

"I'm going to put in a tape and show my son how to play basketball. Just put your head down and run into people."

Denver coach George Karl referring to Manu Ginobili's style of play after Game 3 of the Denver-San Antonio series

■ In my opinion



CLAYTON JONES
SEVENTH INNING STRETCH

Ducks bring more to the community than money

While interviewing players after Oregon's spring football game on a sunny Saturday afternoon, it hit me how much this football team means to the local community.

I'm not talking about the money and the attention it brings to the Eugene area, but the excitement and unity it brings to the people.

Almost 9,000 Duck fans attended the practice game, most of them wearing yellow and green. After the game, the gates were opened, and fans flooded the field seeking autographs.

As I walked from coach to coach, player to player for "work," I noticed how exciting it was for those kids to meet the players. The field was brimming with Oregon jerseys. Whether it be Kellen Clemens' No. 11 lightning yellow, green or white jersey or a blue No. 3 Joey Harrington Detroit Lions jersey, these kids were showing a lot of spirit.

As players answered questions from reporters, kids fought to get footballs, jerseys, T-shirts or whatever they could get their hands on signed.

The star-struck twinkle in the kids' eyes while watching these "larger-than-life" players sign Oregon paraphernalia brings me back to a time when athletes were more to me than just people that help me get a story or a good quote.

I think back to a time when I was 10 years old, and I went to Civic Stadium (Now PGE Park) to watch the Minnesota Twins play in an exhibition game against the Portland Beavers (when they were the triple-A affiliate of the Twins).

I went with my little league team, and we sat on the third-base dugout side, the same side as the Twins.

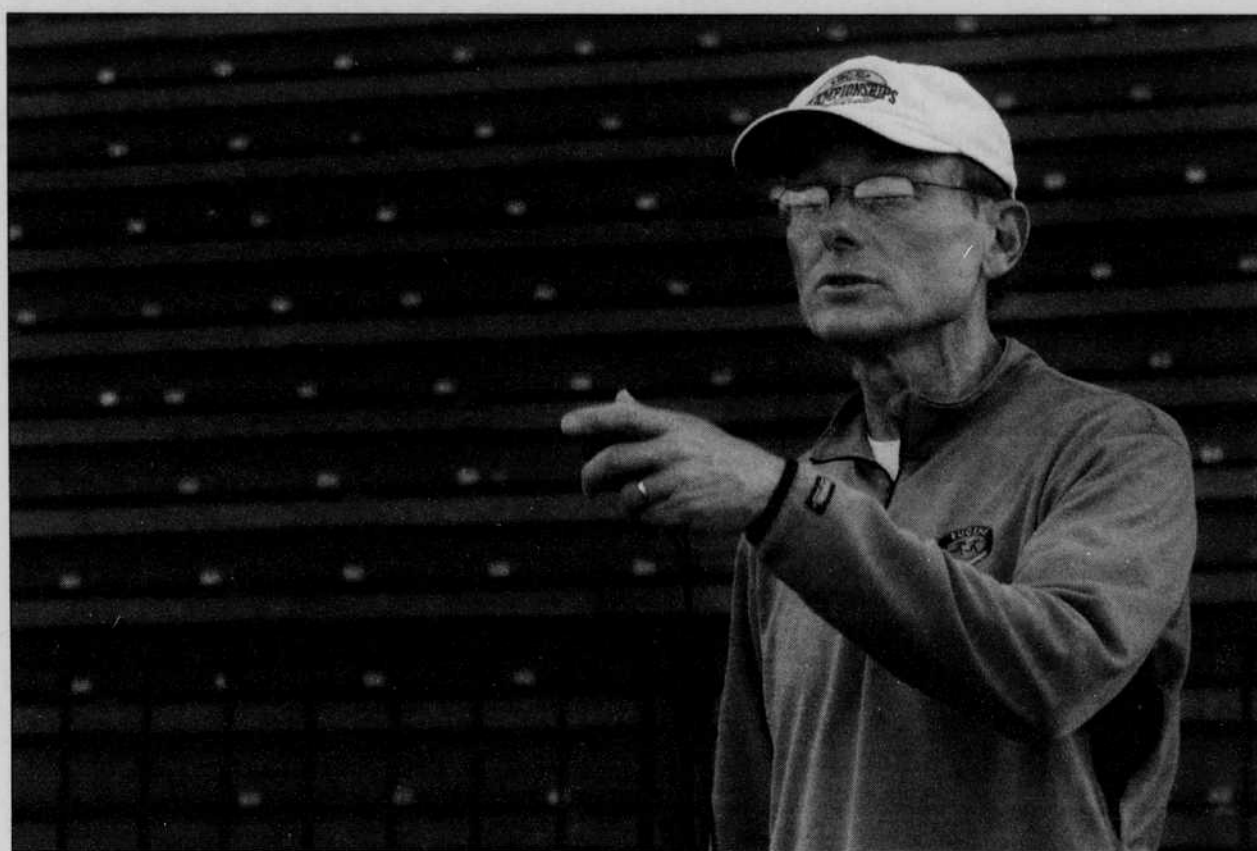
Before the game, I squeezed through hundreds of kids to get an autograph. That was when Kirby Puckett, Dave Winfield and Kent Hrbek were playing for the Twins, but I also remember a smaller guy standing by himself with no one around. Little did I know that was the future American League rookie of the year, Chuck Knoblauch.

He was doing what I wanted to do with my life — play baseball. My nerves got the best of me, and I eventually muttered something resembling a sentence and stuck my sweaty, shaky hand toward him with my crumpled-up ticket for him to sign. He took the ticket with a smile, scribbled his name and actually told ME, "Thank you!"

