

"If I ever need a brain transplant, I want one from a sportswriter, because I'll know it's never been used."

Penn State head football coach Joe Paterno, who has been criticized in the media for staying too long in the coaching ranks.

■ In my opinion



JEFFREY DRANSFELDT
THREE TO WIN

Finding 'real' person challenges reporters

The voice on the other end of the phone interview was calm and collected. His answers to questions were concise and clear.

Who would have known I was talking to Rafer Alston, the trouble-making, coach-punching, girlfriend-beating point guard? At least that's how he appears after years of media reports. It makes it hard at times to sift out facts from fiction.

Tuesday's news story announcing Alston's trade to the Houston Rockets listed him as temperamental in the headline.

Alston, a former point guard at a nearby community college in my hometown of Camarillo, Calif., hasn't been afraid to make headlines in his six-year NBA career. The New York native, who played at Ventura Community College, later transferred to Fresno State and made a roundabout trip to the NBA.

More people know the New York streetball legend by his nickname "Skip to My Lou." He's been featured numerous times on AND1 videos filled with dribbling, dunking and you-name-it highlights. Sure, Alston was talented, but critics said he didn't have NBA game or the ability to lead an offense, instead relying on flash and little substance.

His NBA career started slow with three years in Milwaukee under then-coach George Karl. Alston averaged only 38 games per year over that period and played less than 14 minutes per game.

Alston's break came with Toronto in 2002-03. It was a 47-game stint, but it did enough to show NBA personnel his potential. He hooked up with Dwayne Wade and Lamar Odom with the Miami Heat in 2003-04. Alston had his opportunity and he flourished, playing all 82 games — starting in 28 — and averaged 10.2 points per game. He consistently splashed 3-pointers, averaging two per game at a 37-percent clip.

Happy ending right? Not exactly.

Miami lost to the Indiana Pacers in the Conference Semifinals with Alston hoisting a last-second prayer in the series clincher.

Miami revamped its roster, shipping Caron Butler, Odom and Brian Grant to the Los Angeles Lakers for superstar Shaquille (insert clever nickname here) O'Neal. Alston had an offer to stay in Miami, but instead chose a more lucrative offer from his old team in Toronto.

Still think happy ending? Basketball player earns big bucks after rough start. Should we cue the music and start the credits?

Again, not quite.

Toronto's rebuilding gave Alston a platform to shine, and he did for a while, averaging career highs of 14.2 points and 6.4 assists in 80 games last season.

Success couldn't hide Alston's troubled relationship with coach Sam Mitchell, a talented role-player during his 13-year career.

The acrimony between the pair culminated

DRANSFELDT, page 14

■ Club Sports

Running, soccer kick off seasons

The running club started strong at the Willamette Invitational; men's soccer opens Sunday in Bend

BY WILL SEYMOUR
AND JACOB MAY
FREELANCE REPORTERS

The University of Oregon Running Club began its season with a fast start at the Willamette Invitational on Saturday; both the men's and women's teams placed in the top six, and the day saw a few Ducks produce impressive individual performances.

Rain was in the air in Salem, and the course at Bush Park sported a sheen of mud, but the adverse conditions rolled like water off the Ducks' backs. The women's team took fifth-place honors in the open division, with an average time, which is taken from the top five finishers on the team, of 20 minutes, 7 seconds over the five-kilometer course. Crossing the line first for the Ducks was graduate student Tiffany Beechy with a time of 17:59, a performance that earned her third place overall.

"The beginning of the course was sloppy and we were the last team to run, but the conditions were ideal for me," Beechy said.

Sarah Piazza rounded out the top 20 in the women's competition, clocking in at 19:29 despite just returning from a trip to France.

The men's team also acquitted themselves well, conquering the eight-kilometer course in an average time of 26:47. Another graduate student garnered the top individual time on the team: Brandon Michael completed the course in 25:53, placing him 35th out of 164 competitors. Freshman David Reid stopped the clock at 26:38, a very strong showing for his first eight-kilometer race.

"(Reid) is freaking fast," Beechy said.

