

HAGER

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"I knew I had a long-term option, one that's better than basketball," she said by phone Monday.

But basketball is a part of Williams' life. She spent her childhood in Portland playing the game, watching it, living it.

The game was fun.

For three years at Jesuit High School, the game was fun. During her senior season at Reynolds High School, while leading her team with 26.4 points per game, basketball was really fun.

But then a December rolled around four years later, and for Williams, the game she once knew and loved wasn't there anymore.

Her sanctimonious departure from Oregon on Dec. 12, 2002, left the former guard with a hole in her life and the Ducks with a gap in their starting lineup.

That's when it started.

And it hasn't ended.

Even as she played for the Los Angeles Sparks last season.

Even as she spent a week with the Seattle Storm in the team's training camp. That one week where she had a chance to prove she belonged; but in reality, Seattle head coach Anne Donovan couldn't see her as more than the 10th or 11th player off the bench, at most.

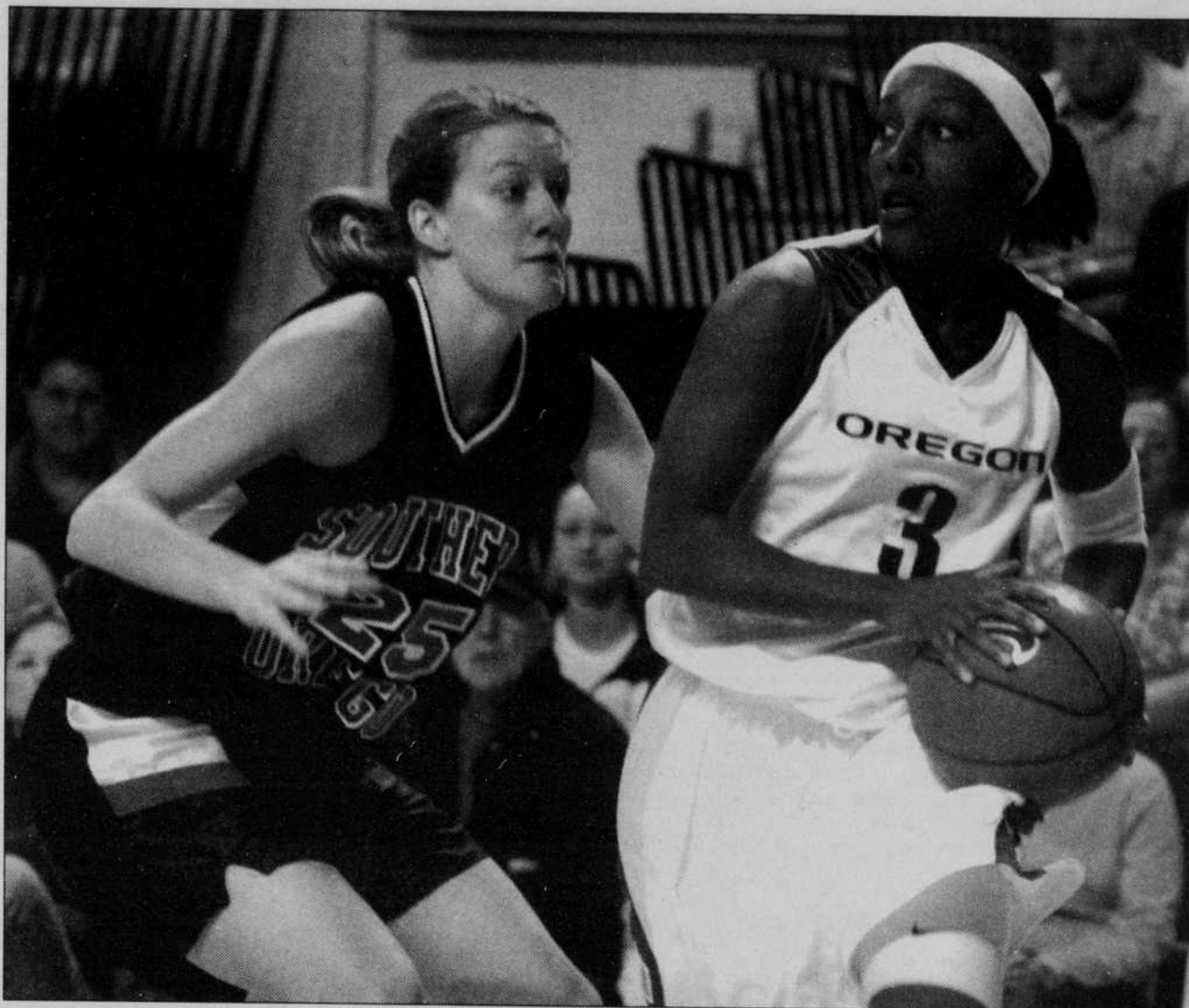
"Basketball just hasn't been fun for me," Williams said of her recent adventures on the court. "I just wasn't getting the same satisfaction. It could be for a number of reasons. At the pro level, it's not about fun, it's about business.

"Everything that happened at Oregon took so much out of me."

That departure from Oregon still sits dark over in the corner, idle, untouched and gathering cob webs. It's a dead subject, a done deal, something that has been placed on the back burner and forgotten.

Neither Williams nor current Oregon head coach Bev Smith have publicly said why the decision to remove the former player from the team was made. We're all left with speculation, rumors and questions.

There's a chance most outside the program will never know.



Shaquala Williams (3), seen here early in the 2002-03 season against Southern Oregon, is going to be an Oregon law student beginning in August. The former Duck point guard has played for the WNBA's Los Angeles team and recently tried out for Seattle, but she was cut a week ago. Emerald

Maybe that's best for all. Maybe in the long run it will hurt everyone in the equation.

Either way, Williams has tried to move on. She thought Oregon had as well.

"In my mind, I thought it was over, done with," Williams said. "I spoke with one of the coaches the other day. They spoke about it, and it was like it was kind of an open wound.

"I've moved on."

And so has Dan Muscatell, the head coach at Sacramento State. Williams spent time there this past season as an assistant, spending most of her time coordinating tape exchange and

producing scouting reports.

Muscatell, a former Oregon assistant, discredited any rumors about Williams and her personality — and there have been some — for her quick departure from Seattle and the WNBA.

After all, he said, she did a great job with the Hornets and is welcome to come back.

"She was invaluable from the aspect of coordinating," Muscatell said. "She has just got a great feel for the game. Nothing she did surprised me. She was even better in some areas than I expected she would be."

For now, Williams will focus on her life as

an academic. She applied to Willamette University in Salem, Howard University in Washington, D.C., and Seattle University.

But Oregon was always on her mind. Eugene, after all, is like her second home.

"Ever since I've been young, I've never wanted to go far away from home," she said. "My best experiences in Eugene were not in basketball."

Here's to three more years in Eugene.

Contact the sports editor at hankhager@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

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