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# It's not quite a sports symphony, but blame it on the conductor

Welcome to Mr. Hockaday's Opus. Unlike Richard Dreyfus, I'm not trying to make anyone cry here. Oh goodness. He started the column with a "Mr. Holland's Opus" reference. It's going to be brutal.

So this is my last issue as Sports Editor (*The dam has opened. Here come the waterworks*) but not my last issue at the Emerald. I'm coming back next year. They'll have to pry this keyboard from my cold, dead fingers someday.

I'm doing commentary (*ha!*) for the opinion page (*double ha!*) as an I-need-to-study maneuver. I'm going to do my best not to write about sports next year, but it might be tough.

I mean, I love sports. I love sports more than breathing, and I really like breathing. I love sports so much, I want to devote my life to writing about it. I want to live in that sports world like so many people already do.

Isn't that so weird? What are sports, really? Games. Grown men playing kids' games and people like me taking it way too seriously.

And yet, there's something about it. Something that makes people reach for the sports page before the community section.

I've heard this before...

I know. But darn it, it's my opus. They didn't tell Richard Dreyfus to stop composing, did they? What would've happened if they'd told Mozart to stop composing stuff? Huh? And yes, I did just compare myself to Mozart.

Like Jell-O that's been in the fridge for a while, my love for sports has only solidified in four years of doing this job. Why? Because of the Duck. Because of the athletes. Because of the motorcycle speeding onto the field before football games. Because of Hayward Field and Mac Court and Autzen Stadium.

I love Nike U., where the students' drinking motto is "Just Do It" and wearing Adidas is like worshipping the Devil. Where we have the Knight Law School and Knight Library and visitors ask "Who is this Mr. Knight?" and we respond "He is The One."

But there's more to it than that. Duck athletics is like a big alumni club. For years, we'll have that connection with other Oregon alumni. People will say "Do you remember Joey Harrington?" "Remember Luke Ridnour?"

This experience was much more than Joey and the Lukes. There were Prefontaine Classics and soccer matches under the lights at Papé Field. There were Duck flags flying from cars. There was the rush of students as the doors opened at Mac Court.

This is what I'll remember from my time here. I'll remember standing in line for eight hours to get Civil War tickets. I'll remember Freddie Jones' dunks and Maurice Morris' incredible logic-defying run in the

Fiesta Bowl. I'll remember driving all night to Los Angeles to cover a game at the Rose Bowl and being eternally happy I did. I'll remember the walk across the river to Autzen Stadium. I'll remember huddling under the rain at Hayward Field track meets, interviewing athletes that were just so happy to be there they might as well have been in the Bahamas.

I'll remember Nashville, Tenn., and Madison, Wisc., the equally thrilling feeling after a win over Texas and a loss to Utah. I'll remember Pullman, Wash., and Corvallis, Arizona and San Francisco. I'll remember the Pac-10. Is there a conference that more defines its region than the Pac-10?

And I'll remember the people. A lot has been written about Tom Heinonen, but I'll always remember sitting in his office as a scared-piss-less sophomore, saying "Honestly, I know nothing about track and field. Nothing." And him responding "That's fine. Let's start with the scoring meets..." I'll remember the beaming faces of Micah Harris and Kevin Mitchell, the honesty of Jason Fife and the tenacity of Chalise Baysa.

Oh, goodness. That's enough. I've still got you, I'm amazed. Like a symphony, this column was long and jumbled, often boring and not well-conducted. But it's my opus, dang it. And now I'll stop crying.

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## Men's

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board. Behind the two stars, the highest-ranked Oregon athletes heading into the meet are Samie Parker (ranked sixth in the 100), Eric Logsdon (seventh in the 5,000-meter race) and Adam Kriz (seventh in the hammer). The top eight positions in every event score points for the team, on a sliding scale from first through eighth.

Trevor Woods (ninth in the pole vault), Hartmann (11th in the 10,000) and Mitchum (16th in the 110-meter hurdles) are knocking on the scoring-spots door. Hartmann has a reputation as a big-meet runner, and Woods has been working all season on technique that could take him over greater heights in the vault.

"You get to the playoffs or post-season in any sport, the adrenaline kicks in," Woods said. "In the vault, if you can control it right, that's when you'll start getting on some poles you might not normally get on, which lets you clear

higher heights."

After the almost-scorers, there's a handful of Ducks who will need supreme efforts to score points at the national meet. But Brett Holts (21st in the steeplechase), Ryan Andrus (22nd in the 10,000), Jordan Kent (24th in the 200), Matt Scherer (25th in the 400), Brandon Holliday (25th in the 400 hurdles) and the 4x400 team (made up of Kent, Holliday, Scherer and Travis Anderson, ranked 18th) have an outside chance to score at the meet.

The Ducks may or may not benefit from increased amounts of qualifying at the NCAAs this year. Because of a new regional-meet system this year, more athletes than ever are making the trip to Sacramento for the NCAA Championships. With the regional-meet system, the top five finishers in every event automatically qualify for NCAAs and then a national committee adds another 6-8 athletes from the national list.

So that means for the first time

ever, field-event athletes will face qualifying rounds similar to sprinters. Woods, for example, has a qualifying round in the pole vault on Wednesday, then has finals on Friday if he makes it there. Sprinters, as well, have three rounds of qualifying this year instead of two.

The first Ducks will start competition on Wednesday. Almost every Duck will be in action, starting with Parker's 100 preliminaries at 10:45 a.m. and ending with Logsdon's 5,000 qualifier at 10 p.m. The only Ducks not in action Wednesday will be Andrus and Hartmann, who run the 10,000 at 9:40 p.m. on Thursday.

If all goes well for the Ducks, three athletes and one relay team could still be running Saturday, the final day of the meet. Mitchum's 110 hurdles finals are set for Saturday evening, as are Kent's 200 finals, Logsdon's 5,000 final and the finals for the 4x400 relay.

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