This encouraging showing by Oregon bodes well for the rest of the season.

"It was a good early season run," senior Kevin Sully said.

Coach Tom Heinonen returns for his third year in charge of the club,

and brings with him enthusiasm for the sport.

"With Tom, everyone enjoys (running) and gets excited," Beechy said.

The Ducks running club also boasts a wealth of youth and experience, which will serve them well both this year and in the future.

"We have a good mix of people, from grad students to freshmen," Sully said.

Interest in the club is also on the rise.

"We have 40 members now and 30 others showed interest at the recent Club Sports open house," running club coordinator Justin Samudio said.

Another sure indicator of the success that the club has had in recent years is that it has seen members move on to more prestigious squads and competitions, including the Oregon intercollegiate track and field team.

"We've had some losses to private clubs and the intercollegiate team, and that has sapped us a little bit," Beechy said.

The Ducks travel to Estacada for a meet next week, and then race in the OSU Beaver Classic in Corvallis on Oct. 22 and the Pre's Trail Open in Eugene on Nov. 6.

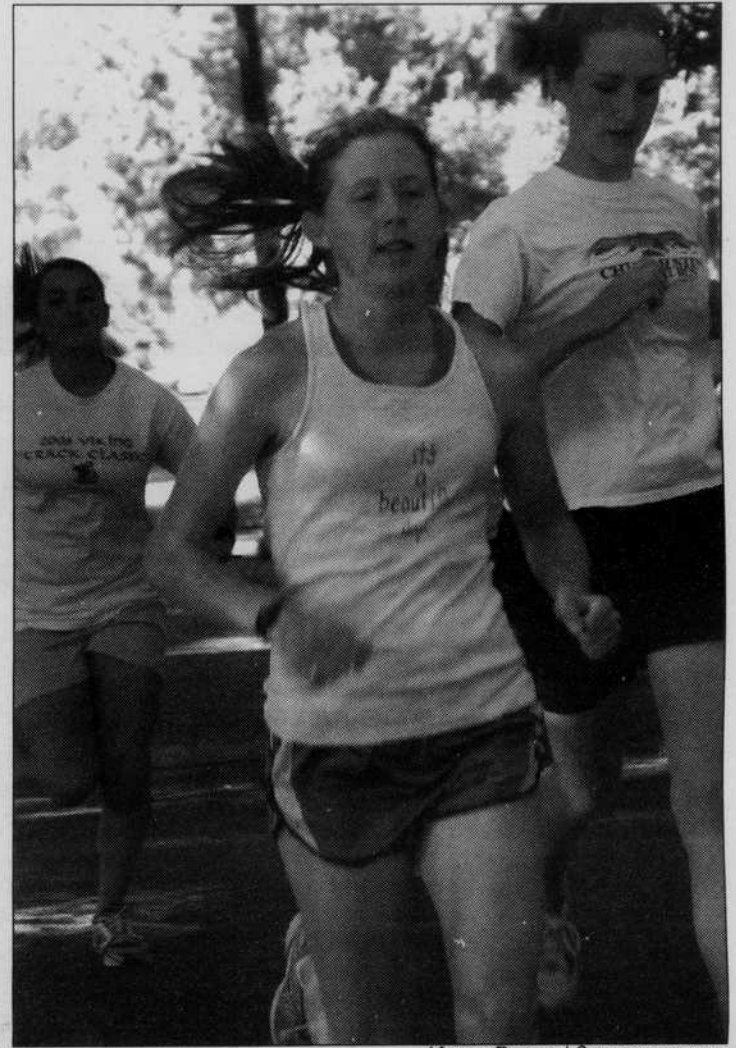
Club soccer

With 11 returning players and a 6-1 record that won the Cascade Collegiate Soccer League last year, the men's club soccer team has high aspirations for this season.

Soccer coordinator Patrick Drake believes the team has a chance to win the national title if it can play to its ability.

"We need more solid attacking and finishing" Drake said. "If we could finish on the opportunities (last year) we could have had some blowouts."

