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# Filling the mold

Justin Phinisee knows he needs to step up in the 2004 season for Oregon to be successful

By Hank Hager  
Sports Editor

Justin Phinisee sits in the lounge area of the Casanova Center, intently listening to questions and firing back with what he thinks he must do for the Ducks to be successful in 2004.

Then a question shocks him slightly. It doesn't surprise him, doesn't catch him off guard. Instead, it makes him think and remember what it's been like to play for Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti.

"Is it scary to think you're going to be a junior?"

Phinisee takes a second to laugh. Then he answers as confidently as he has every other answer, day in and day out, since he came to Eugene from Downey, Calif.

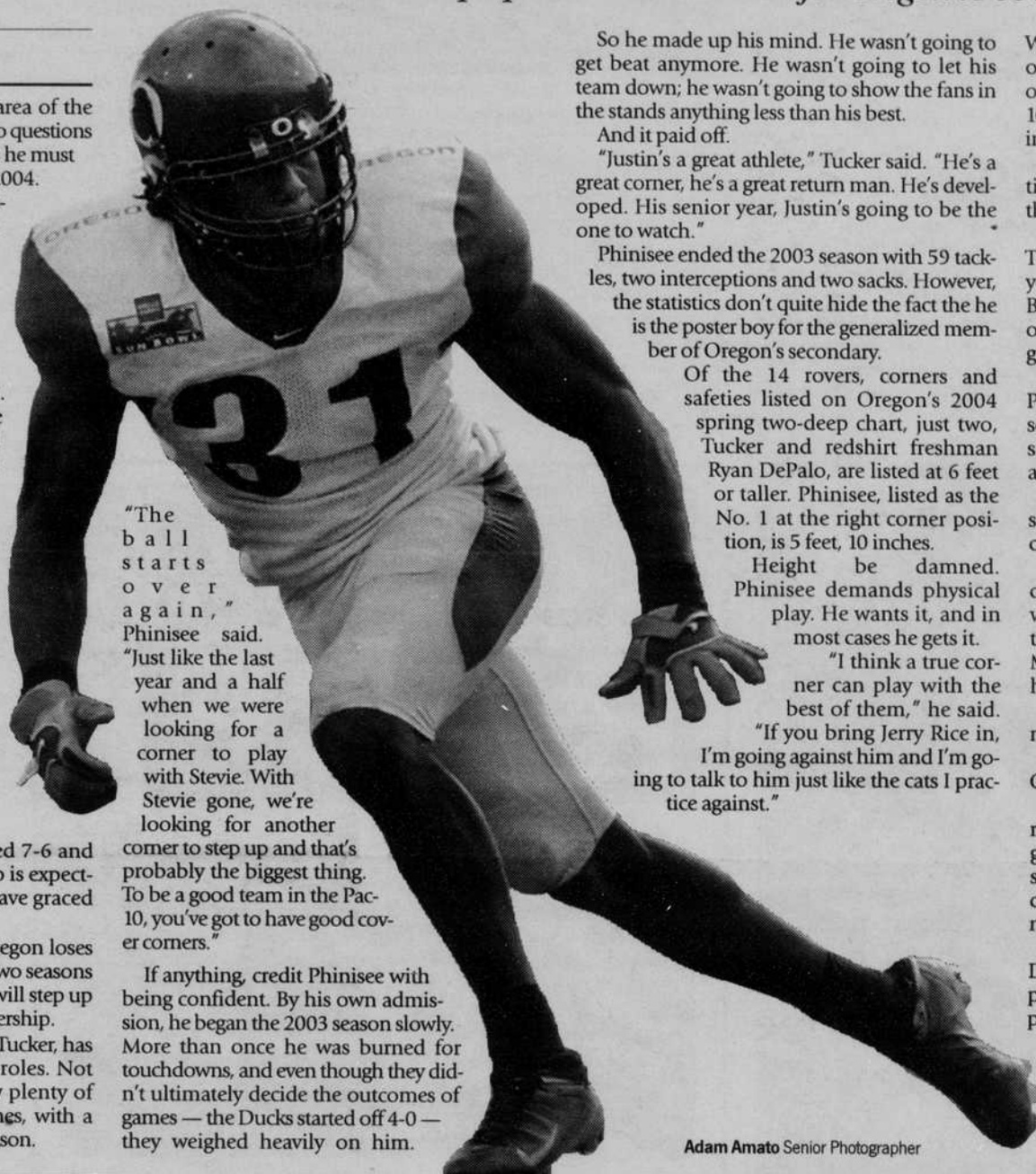
"Time flies," he said after Oregon's sixth practice of the spring. "But I'm looking forward to it. As a junior, I've got a year under my belt, some experience, some confidence. When we get that (team) chemistry, I'm looking forward to some big things."

