

*"I ain't no GM. Ask Kobe.
He's the GM. It's his team."*

Lakers guard Chucky Atkins when asked what moves he would make to improve the team during the offseason.

■ In my opinion



CLAYTON JONES
SEVENTH INNING STRETCH

Pro baseball steroid usage has tarnished sport, players

So, who's getting JUICED for baseball season? I know I'm PUMPED for it.

My eagerness is SWELLING as opening day approaches when the defending champion Boston Red Sox take on their bitter rivals, the New York Yankees, on Sunday.

Baseball season always INJECTS happiness into my spring and summer, and I'm going to have to really FLEX MY MUSCLES — my intellectual ones — to get through the term with the many distractions that the grand ole game brings.

We can only hope for another great season, and hopefully we don't get RIPPED off.

It's unCLEAR who THE CREAM of the crop will be this season, but it will be interesting to watch.

No way, JOSE. I can't lie to you.

The game of professional baseball is in crisis, and steroids are the problem.

Whether they admit it or not, the size of players, statistics and player testimony seem to point toward the opinion that some baseball players have been using steroids for a long time.

Players were called to testify before the House Government Reform Committee, who is investigating penalty procedures that baseball has for those who test positive for steroids.

At the hearings, Mark McGwire pleaded the fifth and looked all but guilty in the court of public opinion. The former single-season home run leader not only refused to deny any of the allegations, he refused to talk about anything in the past — at all.

This from the supposed savior of baseball after the strike in 1994 that made the hearts of baseball fans sink.

But he did make room to jab at Jose Canseco, who said that he had injected McGwire with steroids while they were teammates on the Oakland A's. He said prosecutors could depend on Canseco's testimony if they wanted to use information from "convicted criminals who would do or say anything to solve their own problems."

But Canseco did say one thing during the testimony that I did agree with: Baseball can't be relied on to police itself in this situation.

How can a professional baseball league that has more than enough money to get the top drug-testing supplies available not have caught the problem?

Test these guys and clean up baseball for goodness sake.

Steroids have tainted the game, and as a baseball fan who came out of the womb watching the sport, it really is a sad time.

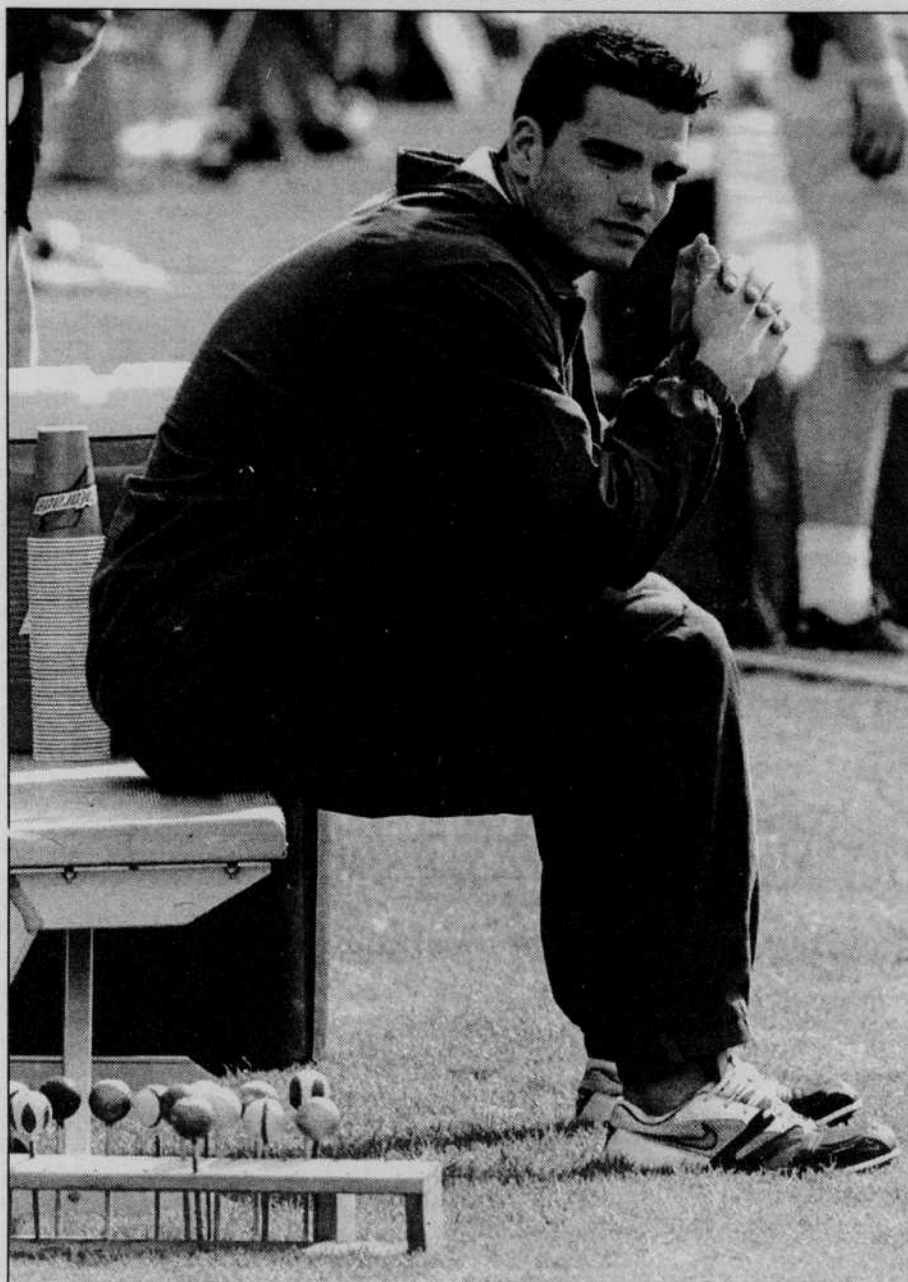
To think that players I watched and emulated while I was growing up are cheaters makes me absolutely sick.

