

# Backup Legace could get playoff start for Wings

Detroit's head coach has not officially named a starting goaltender for the playoffs

By Helene St. James  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

DETROIT — Manny Legace sat at his stall at Joe Louis Arena, preparing to face his first round of questions as the Detroit Red Wings' playoff goaltender (or maybe not). He needed a hat, though, because his hair was all mussed from Monday's practice, so he shouted at teammate Chris Chelios.

Chelios quickly lobbed his hat across the locker room — after all, it was a Cheli's Chili hat, and perhaps the only thing better than playoff hockey is free publicity — only it didn't quite fit.

"What a peahead!" Legace said after trying on the cap and finding it barely came down over the top of his scalp.

Chelios — that peahead — also is one of the Wings' top four defensemen and will be one of Legace's best friends when he and the Wings begin the first round of the playoffs Wednesday against Nashville. Or maybe not.

Curtis Joseph is technically the Wings' No. 1

goaltender. But he has had a sore right ankle, hasn't played since March 21 and only got back on the ice last Friday.

Monday was his first all-out practice, and though he said he felt "good and ready to go," it's unlikely he will start. Friday he said he would continue to feel the effects of the injury for a while and that he didn't expect to play because he had been out so long.

Legace, technically the backup, has carried the team for chunks of the season and finished with a 23-10-5 record, a 2.12 goals-against average and a .920 save percentage.

Coach Dave Lewis wouldn't reveal to reporters

who would get the nod, and Legace and Joseph said they didn't know, either. But when asked if the goalies knew, Lewis smiled and said, "They might."

"I feel comfortable with whoever I choose," Lewis said. "I want to do what's right for the individual, and what's more important, what's right for the team."

Lewis said he might let everyone know who the starter is today, and if not, then definitely by Wednesday evening.

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Adam Amato Senior Photographer

Luke Jackson leaves the Ducks with 1,970 career points, second-best in Oregon history. He is expected to be a first-round selection in the upcoming NBA Draft.

## FUTURE

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of seven games. I've got to take my hat off to these guys how well they put us in a position to be here today."

Now, they leave. They give way to the core group of players that will make up Oregon's roster for the next four seasons.

Or so the Ducks hope.

Those include Chamberlain Oguchi, Bryce Taylor and Maarty Leunen, three players who give the Ducks one of their best recruiting classes in program history.

"We're going to be young, which is going to give me a few more gray hairs to coach that group next year, but at the same time, I feel good about the group that's coming in the door," Kent said.

They'd better be as advertised, or the Ducks (18-13 overall) may not see the postseason for the first time in four years.

Oregon returns a core group of players to the 2004-05 team, headlined by point guard Aaron Brooks and forward Ian Crosswhite. But it is a group that didn't completely show its promise.

Crosswhite struggled late in the season. Freshman Mitch Platt went down with an injury early on and lost valuable playing time. Brooks sat out 10 crucial

Pacific-10 Conference games. Some of those contests the Ducks should have won, and in turn they probably cost Oregon a chance at an NCAA Tournament berth.

The list goes on with Adam Zahn, Jordan Kent and Matt Short, individuals who will need to find consistency that wasn't there this season.

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Ernie Kent  
Oregon head coach

"I think the good thing about the group that's coming back next year is they have had the opportunity to sit here and get a firsthand look at what it takes to be a great player, have a great team and great tradition," Ernie Kent said.

That group will try to outdo what the four seniors accomplished during their time at Oregon. That included a Pac-10

regular-season championship, a Pac-10 Tournament championship and three visits to the postseason.

"I just really appreciate my teammates," Jackson said. "I'm going to miss just going out every day and working hard and being with the guys you enjoy so much. Just to appreciate the coaches and the faith they've had in me all season long."

Hard work is what got the Ducks through the season. They battled to a 5-2 nonconference record to start the season, then went 9-9 in Pac-10 play. Oregon defeated Cal in the first round of the Pac-10 Tournament, probably a must for the postseason, and hung with Stanford for 38 minutes in round two before bowing out.

For as much hard work as Oregon put in, inconsistency became a problem. But Jackson, Ernie Kent and the Ducks fought through it and showed they deserved as much as a berth in the NIT.

"People thought we weren't even going to make it to postseason play," Davis said. "Coming back from Colorado, it was just a huge atmosphere for us. To be one of the last eight teams left, that's something in itself when nobody thought we'd be playing in the postseason."

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## HAGER

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only difference? It's Portland's home-opener.

And yet, how close that could have been to happening in Eugene.

The Beavers don't have an owner. They've been taken over by the PCL. That only happened last week.

Before that, the city of Portland was thinking of locking the team out of PGE Park because of unpaid debt accumulated by one of the team's previous management groups.

So where would the Beavers go?

One suggestion was Peoria, Ariz., the spring training home of the club's

parent organization, San Diego.

The other destination?

Civic Stadium in Eugene.

Just think of the possibilities. Imagine what it would have been like to see potential major leaguers in our little city. I'd be interested.

Too bad it won't happen.

Guess we'll have to go all the way to Portland to see the likes of pitcher Dennis Tankersley and outfielder Xavier Nady, two of the Padres' better prospects at that level.

The opportunity to see the club in Eugene was almost realized, even though it wasn't set in stone. There would have been obstacles to getting the Beavers into Eugene, mainly

dealing with stadium issues, because quite honestly, Civic Stadium is a far cry from PGE Park.

There's a foundation of baseball fans in Eugene, no doubt. Since the sport left the University in 1981, there has been a void that hasn't quite been filled.

The school's Club program thrives, somewhat, even though it appears to suffer from the same setbacks that dominate the level. There's little money with too much travel.

But it gets its share of fans. That was apparent this weekend when the team hosted Western Washington in a three-game series.

Even as the doubleheader Saturday wound down, the fans were there.

They were seen basking in the sun, hoping the Ducks could pull out a late-inning win in the second game of the afternoon.

Oregon couldn't do that. But it's presence was enough.

The fact the Beavers even considered Eugene a possible destination is enough to show baseball in this city could thrive. In doing a story on the state of baseball in Eugene, I learned that the sport would be on the table if the University could meet all the rules stipulated by Title IX.

The thing is, that's not going to happen for a while. There are a number of factors that need to be cleared, the most pressing being the equality of women's sports to men's sports.

Women need to be given more

opportunities at the college level. I, for one, am for that. Women's athletics have proven to be competitive, to an extent, and interesting to watch. Hopefully lacrosse will prove to be the same way when it starts next year.

For now, I'll stick to watching Club baseball and ESPN and ESPN2 to catch Major League Baseball action. If I want to see high-level baseball in person, I'll head to Portland, where the Beavers are an underrated attraction in a city that is dominated by Blazers-mania.

Too bad the Beavers can't play in Eugene. I'd be out there every night.

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