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Just a hard day's work for Larsen

Jen Larsen, former North Carolina assistant, joins the Ducks as the new head coach of women's lacrosse

By Jesse Thomas
Sports Reporter

For Jen Larsen, life has been a rush lately.

Moving from the East Coast, living with her real estate agent and accepting the Oregon women's lacrosse head coaching position have all been nothing short of hectic.

"It's been a whirlwind," Larsen said. "I feel like I'm just spinning with everything. I'm learning the ropes and figuring out how things get done, and spreading the word about Oregon lacrosse."

But Larsen thrives on challenges and knows it will be an uphill battle, both in establishing a team and learning about herself.

"I'm just excited about the opportunity and thrilled to be here," Larsen said. "I'm pleased with the interest that I'm getting from some of the top athletes. I'm really excited about the fact that the word is spread about Oregon and students are excited about it."

The announcement came in late July for Larsen, who will lead the Ducks into lacrosse intercollegiate competition in the 2004-05 school year. Although Larsen has never held a head coaching position, she has experience in assistant coaching for the sport.

Larsen, a University of Virginia graduate, has been an assistant coach at University of North Carolina for the past three years. When she heard about the opening of a program at Oregon, she sent in her résumé.

Prior to being a Tar Heel, Larsen was an assistant coach and camp director for the field hockey program at Duke University from 1998 to 2000. The former Cavalier graduate also worked at Georgetown from 1996 to 1998 as an assistant lacrosse and field hockey coach.

For Larsen, the West Coast is entirely new. Despite having a few relatives up and down the seaboard, Larsen hasn't visited Oregon since her youth.

"I'd only been here on a family trip as we drove cross-country," she said. "I'd only been to Crater Lake, and that's the only thing of the state of Oregon that I remembered my whole life."

Larsen made her return over the July 4 weekend during the interview process, and it was a little different than she remembered — or at least Eugene was.

"During my whole interview I couldn't find anything I didn't love about this place," Larsen said. "And it got to a point where I was walking around like, 'All right, there has got to be something.' And I really left wanting and just dreaming about getting this job."

That dream has come true for the 29-year-old Larsen, who describes herself



Jessica Waters Photo Editor

Oregon lacrosse head coach Jen Larsen takes some time away from her busy schedule to illustrate the equipment used in the sport, as many on the West Coast are unfamiliar.

as energetic, passionate and fun.

"Our search and our pool of candidates was unbelievable," Athletic Director Bill Moos said July 29 in a press conference. "The one that we selected rose above (the others) quite dramatically, in my opinion. We are very thrilled that Jen Larsen has agreed to be an Oregon Duck."

And thus the journey began in starting a team from scratch. Larsen will look to her mentor in North Carolina, women's head coach Jenny Slingsluff Levy, who also started her program from the ground up.

Larsen's first task included hosting a summer clinic camp on Aug. 16. The camp brought in high school athletes from across the state for a chance to improve their skills, meet Larsen and play alongside some U.S. national team players.

"It was fantastic," Larsen said of the clinic. "There's some kids that drove over four hours to the clinic and that is really exciting. There's going to be more opportunities and more clinics but the most exciting part was they were the first ever players to be involved in a lacrosse scrimmage on Oregon's campus."

Larsen's hope in the future is to have as many Oregon athletes on her roster as possible.

"I know that there are some really fine athletes in this state and they're starting to fall in love with lacrosse as a lot of people have on the East Coast," she said. "I want kids to dream about playing lacrosse at Oregon."

The most recent addition to the new staff is assistant coach Robert Bray. Bray is a former four-year lacrosse coach at St. Mary's College of Maryland and was one of the other candidates who applied for Larsen's position.

Larsen also realizes the challenge of familiarizing the community to the sport of lacrosse. The realization came

in a conference before the Sept. 6 Nevada football game where Larsen got to speak and ask, "How many of you have seen lacrosse?"

"I was really surprised with how many people raised their hands," she said.

Larsen's next question, "Well, how many of those people have seen women's lacrosse, not men's lacrosse?"

The response?

"Two people still had their hands up," she said. "So I definitely have my work cut out for me to introduce people to the game."

For Larsen, adjusting to this new lifestyle has not been easy. The majority of her furniture and belongings remain on the East Coast as she continues the moving process. And in her spare time she is looking to do some white-water rafting and kayaking.

"I love nature, I love being outside," said Larsen, who has been in Eugene since July 27. "I'm just taking it a day at a time at this point. It's a whole new life out here."

But thus far, Eugene has seemed the perfect fit for the 1993 lacrosse national champion. And the overwhelming feeling that is Oregon athletics has not scared Larsen a bit.

"I've just been surrounded by big-time athletics my whole life," she said. "I'm an athlete down to the very last part of me. I feel excited and honored to be part of it because it is such a big-time athletic department. You just pull up into this facility and almost get chills, it's so cool."

Larsen's team will take to Papé Field and begin competition at the start of the 2004-05 school year. She hopes to have some athletes signed to the roster by November in her ever-continuing crazy schedule.

Contact the sports reporter at jessethomas@dailyemerald.com.

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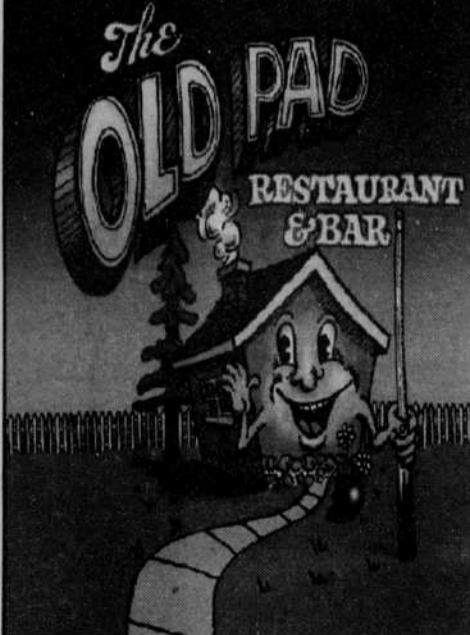
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