

■ Guest commentary

Kent's personal life plays no role in his superb coaching abilities

I could no longer hesitate voicing my opinion after reading John Canzano's piece in the Oregonian on July 15 about Oregon men's basketball coach Ernie Kent. The journalistic defamation of our Northwest icons must stop!

It's irritating to watch Kent evade the media's target practice during a bump in the road of his life. The magnitude of Kent's "difficult times" is not affecting the highly anticipated 2005-06 season. Why then does it seem Northwest media has a fetish for targeting our community's exemplars, only in attempt to insert them into the sports version of "The OC"? (Drama.)

I suffered as a fan when Mr. Canzano attacked and helped derail Damon Stoudamire's career in Portland. When my man Ernie's name was put on blast, I felt it was my duty as a current Duck to speak out.

Canzano mocks Kent's recruiting skills, citing Oregon's inability to have Lake Oswego phenom Kevin Love on lock for signing day. If one player manages to slip from "Oregon's backyard," can we really doubt Kent's recruiting ability? No, but under his breath, Mr. Canzano does.

Remember Aaron Brooks? He was the Seattle native and prep All-American that Kent stole from the Huskies' backyard.

USC/UCLA's backyard: 13th-best prep shooting guard (rivals.com)

Bryce Taylor — son of two-time ABA all-star and 1973 rookie-of-the-year Brian Taylor. Ray Schafer: Alaska state player of the year and third best center on the West Coast (rivals.com). Oregon native Maarty Leunen (OSAA player-of-the-year) and "Champ" Oguchi from Texas are two more examples of Kent's stellar recruiting. Finally, we must not forget signing Malik Hairston: third ranked prep player (USA Today), best shooting guard in country (rivals.com) and 2004 McDonald's All-American. Why the sour grapes? All these terrific recruits were signed just last year!

Hairston became the most anticipated recruit to step onto the 100-year-old hardwood of MacArthur Court. I lived down the hall from him last year while attending the University, and during my first legitimate conversation with him, I had to ask the mind-boggling question: "Why Oregon? Why not Duke or Kansas, the NBA, or why not stay close to home with Tom Izzo at Michigan State?" Hairston paused and laughed about it for a second. His first words were, "My mom liked coach Kent." He continued by describing Kent's run-and-gun offense, demand for discipline and ferocious teamwork ethic.

Mr. Canzano, you're right, Kent is obsessed with his image. As well as his players' image and the Duck

basketball program's image. Kent molds his players with a philosophy that will only tolerate gentlemen student-athletes on and off the court. Canzano preached the outlook of image for years during the era of the Jail Blazers. Ian Crosswhite crossed the line last season and Kent gave him the heave-ho. If "image" is an important aspect en route to a successful organization, why the fuss about obsessing over it?

Kent has established a close-knit family within the Eugene community, and treats his players and fans as though they were children of his own. The Ducks will potentially start four sophomores and a junior next year, with more talent than Kent has ever coached. Yes, the Luke-Luke-Freddy days are in the past and the new legends are here. Oregon's 14-13 record last year resembles the 2002-03 North Carolina Tar Heels, who also started four freshmen. North Carolina's season with immature leadership resulted in a 19-16 record and no March Madness. Two years later, they won a championship. If this crew of sophomores hangs around until junior year (Aaron's senior year), there will be a stir of madness on the Duck campus come 2006.

You hear that Mr. Canzano? In 2006, Oregon will have its best basketball season since 1939 and could

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■ In my opinion

Deserter Williams doesn't deserve warm welcome in Miami

BY SHAWN MILLER
FULL-COURT PRESS

It scrolled across the bottom of ESPNEWS: Running back Ricky Williams reports to Miami Dolphins training camp.

My immediate thought was: who cares? Seriously, who really cares about a dopehead that quit on his team a year ago? Who wants a quitter that is only returning to professional football so he won't lose \$8.6 million?

Last year, Williams informed then-head coach Dave Wannstedt on July 23, a week before training camp opened, that he was planning on retiring.

The decision shocked teammates and the sports world, while Miami suffered through a 4-12 season. Not only did Williams hurt the team, but it cost Wannstedt his job.

It is said that one player doesn't win games or make a team, but when that one player won the NFL's rushing title in 2002 and quit without leaving time to find a reasonable replacement, one player costs games.

It was later announced that Williams violated the league's substance abuse policy; he admitted that he failed drug tests and faced a suspension for testing positive three times for marijuana.

Current head coach Nick Saban was vocal about wanting Williams to return to the program and offered him his roster spot back. Meanwhile, teammates have been saying "If he wants to be here and doesn't quit, we want him here."

BS. Don't listen to that crap. His coach wants him there because he wants more than four wins, and his teammates are just being politically correct. I wouldn't want a quitter on my team, and I'm sure most of the Dolphins feel the same way. They fought through a tough, discouraging season together because of Williams. They have a bond of fighting through adversity, a bond that doesn't include Williams.

The Dolphins drafted running

back Ronnie Brown of Auburn University with the second pick of the 2005 NFL Draft, presumably to fill the empty, dust-filled shoes of Williams. It almost seems that Williams just wants to screw with the Dolphins. First, he quits just before training camp starts. Now, after the Dolphins got a top draft pick because of a horrible record, and used it on a running back, Williams wants to be a part of the team again.

The whole situation could be forgivable if it weren't just about the money. It is obvious that Williams doesn't want to lose the \$8.6 million he owes the Dolphins for breaching his contract. Williams battled Miami when the courts ordered him to repay the Dolphins, and when there were no more appeals and the decision was final, all of a sudden Williams wants to lace up the cleats and step back on the field.

I don't respect Williams, nor do I think the Dolphins should take him back. The only problem is, if the Dolphins don't take him back he can play for one of 31 other NFL teams.

I suggest a punishment. First off, Williams should have to run all of the team errands that are usually reserved for rookies. Second, every Dolphin should line up during training camp and play a little drill I call "Run Ricky Run."

The object of "Run Ricky Run" is to work on tackling. Teammates take turns on the defensive line, the ball is handed off to Williams and the team works on tackling. To be effective, this drill should be daily and all Dolphins should participate.

And last, he should have to visit middle schools weekly and explain the negative effects of smoking pot.

Sorry University of Oregon stoners, I mean... students. I know most of you are into the liberal side of marijuana, but I vote for punishing potheads.

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