So when I was out there Saturday watching those youngsters get so excited for autographs, it reminded me (and possibly the players) how vital a role this football program plays in the fabric of this community, and how the players' actions toward kids could stick with them for the rest of their lives.

Just like Chuck Knoblauch's appreciation and modesty has stuck with me.

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Running Club coach Tom Heinonen, who competed in three International Cross Country Championships, helped increase team participants, bringing the number of runners from six to around 30.

LAUREN WIMER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Running a team with heart

Former Oregon women's track and field and cross country coach Tom Heinonen brings structure and enthusiasm to the running Club

BY KIM GAVIGLIO
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

Running; it is one of nature's most primitive sports.

It is about your body and mind working as one. Succeeding as a runner takes dedication in the form of sweat, blood and tears and a renowned coach to push athletes to their potential.

For the Oregon Club running team that coach is Tom Heinonen, a former Oregon intercollegiate women's track and field and cross country coach. Heinonen retired from his coaching position after the 2003 track season and agreed to coach the Club running team starting in the fall that same year.

Before Heinonen became Club coach, the running team included a grand total of six members and no practice schedule or consistent workouts.

"Before Heinonen we were begging to enter a race, and now we race all the time," said Meriel Hartling, one of the original running

Club members. "It's so great to know that there will always be people to run with at every practice."

Heinonen said his initial goal for the running Club when he first arrived was "to give it focus and stability while also increasing the amount of runners participating."

With an average of 30 runners showing up for routine runs and 20 coming to speed sessions each week, it's safe to say the Club has reached Heinonen's goal. As the Club grows, Heinonen makes a point to know the first and last name of every runner, bringing a team feel to a once individual sport.

A typical week includes steady runs for three days, alternating with three days of speed workouts, one of which is a race on a Saturday or Sunday.

Heinonen incorporates sprint, middle distance and long distance in the workouts. He adjusts workouts according to the team's physical endurance, when the next race is and how the runners are performing on a given day.

Heinonen competed in the International Cross Country Championships in 1968, 1969 and 1970 prior to coaching at Oregon for 27 years. He is the only women's coach in NCAA history to win multiple national titles in outdoor track and field and cross country. After his team won three national championships, Heinonen was deemed NCAA coach of the year. He was also the Pacific-10 Conference Coach of the Year eight times.

According to Heinonen, the hardest part about the transition from the Division I program to the Club team was the budget restraints.

"My budget went from \$750,000 to \$600," Heinonen said. "The Club team is a self-help organization. These runners compete because they really enjoy the sport, not because a scholarship is holding them accountable. There is no sense of entitlement in Club sports. All the athletes have to buy their own shoes and pay their own entry fees to compete."

"Club athletes are passionate about their sport on a different level than an intercollegiate athlete. It is the pure reason Club sports flourish."

Some runners have used the Club as a stepping stone to take their talent to a new

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IN BRIEF

Runner Eric Logsdon shatters previous personal best record

Oregon redshirt senior and All-American distance runner Eric Logsdon joined Oregon's all-time-fastest list in the 5,000 meters after running a personal best at the Cardinal Invite at Stanford on Sunday. He improved on his previous record by nearly eight seconds.

The Canby native entered the meet with a previous best of 13:48.12 from the 2004 Oregon Invitational. With his time of 13:40.21 on Sunday, Logsdon moved into eighth place in front of Matt Centrowitz and Steve Fein. Logsdon's time is also only three seconds behind current seventh-place holder Ken Martin.

Logsdon also became the fastest Oregon 5,000-meter runner in more than 20 years. The last Ducks to enter the top eight, Bill McChesney Jr. (school record, 13:14.80) and Jim Hill (sixth, 13:30.52), did so in 1982.

In the race Sunday, Logsdon finished ninth overall and was the fourth-fastest collegian in

his section, trailing only Wisconsin's Chris Solinsky (sixth, 13:38.92), Colorado's Brent Vaughn (seventh, 13:39.69) and William and Mary's Ed Moran (eighth, 13:39.70).

Nike's Abdi Abdirahman won Sunday's race with a time of 13:28.57. He finished ahead of Nike's Jonathan Riley (13:30.05), Wisconsin's Matt Tegenkamp (13:31.98), Wisconsin's unattached freshman Matt Withrow (13:35.32) and Nike's Bolota Asmerom (13:37.14).

— Brian Smith

Churchill Odia to join Oregon basketball squad in 2006

Former Xavier point guard Churchill Odia has signed an offer for athletic aid to Oregon, men's basketball head coach Ernie Kent announced on Monday.

The 6-foot-6 freshman from Lagos, Nigeria, is expected to enroll in classes at Oregon this summer. He will sit out and redshirt the 2005-06 season in accordance with NCAA transfer rules and will have three seasons of eligibility beginning in 2006-07.

When Odia becomes eligible, both of

Oregon's point guards, Aaron Brooks and Kenny Love, will be seniors.

"Churchill is a very versatile player who will be able to come in and learn our system as he sits out a year," Kent said. "He is a prototypical point guard for our system, and he has a tremendous feel for the game. And we can utilize his height and athleticism at the other wing positions as well."

Odia was a member of the 2004 Nigerian national team that played in the Olympic qualifying tournament. He was also a part of the 2003 Nigerian junior national team that lost to Kent's United States' team at the World Championships in Greece.

"I've met a number of players like Churchill through my involvement with USA Basketball," Kent said. "And getting a player like Churchill to come to Oregon is another example of the dividends of that work paying off."

Odia averaged 8.8 minutes, 1.6 points and 0.9 rebounds in a total of 25 games for the Musketeers last season and played only a combined four minutes during the team's last six games.

— Oregon Media Services