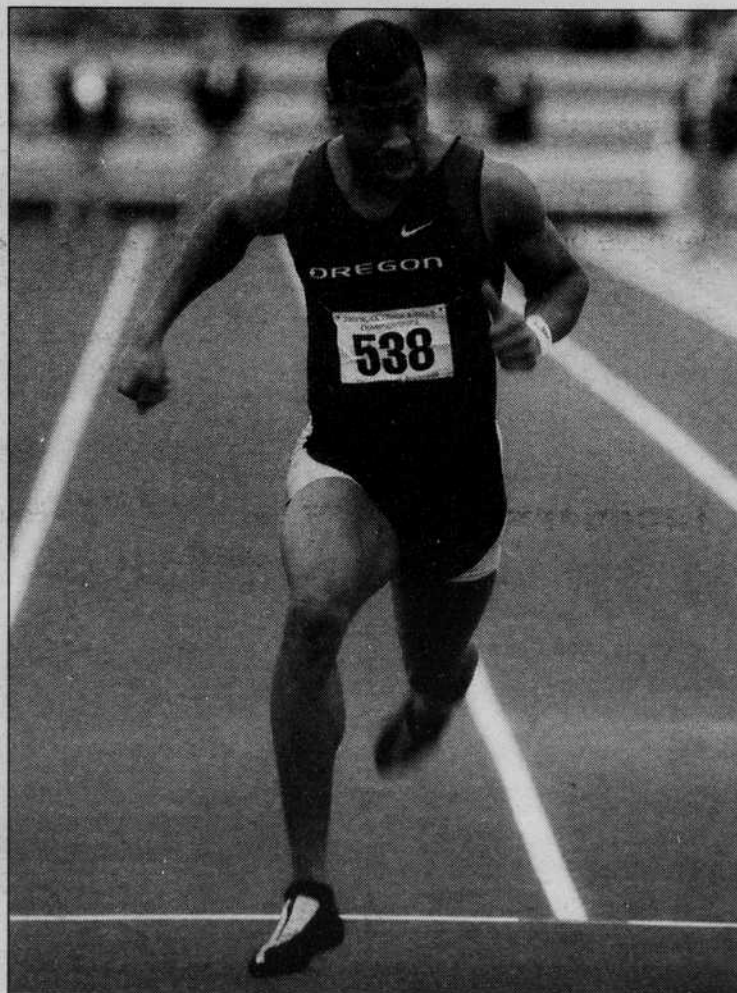
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Jeremy Forrest Emerald

Brian Helquist hoists the Pac-10 Tournament trophy as the Ducks return to Eugene on Sunday.

## UO vaults to success at NCAA indoors



Geoff Thurner Oregon Media Services

Samie Parker finished fourth in the 60-meters for his second All-American honor.

Three Duck men and women  
earn All-American honors at the  
NCAA Indoor Championships

### Track and field

**Jesse Thomas**  
Sports Reporter

Randal Tyson Track Center provided the scene for records to be broken and for All-Americans to stake their claims on the weekend.

The Oregon men's and women's track teams finished 41st and 15th in the team standings, respectively, at the NCAA Indoor Championships in Fayetteville, Ark.

The women were led by redshirt seniors Becky Holliday and Niki McEwen, who combined for 13 points. The 15th-place finish was the highest for the women since the 1996 NCAA indoor finale.

Holliday led the trio of Ducks, all of whom finished in the top-10 in the pole vault. She set a school record of 14 feet, 3 1/4 inches. Saturday marked her third All-American honor for the Ducks after taking second outdoors and seventh indoors in 2002.

"I can't be too disappointed," Holliday said. "I jumped well and had good attempts at every height. I guess it will make me hungrier for outdoors."

McEwen secured her highest-ever

NCAA place with her second-highest clearance at 13-11 1/4. McEwen entered the tournament ranked third and finished fourth, her third All-American honor in six indoor and outdoor NCAA appearances.

McEwen was content with her performance, considering she missed two weeks of training in mid-February after being sidelined by a case of shingles.

"I'm happy that I put together a solid season, and I'm starting to take advantage of my maturity and experience," McEwen said. "My confidence is improving and I'm having better practices more often, which is a sign of bigger heights to come."

Bringing up the rear for the Ducks was junior Kirsten Riley, who earned a personal best of 13-3 1/2 in her NCAA debut. Riley finished 10th after missing her attempts at 13-7 3/4.

For the men, senior Samie Parker improved his time by .02 seconds from last year to earn his second All-American honor. Parker's 6.64 seconds in the 60-meter dash placed him fourth to give the men's team five points and a 41st placing.

"I got out of the blocks slow, and that really cost me," Parker said. "I came in really wanting to be in the mix for the win, but all I can do now is look ahead. It was an all-right race and something I can build off."

Senior Adam Kriz also competed for the men on Friday in the weight

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