

Sports Editor:
Hank Hager
hankhager@dailymerald.com

Monday, June 7, 2004



Hank Hager
Behind the dish

I'll never forget the things I've witnessed

When I was six years old, I was introduced to baseball by my father and the rest of my family.

A couple years later, football and basketball followed. When I was 10, hockey became mainstream for me, not just a Canadian sport anymore.

For years, I grew up watching those sports and those sports alone.

I could name the entire starting lineup for the 1989 San Francisco Giants. Whenever Larry Bird and Michael Jordan squared off, you could bet I'd be in front of the television.

I always loved watching Joe Montana and Steve Young throw tight spirals for the 49ers, and Pat Falloon (I know, no one's ever heard of him) skate on the Cow Palace rink in 1991 before the Sharks formally moved to San Jose.

The love of those sports grew and eventually I became a fan of all teams; I just wanted to watch a baseball game, whether or not that actually involved going to the Kingdom. That place was downright scary.

Then I came here.

I uprooted to Eugene, visited McArthur Court, Autzen Stadium and Hayward Field and began to realize what I was missing.

I was missing just how great it can be to watch and cover games played by people my own age. To turn around while in the stands and see the 6,000-plus students screaming at the top of their lungs, hoping, just hoping, that doing so can propel Oregon to a win.

To see the love those students — and even most fans in general — show toward a school is absolutely breathtaking and certainly a sight to see in a time when, quite frankly, athletes and the sports they play are getting less and less respect.

I've been fortunate for these past three years to be able to get away from the crowd and watch from afar. While it was always great to be in the middle of everything, this past year especially has been a breath of fresh air.

I've seen how fans and students alike can rally around a football team that has just lost four of its past five games. I've seen how the leader of that team has evolved from a more reserved personality to an aggressive, let's-get-it-done mentality.

I've seen one of the best players in Oregon basketball history play in the 1,000th game at McArthur Court. Then I watched him play in New York and saw just how vulnerable athletes can be sometimes.

I've seen the Pit shake — twice. Both times against teams most will never see again. We're talking Colorado and George Mason.

During finals week.

I know, I know. I never thought the whole building could shake like that.

Wow.

Best of all, I've seen people, athletes and fans alike, talk about Oregon sports as

Turn to **HAGER**, page 13A

And the award goes to . . .

The Emerald sports staff hands out its yearly Emmies to the best in Oregon athletics

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

This year's over already?
OK, so it may have ended quickly, but we've all seen things that made us cheer, smile, cry and remember what it used to be like.

Well, it's time for the fifth-annual Emmies.
I know, I know. After five years, we still couldn't come up with a better name. But this one just seems to fit.

We honor the best in Oregon athletics during the 2003-04 seasons.

It wasn't the greatest year for Oregon teams, but then again, it was far from the worst. From the Sun Bowl to Tallahassee, Fla., regional, the NIT to tennis in Oxford, Miss., Oregon teams surprised and impressed us.

Most Entertaining Female: Sarah Mason.

This was really a hard choice this year.

OK, maybe not so much. But even though Mason played for a team that didn't quite live up to its potential, she displayed plenty of fireworks for the fans in the stands at McArthur Court.

Mason not only is the future of Oregon volleyball, but its present. And she's going to be a sophomore next year.

Most Entertaining Male: Andre Joseph.

We honored Joseph with the Best Interview award in 2003, and much to our amazement, he didn't come close to qualifying himself with the honor again. But you know what, we really don't care because when someone like Joseph steps onto to McArthur Court floor, you can't help but have fun watching him.

Joseph defined intensity. Whether that was from beyond the three-point line or defending the opposition's best, he had this look about him: you're not going to get past me, oh no.

Imagine what it would have been like had he started at Oregon as a freshman instead of transferring his junior year.

Biggest Heart: Kevin Mitchell.

The award this year proves that the biggest hearts don't have to necessarily belong to the biggest people.

Mitchell was listed as a hearty 5-foot-11 in the 2003 Oregon media guide. Despite his size and lack of natural ability, there was never anybody else on the field who gave it his all, tried harder or just generally had as much fun. He was always someone who was frank and honest with the media. Mitchell was a gentle football giant in the truest sense of the word.

He spent five years with Oregon. Those years were five of some of the better ones of any linebacker to pass through Autzen Stadium.

Best Interview: Sarah Malone.

We've had athletes in the past make up words. We've had athletes talk until their lips turned blue. And we've had athletes so brash, so cocky, no words can put them into context.

And then there's Sarah Malone. Whether you want to talk bowling or her favorite — and we use that word loosely — opponent at Southern California, Malone was there to chat.

Oh, she wasn't always terribly afraid to poke fun at teammates, either. Adam Jenkins was the lucky one in May.

"I can kick his butt at throwing arrows and he hates that," Malone said. "We hadn't thrown them since we were in college, so we went and bought a few and came out and threw them and I

Turn to **EMMIES**, page 11A



Luke Jackson earned MVP honors this year, while having the best performance in the best game of the season. He could be a first-round selection in the NBA Draft later this month.

Austin-bound Ducks looking for wins

The Oregon men's team sends several underdogs to Austin to compete at the national championships

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

As one reads over the list of Oregon men heading to the NCAA National Championships next week, several names were expected.

MEN'S TRACK

To my Skipper enters the year's final meet with the top pole vault mark in the country — 18 feet, 10 1/4 inches — after a phenomenal freshman campaign.

Sophomore Eric Mitchum and his two sub-13.60 second times in the 110-hurdles goes ranked third in the country.

An even closer look at the list, however, will reveal some names that don't seem so familiar. In fact, one may have no idea who Teddy Davis, Paul Eitter, A.K. Ikwuakor or Gabriel LeMay are. Don't be mistaken, though, each of these athletes is capable of a performance in Austin, Texas, that could have them well-known by meet's end.

Until the NCAA West Regional Qualifier 10 days ago, the thought of Davis getting a chance to compete at nationals seemed far-fetched. The sophomore high jumper from White Salmon, Wash., hadn't cleared 7 feet since the first meet of his freshman year and was struggling with his technique.

Assistant coach Bill Lawson talked to Davis about changing his technique from a speed approach to a power approach before regionals, and the switch paid off. Davis cleared a personal best

Turn to **MEN**, page 13A

Seven Oregon women will compete at the NCAA Championships beginning Wednesday in Texas

By Alex Tam
Sports Reporter

The ultimate goal for seven members of the Oregon women's track and field team has finally arrived.

WOMEN'S TRACK

All of the training and hard work put in all season long will pay off at the 2004 NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships in Austin, Texas.

Despite four of the women making their debut at the national championships, the Ducks are confident and unnerved going into the

biggest stage of college track and field.

Emily Enders, a freshman pole vaulter, makes her first appearance and continues her impressive first campaign at Oregon. The Snohomish, Wash. native secured an automatic invite at the NCAA West Regional Qualifier after placing fifth with her second-highest mark ever (13 feet, 1 3/4 inches). Enders, who is ranked 20th nationally, also was voted the team's newcomer of the year this past week.

"It's amazing, and it was one of my goals at the beginning of the season," Enders said. "I knew that it was pretty much 50/50 chance of making it. As (NCAAs) got closer, I felt it was more of a possibility. It feels great and I'm really excited."

Redshirt junior Bree Fuqua also debuts at NCAAs in her first season at Oregon after transferring from Wisconsin. Fuqua, a shot putter,

Turn to **WOMEN**, page 13A