Big things have always been expected of Oregon's secondary. In 2001, when the Ducks defeated Colorado in the Fiesta Bowl and ended the season No. 2 in the nation, they had the likes of Rashad Bauman and Steve Smith, both drafted into the NFL.

Since then, as Oregon has finished 7-6 and 8-5, players such as Keith Lewis, who is expected to be chosen in the 2004 draft, have graced Autzen's surface.

But now comes another era. As Oregon loses Lewis and Steven Moore, a starter for two seasons at cornerback, the focus falls on who will step up and replace the duo in talent and leadership.

Phinisee, along with senior Marley Tucker, has been mentioned by many in those roles. Not only is Phinisee a returner who saw plenty of action in 2003, he started eight games, with a majority of those coming late in the season.



"The ball starts over again," Phinisee said.

"Just like the last year and a half when we were looking for a corner to play with Stevie. With Stevie gone, we're looking for another corner to step up and that's probably the biggest thing. To be a good team in the Pac-10, you've got to have good corner corners."

If anything, credit Phinisee with being confident. By his own admission, he began the 2003 season slowly. More than once he was burned for touchdowns, and even though they didn't ultimately decide the outcomes of games — the Ducks started off 4-0 — they weighed heavily on him.

So he made up his mind. He wasn't going to get beat anymore. He wasn't going to let his team down; he wasn't going to show the fans in the stands anything less than his best.

And it paid off.

"Justin's a great athlete," Tucker said. "He's a great corner, he's a great return man. He's developed. His senior year, Justin's going to be the one to watch."

Phinisee ended the 2003 season with 59 tackles, two interceptions and two sacks. However, the statistics don't quite hide the fact he is the poster boy for the generalized member of Oregon's secondary.

Of the 14 rovers, corners and safeties listed on Oregon's 2004 spring two-deep chart, just two, Tucker and redshirt freshman Ryan DePalo, are listed at 6 feet or taller. Phinisee, listed as the No. 1 at the right corner position, is 5 feet, 10 inches.

Height be damned. Phinisee demands physical play. He wants it, and in most cases he gets it.

"I think a true corner can play with the best of them," he said.

"If you bring Jerry Rice in, I'm going against him and I'm going to talk to him just like the cats I practice against."

Want an example? Phinisee is quick to point one out. It comes in the shape of California senior Geoff McArthur, who emerged as one of the Pacific-10 Conference's most productive wide receivers in 2003, pulling in 85 passes for 1,504 yards.

Against Oregon, McArthur had just five receptions for 42 yards. The Ducks capitalized on that, taking the game, 21-17.

"I think (Phinisee) is a lot like Keith Lewis," Tucker said. "He does things sometimes and you're like, 'Justin, that's not part of the defense.' But when he does it, sometimes he capitalizes on it and sometimes (he doesn't). It's part of the game. It's part of being a corner."

That's the hook. As much of a mark as Phinisee made in the latter part of the 2003 season, he isn't even close to being guaranteed a position as a starting cornerback. Oregon's secondary is in flux as much as it has ever been.

Sophomore J.D. Nelson is penciled in as the starting free safety on the team's two-deep. He could, however, just as much move to corner.

Rodney Woods has shown himself as a prime candidate to start at the other corner position, and with time, Ryan Gilliam could very well be more than competent on the outside. Marc Walker, Marques Binns and Sam Hughes would all like to have something to say about the situation as well.

As much as Phinisee would like to stay at corner, he's also open to a spot at safety.

Just as long as he gets a chance to help the Oregon secondary.

"Justin is a football player," Bellotti said. "He's a returner, he's a good special teams player, he's a good corner. I think he can be a good rover or safety, too. If we have a couple corners we have confidence in, we'd love to play Justin inside. If not, I'd feel very comfortable with him at corner."

