

■ In my opinion



JEFFREY DRANSFELDT
THREE TO WIN

Saints and Hornets should not return home

The New Orleans Saints and NBA's Hornets will never permanently return to Louisiana.

It's a powerful statement, but it's a possibility people have ignored since Hurricane Katrina ravaged the area and left hundreds of thousands homeless and more than a thousand dead. The hurricane flooded the region and the Saints' home arena, the Superdome, became an emergency home to the suddenly homeless.

The Saints have become an inspirational story, moving to San Antonio and having their first "home game" in New York against the Giants. Both Saints and Hornets officials have been positive, saying they will return to New Orleans. Saying is one thing, but consistently putting forth this idea when a permanent return is unlikely is unconscionable.

To maintain its New Orleans ties this season, the Saints are playing four games in Baton Rouge at Louisiana State University.

New Orleans will take months, more likely years, to regain any sense of normalcy. City officials and citizens are more focused on living conditions and rebuilding the city. Professional sports are secondary and rightfully so.

The Hornets, New Orleans' other professional sports franchise, decided early to move. New Orleans Arena, where the Hornets regularly play, is damaged and could take months to repair. They settled on Oklahoma City with six home games scheduled to be played at LSU. San Diego, Calif., Anaheim, Calif., Tampa, Fla., and Nashville, Tenn., were also considered.

Temporary situations, both the Saints and Hornets say, but everyone has seemingly forgotten newspaper headlines from just before Katrina hit.

The Saints have long been rumored to be moving after years of disagreement between owner Tom Benson and city officials over a new stadium to replace the Superdome. In May, attorney Stanley Rosenberg said Benson was considering moving the Saints via an out clause in the contract with the Superdome after the 2005 season.

The article said that Benson would be responsible for \$81 million owed to the city for subsidies he has received since 2001. The interested cities included Albuquerque, N.M., Los Angeles and — surprise, surprise — San Antonio.

On Oct. 7, it was reported that a clause in the Saints' contract with the Superdome may allow them to leave without compensation. Damage to the Superdome could allow Benson to take advantage of a 90-day window where he could void all contractual obligations with the state of Louisiana; he could then move his team by declaring "force majeure." The opening extends from Aug. 29, when Katrina hit, to Nov. 28.

I won't be surprised if after this season the Saints decided to stay leave New Orleans

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■ Duck cross country

Harriers ready for pre-NCAA meet

The Ducks will use the meet at Indiana State University to work on team strategy

BY KIM GAVIGLIO
FREELANCE REPORTER

The time has come to see what the Ducks are made of as they begin the crucial second half of the cross country season.

This weekend Oregon's cross country team travels east to Terre Haute, Ind., to join 77 men's teams and 80 women's teams for the Pre-NCAA Invite at Indiana State University.

This meet will be one of the most important meets for the Ducks this season. The best teams in the nation will be showcasing their newly recruited talent and gauging the competition. The pre-NCAA meet also allows many of the under-the-radar teams to surprise a few people.

As the season continues to progress, so do the Ducks. They have maintained focus, and it is definitely paying off for the men and women of Oregon.

For the first time in five years, the women's team has earned a national ranking, coming in at No. 30 under new head coach Vin Lananna. Lananna might be new to Oregon, but he is by no means a novice to the world of running.

Lananna worked as the director of athletics and physical education at Oberlin College in Ohio for two years. However, he is mostly known for serving 11 seasons as the director of track and field and cross country at Stanford University during which time his teams won five national championships and had 36 top-10 finishes.

"I've never focused too much on the rankings," Lananna said. "They are a good tool for promoting the sport of cross country, but they really don't have an impact on what we do on a daily basis."

"We will continue to emphasize both the Pac-10 and NCAA West Regional Championship as a focus of our season. There is tremendous parity



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The Oregon women's cross country team ranked No. 30 in the recent U.S. Cross Country Coaches Association poll. It is the team's first ranking since the 2000 season.

in the conference and the region, so both teams will need perfect races in order to get to the NCAA Championship."

To help the Ducks accomplish their goal of qualifying for the NCAA Championship, the men and women have focused on team strategies as well as their individual running performances. With more than 300 runners on the field per heat, striving to close the gap between Oregon's first and seventh runner will not be an easy task.

"The men's team will strive to maintain a close pack from our second through seventh runners," Lananna explained. "Obviously, Galen Rupp is a solid front runner, but there are numerous combinations for which athletes on the men's team could fill the other spots. They are all training very well right now."

"The women's team has a solid pack through six runners, and we won't plan to rely on just one person to compete well. It will be a true team effort," Lananna said.