The regular season mostly consists of nearby small community and private colleges, where winning is not a difficult task. The main challenge during the regular season comes from Oregon State,



NICOLE BARKER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Kristen Wheeler, left, Rosie Sweetman, center, and Devlin Timony-Balyeat warm up before running-club practice Wednesday afternoon.

which gave the men's team its only loss last year. The team is looking forward a chance to repay the favor to the Beavers.

Drake suggested that the team lower its intensity while playing against smaller schools to keep from embarrassing its opponents. He believes the team should "focus on a lot of possession play. Keep (the ball) controlled 70 percent of the game."

This year the team is looking for senior defensive midfielder Chris Platt and senior center forward Brian Mikolaitas to help carry the load.

The first game this season is Sunday against Central Oregon

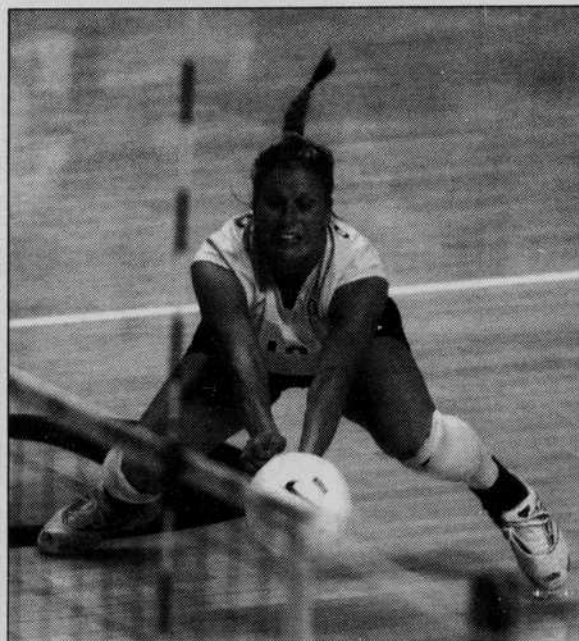
Community College in Bend.

The game will be the first test in what is expected to be an easy ride to the collegiate national tournament that will take place Nov. 17-19 in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Until then, the team will try to meld and strengthen itself against teams that are unlikely to pose much of a challenge. The team hopes it will be able to play at a more intense pace once it reaches higher quality opponents in the tournament.

After the fall season, the club soccer team will continue to play through the winter in an indoor league and will play another season of soccer in the spring.

TAKING THE DIVE



Junior setter Heather Madison dives for a ball against Stanford on Sept. 30. Oregon travels to Los Angeles to face UCLA on Friday and USC on Saturday.

NICOLE BARKER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

IN BRIEF

Men's golf takes on Big Ten, Pac-10 Challenge

The Oregon men's golf team finished 13th at the Big Ten/Pacific-10 Challenge in Glenview, Ill., Tuesday.

The Ducks (905) improved their score each day and finished 20 strokes behind Illinois for a top-10 placing.

Gregg LaVoie shot consecutive par rounds of 72 to finish tied for 18th. He began the final day in 41st but climbed into the top 20.

LaVoie has four top-25 finishes in his last five tournaments dating back to last season. The only blemish on that record is a 44th-place finish at last month's Northwest Collegiate Classic in Corvallis in which he finished eight strokes out of the top 10.

LaVoie was one of three Ducks that qualified for the U.S. Amateur last August. Ted Whitney and Derek Sipe also earned the honor. LaVoie also earned All-America honors last season.

Oregon's Matt Ma tied for 46th with 226 strokes, followed by teammates Joey Benedetti (tied for 53rd with 228), Sipe (tied for 60th with 233) and Jay Snyder (67th with 237).

Northwestern (860) defeated Minnesota, by three strokes to earn first place.

The Big Ten won its first in the series over the Pac-10 by 51 strokes. The top six team scores were added by each conference to determine the winner.

Other Pac-10 schools were Arizona State in third (865), UCLA fourth (868), Washington fifth (874), Arizona tied for seventh (885), USC 12th (899) and California 14th (920).

— Shawn Miller