Professional baseball has been played for well over 100 years, and it's amazing that some players nowadays have the nerve to drag the game's integrity through the dirt.

So with the season just around the corner, baseball is down to its last strike to rectify the game that I and millions of others have loved their entire lives.

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SKIPPER UNDERGOES SUCCESSFUL SURGERY



ERIK R. BISHOFF | PHOTOGRAPHER

Oregon sophomore pole vaulter Tommy Skipper will be sidelined for an estimated 4-6 weeks during the outdoor track and field season after undergoing successful knee surgery last week. The Sandy native underwent an arthroscopic procedure March 21 to repair a small tear in the medial meniscus in his left knee. According to doctors, the procedure went well. The injury occurred in mid-February, though Skipper opted to compete in three meets afterward, capturing two titles and a second place finish in the process. The two-time NCAA champion hopes to return to competition by early May.

■ Duck golf

Women, men place in top five at tourney

The Oregon men placed fifth as the women were edged out for first by one stroke by California

BY SCOTT J. ADAMS
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

The Oregon men and women defended their home turf well last week. Both teams earned top-five finishes in their respective fields at the Oregon Duck Invitational. For the men, valuable ground was gained toward earning an NCAA Regional spot. The Ducks finished ahead of nine other teams in their region competing at the tournament.

The Oregon women played well en route to recording a team total score of 909. However, it was one stroke too many as California edged out the Ducks with a final round of 302 that gave the Golden Bears the team title. It was Oregon's second consecutive second place finish at the Oregon Duck Invitational.

Johnna Nealy and Kim McCready of Oregon continued their successful ways as both carded a final round 76. Their teammate Erin Andrews also delivered a strong performance. The junior from Las Vegas tied for 15th place at 231 — her best finish of the season.

The individual title proved as close a race as the team title. Three-time defending individual champion Kim Welch of Washington State appeared on track to win her fourth Oregon Duck Invitational title until she faltered in the final round. Welch bogeyed on hole No. 16 and settled for a score of 76. It would not be enough to hold off a late rally by Kay Hoey of Long Beach State. The 49er kicked down the door to first

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Big Ten answers ridicule, sends two to Final Four

BY NANCY ARMOUR
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — Excuse the Big Ten if it gloats a bit these days.

Dissected and dismissed all year as being weaker than the other power conferences, the Big Ten is showing its mettle when it counts. After putting three teams in the regional finals of the NCAA tournament, the Big Ten is sending Illinois and Michigan State to the Final Four this weekend.

For those keeping score, that's one more Final Four team than the vaunted ACC. And two more than either the Big East or the Big 12.

"We're proud of our teams and our players," Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany said Monday. "You don't take it too seriously. You'd like people to say nice things instead of not-so-nice things. But I think the criticism, to the extent there was some, I don't think it was justified."

But knocking the Big Ten has become the thing to do in recent years. Critics say it isn't as strong as it once was, with an RPI this year that was sixth-best among the elite conferences and only three teams in the final Top 25. Others say it can't compare with the ACC.

After Illinois lost for the first time this season, it kept its No. 1 ranking, but 22 voters went for North Carolina, a team with three losses.

Delany disputes all that and can rattle off the numbers to back it up. The Big Ten had seven

teams in the top 50 and beat 32 of the top 50 ranked teams. Big Ten teams also won 70 percent of their 110 nonconference games.

Those who claim the Big Ten is too plodding? Delany said the ACC averaged 71 points a game, a mere three points ahead of the Big Ten.

And when it comes time for the NCAA tournament, few conferences match the Big Ten. It has the most appearances of any conference and trails only the ACC in victories (309-278). This is the third time since 1999 the conference had two teams in the Final Four, and the seventh time since 1976.

Since 1997, more than half of the conference — six teams — has made at least one Final Four appearance. Michigan State, who will play North Carolina on Friday night, is playing in its fourth Final Four since 1997.

"When they put it on the TV screen, the conferences and the records, we're on top right now, so it's a good feeling," Illinois coach Bruce Weber said. "I know our coaches in the league have been upset about it really since last spring. ... Our image is being hurt, because it mainly affects recruiting."

"So it's got to be a positive to have two teams, to have them win in overtime, we win in an unbelievable fashion," Weber added. "Hopefully it will give us some good publicity nationwide."

IN BRIEF

Bree Fuqua passes mark on Oregon's shot put record

Senior Bree Fuqua, a member of the Oregon women's track and field team, set a personal record and broke the school shot-put record last week in her home state at the Montana Open.

The Polson, Mont., native put the shot 53 feet and nine inches to finish first in the event and take the Oregon record previously held by Quenna Beasley, who set the last mark of 53-1 1/2 in 1983.

The 5-foot-9 thrower, who has been a Duck hurler for two years, also recorded a personal-best in discus, winning that event with a 165-4 heave.

Fuqua's new shotput record is more than one foot better than her former personal record of 52-8 3/4, which was set last year at the NCAA West Regional. With that, she qualified for the collegiate finale but came up short, finishing 24th with a 49-5 put.

In the 2004 indoor season, Fuqua set a new indoor shotput school record with a season-best 51-3 1/2 toss.

Prior to joining Oregon's track and field squad, Fuqua competed for three seasons at Wisconsin where she set — and still holds — the school's indoor (51-3) and outdoor (51-5 1/2) shotput records.

— Stephen Miller