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COMMENTARY

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EDITORIAL

Duck image gets backing as academics take backseat

As bewildered fans poured out of Autzen Stadium on Saturday, dismayed at the 55-16 beating Washington State hammered down on the Ducks, a handful of questions came to mind.

How could the offense be so terrible? How could the secondary be so soft? How could the Ducks be on the cover of Sports Illustrated?

The first two questions can be answered by local sports writers, head coach Mike Bellotti and the Oregon football players. The last query has less to do with football and more to do with what this University has become.

The University is a football school. A basketball one, too. It's been years in the making, and last season's blemished record won't keep high-rolling, big-dollar donors from shelling out millions to keep the athletic department in the national spotlight.

Video games in the locker room. Special ventilators, optical gizmos and an atrium. A door rigged to whoosh (swoosh?) open — vertically — when players are ready to take to the field. Plasma TVs. Price tag: \$3.2 million.

And then there were the renovations of the stadium itself. Some 12,000 seats were added, along with suites for the said donors. Price tag: \$90 million.

Finally, it's the new arena to replace the aging McArthur Court. More than 14,000 patrons will pack the new facility. The donors will have luxury boxes, too. Price tag: More than \$100 million.

Clearly, the story in Sports Illustrated wasn't about the monumental win against Michigan. Instead, it was about the aforementioned big-ticket bonanzas. The Michigan game just served as a means to direct the spotlight to the Ducks' frivolous spending.

It's quite all right that students, alumni, Oregonians and national citizens get excited about Duck football. We in the office do, too.

But the excitement doesn't seem to be around when it comes to funding eight-figure academic buildings. Donors play integral roles in athletics, so it seems only reasonable that contributions would be comparable for academic purposes.

Donors have helped secure renovations to the University Museum of Arts. The library and law center were funded by one Mr. Phil Knight. Clearly, donors do recognize the need to donate.

And as an aside, University research did have a record-setting year, bringing in nearly \$80 million.

It's just that, well, athletics always seems to overshadow everything else.

Perhaps it's the excessive nature of some of the athletic department's spending — Joey Heisman — coupled with the fact that athletics seem to be raking in the money when the school's academic side is scraping by.

State higher education funding was less than expected this biennium, tuition is increasing — again — and the future appears uncertain. Knowing that some deep-pocketed friends are ready to come to the University's aid would be a blessing.

Regrettably, that just isn't so. So "Go Ducks!" Despite the Washington State loss, perhaps more winning will keep donors in good spirits and hopefully boost academic funding in the process.

EDITORIAL POLICY

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters @dailymerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submission must include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.



Steve Baggs Illustration

Commentary: An open forum

Welcome, readers, to the new school year and a new start for the Emerald. As editorial editor, I'll oversee the space you're reading now. The Commentary section is in many ways unique: It's the space where writers not only report the news, but interpret it in the context of their own worldview.

The editorial board will sound-off Monday through Thursday about issues ranging in scope from campus debates to international conflicts — anything that interests or affects students. Five columnists, myself included, will write about trends, hot-button topics and anything else that interests them, hopefully alerting and informing readers in the process. Look for your favorite columnist on the same day each week.

Most importantly, this space is for the Emerald's readers — students; faculty and staff; and members of the local, national and global communities — to voice their opinions and to reply to ideas seen here or elsewhere.

That being said, not all opinions are created equally. The language of debate is more frequently a weapon of prejudice, deceit and name-calling, and less often a dialectic of reason, lucidity and tolerance. Part of this, it turns out, stems from the unrelenting pace



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of the modern age. The time constraints of busy lives, not to mention the sheer mass of ideas available to the public, can compel consumers of information to ingest ideas in less time than a full and fair understanding and analysis of the facts often requires.

Such a circumstance is certainly not ideal, but it is probably often unavoidable in today's world. This situation becomes a problem when, in an effort to further an agenda, demagogues or other intellectually dishonest zealots — of potentially any political persuasion — take unfair advantage of the busy public's trust and short attention spans, disguising gross oversimplification as simplicity, and unthinking passion as rationality. They may label anyone who disagrees with their agenda

as "racist," "unpatriotic" or worse, regardless of whether the term legitimately applies — trying to exclude their adversary's ideas from the realm of discussion by labeling them insensitive or otherwise inappropriate.

Many places in the media have devolved into forums where uninformed rants and ideologically incestuous nonsense run amok, often times leaving little room for rational, tolerant discussion. This space is not one of those places. Given the highly charged — and sometimes fiercely polarized — political atmosphere of recent times, it is more essential now than at any time in my memory to be skeptical of half-considered sound bytes and propaganda.

Finally, the rest of the Emerald staff and I want to hear from you. Tell us what you think about our news stories, our editorials and our columns. Write us a letter to the editor or a guest commentary, or come to our office in EMU Suite 300.

Stay informed, think for yourself, and have a great year.

Contact the editorial editor at traviswillse@dailymerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Emerald ...

Every year the Emerald seemingly goes through changes: some good, some bad, some for no reason and others with great clarity in mind.

We'll leave it to readers to evaluate how things end up, but here's the plan:

Page one: Here readers find the stories most important to the University community. Typically, these stories will be campus-related and written by Emerald staffers. On occasion, national or international stories will find their way onto the front, and these stories won't likely be written by Emerald reporters or editors.

Commentary: This section is always going to be on page two, and it's reserved for the editorial — the voice of the Emerald —



Brad Schmidt
 Of chief concern

columnists and community members.

Nation and World: The Emerald has reserved a small section of the paper, usually on page two or three, for issues and events outside of the state. There will generally be

at least one story pulled from a wire service.

Pulse: The entertainment section of the newspaper comes out every Thursday. Pulse covers the local music scene, includes things such as art and poetry, and has movie, CD and restaurant reviews. This year we're extending an offer to readers to contribute material for publication: photos, drawings, poetry, whatever.

Sports: Often considered the bread and butter of the Emerald, the sports section offers readers their daily assortment of Duck analyses and recaps.

So that's it; I hope you enjoy!

Contact the editor in chief at editor@dailymerald.com.

ONLINE POLL

Each week, the Emerald publishes the previous week's poll results and the coming week's poll question. Visit www.dailymerald.com to vote.

Last question: What's the worst part about coming back to school?

Results: 49 votes.

Paying higher tuition — 34.7 percent or 17 votes

Buying books — 20.4 percent or 10 votes

Tests and quizzes and finals, oh my! — 16.3 percent or 8 votes

Early morning classes — 12.2 percent or 6 votes

Walking in the rain — 8.2 percent or 4 votes

Taking classes from scatterbrained professors — 8.2 percent or 4 votes

This week: Where do you get your textbooks?

Choices: The University Bookstore; Alternate bookstores; I buy them online; Borrow from friends or the library; Don't buy ... don't read.