Traveling to Terre Haute will give the Ducks a taste of the level of competition they will be

facing over the next month and a half. The men's race features 18 of the top 25 teams in the country, and the women's race will have 9 of the top 10 and 19 of the top 25. Because of its size, Saturday's meet will be divided into two separate races for each the men and women. The men will run an 8K and the women will run a 6K.

Tentatively, the Ducks competing are Michael McGrath, Galen Rupp, Jon Thomas, Scott Wall, Patrick Werhane, Chris Winter and J.K. Withers. Women competitors likely will include Dana Buchanan, Katie Leary, Emily Mathis, Amber McGown, Zoe Nelson, Sarah Pearson and Sara Schaaf.

"We are concentrating on one meet at a time," Lananna said. "We have some tough races in the next five weeks, and we don't want to get too far ahead of ourselves. The enthusiasm on this team is outstanding, and if the coaches and athletes can continue that positive attitude for the rest of the season, I'm confident that we will achieve success as individuals and as a team."

■ Men's basketball

Johnson brings strength to front court

The junior college transfer will give the Ducks an intimidating presence inside to go along with their sharpshooters outside

BY LUKE ANDREWS
SPORTS REPORTER

Fans will have their first chance to meet Oregon basketball's newest member, Ivan Johnson, at Friday's Midnight Madness at McArthur Court.

Johnson, a 6-foot-8-inch, 255-pound transfer from Los Angeles Southwest College, is looking to bring a new powerful presence to the Oregon lineup. With 6-foot-10-inch, 275-pound Mitch Platt redshirting after his second foot surgery, Oregon head coach Ernie Kent is hoping Johnson will fill a void for the Ducks.

"Once he grasps the system, he's going to be a very good player," Kent said. "He's big. He's strong. He's powerful. He gives us what everybody else has, and maybe what they don't have, in terms of his physical presence. He's a tough basketball player."

The San Antonio native averaged 22.3 points, 12.2 rebounds and 2.4 blocks per game as a sophomore at Los Angeles Southwest College. He earned California Junior College all-state honors after leading all leagues in rebounding and ranking eighth in scoring.

Johnson will join an Oregon team with a crop of talented guards. Sophomores Bryce Taylor and Malik Hairston — members of the

Pacific-10 Conference's All-Freshman team — and All-Pac-10 guard Aaron Brooks compose one of the Pac-10's most explosive backcourts. The three led the Ducks in scoring last season, each averaging more than 11 points per game.

Hairston is looking forward to his chance to run the floor with Johnson, who is described as an athlete and a physical presence.

"Ivan's a beast. He brings toughness that we've never had," Hairston said. "He doesn't have any fear. He'll be a presence on offense and defense."

Johnson will add depth to Oregon's frontcourt that includes sophomores Maarty Leunen (6-9, 215) and Ray Schafer (7-0, 235), junior Adam Zahn (6-8, 225) and one of the team's two seniors, Matt Short (7-0, 235).

"(The frontcourt) get me better, and I am getting them better," Johnson said.

Churchill Ochia, though he will redshirt this season in accordance with NCAA rules, is another transfer for the Ducks. The Nigerian native played a limited role at Xavier, averaging 8.8 minutes in 25 games, but will add additional support for Oregon's run-and-gun offense in the future. The backcourt, in addition to Taylor, Hairston and Brooks, consists of senior Brandon Lincoln, junior Kenny Love,

sophomore Chamberlain Oguchi, junior Jordan Kent and junior Adrian Stelly.

"We have a veteran basketball team with enough guys that have played enough minutes," Kent said. "It's just a different mentality. That's experience. You cannot substitute that."

A challenging schedule

The Ducks begin the pre-season Nov. 9 at home against Southern Oregon with hopes of improving upon last season's disappointing 14-13 overall record and 6-12 Pac-10 record.

Oregon will be tested early with non-league games against Rice, Vanderbilt, Georgetown and Illinois in consecutive weeks.

"This schedule's got a lot of big games on there," Kent said. "We've got a stretch there, those are all tough ball games. Illinois is an opportunity to get them back out here in Oregon."

The Ducks open the Pac-10 portion of their schedule at home on Dec. 31 with the Civil War against Oregon State.

Revised Pac-10 Tournament

One of the disappointing factors for Oregon last season was its failure to qualify for the Pac-10 Tournament at the end of last season. This season Pac-10 officials have decided to include all 10 of the conference's teams into the tournament, which is played at the Staples Center in Los Angeles from March 8-11.