Phinisee, much like Bellotti and the rest of the Ducks, is quick to point out that it is just spring practice and as much as it can make or break a player's season, it won't act as the final answer.

So with that in mind, Phinisee will be content to get repetitions at corner, safety, and the punt and kick return teams. He'll try to act as a veteran. He'll watch tape,

Adam Amato Senior Photographer

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## Track gets respect from this dummy

"Track and field sucks."

Those four words amount to blasphemy in the city of Eugene, aka "Tracktown, USA."

Those four words also came out of my mouth roughly two months ago when I was assigned to the men's track and field beat. I was a firm believer that a sport wasn't a sport unless a ball was in play.

Being the epitome of a track dummy, I struggled to find the reasoning behind jumping into a sand pit, vaulting over a bar with a flexible pole or chucking a spear as far as your shoulder would allow. How people could sit in the stands at Hayward Field and be entertained by the long jump, pole vault or javelin baffled my mind.

When it came time to cover my first track meet during spring break, I walked into Hayward Field sure of two things: I would be bored for the next five hours, and I would leave with a nice rosy sunburn.

After five hours at the Oregon Preview, however, it turned out that the only sure thing was the sunburn.

After watching Tommy Skipper win the pole vault and Brandon Holliday win the 400-meter hurdles, I was astonished by the amount of athleticism that went into competing in the sport of track and field. An



Jon Roetman  
Roughing the passer

expected five hours of boredom had turned into five hours of being intrigued.

Watching Leonidas Watson compete in the long jump gave me a different perspective of track athletes: They're not just competitors, they're entertainers.

As Watson stood at the beginning of the runway, preparing himself for the jump, he looked to the Hayward crowd and signaled for fans to start clapping. Oregon fans responded with a rhythmic clap that filled Watson with a noticeable increase of energy. The St. Louis native responded with an event-winning mark on his fifth jump, leading to plenty of "oohs" and "ah-hhs" from the crowd.

Skipper competed with the same kind of flair in the pole vault. The freshman

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## Club dance takes home 15th place at nationals

The Ducks competed in the National Collegiate Dance Championships in Daytona Beach, Fla., earlier this month

By Kirsten McEwen  
Freelance Reporter

Bringing together art and athletic ability, Oregon's Club dance team has made its mark on the national scene.

### Club Sports

Thirteen members of Oregon's dance team traveled to Daytona Beach, Fla., to participate in the National Collegiate Dance Championships on April 2 through 4. The preliminary round of the tournament was held in Peabody Auditorium, while the finals were at the Band Shell, located on Daytona Beach.

Oregon finished 15th in the nation, and team members said they felt confident about the performance.

"We were excited about the performance, and I think we are all proud of how we competed as a team and how much work we put into it," co-captain Robin Badstubner said.

Leading up to the event, the team practiced six hours a week. The Ducks stayed in Eugene during spring break to perfect the routine.

"We stayed here during break and practiced in the Rec Center," Badstubner said. "We spent over 35

hours in just one week preparing for Florida."

The Ducks performed a routine that "was a little edgier" than their normal style, Badstubner said.

"We tried to use music and movements that made us really want to go out there and dance," Badstubner said.

Oregon began to plan for nationals in the fall. The team had to submit a video entry by Dec. 1 to qualify for the championships, she said.

### A breezy weekend

Windy weather and tough competition are what Oregon's Club sailing team searched for last weekend when the team traveled to San Francisco to compete in the St. Francis Intersectional.

The Stanford-hosted event was a chance for Oregon to sail at a high-class venue against top West Coast schools.

Sailing coordinator George Yioulos said winds were blowing 15-20 knots, "supplying perfect wind for the participants who had views of the Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz Island."

"It was cold, it was windy, it was foggy, there was tons of chop and it was ... awesome," Yioulos said.

In preparation for the St. Francis Intersectional, Oregon's Club sailing team hosted a clinic at Fern Ridge Reservoir on April 3 through 4. Blaine Pedlow, the sailing coach at California, came for the event and ran the clinic for 20 boats. The Ducks took advantage of having a coach nearby and used the weekend to fine

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