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Jones: Cadets utilize newfound life skills

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pleased and appreciative that he has agreed to represent our Oregon National Guard Youth Challenge Program. We look forward to involving him in our activities as his time permits during the upcoming NBA season."

The 17-month program applies to youths ages 16 to 18 who are recognized as cadets upon entering it. They work through a two-phase program starting with a five-and-a-half-month residential program aimed to help them develop skills for coping with life. They also perform community service and attend

classes leading to a high school diploma, general education diploma, or recovery of up to eight high school credits according to their Web site.

The program is free to cadets and their families and is preceded by a full year of mentoring by a responsible adult in the cadet's home community. Cadets are encouraged during this time to be active in their communities by utilizing their newfound life skills. More than 3,000 cadets have entered the Oregon National Guard Youth Challenge Program since 1995.

This is not the first time Jones has

given back to troubled youth. He has been an active supporter for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Indiana. Jones has donated tickets to academic achievers in the organization's program and Kids on Deck, those who are currently on the waiting list for mentors. He and his teammate Jeff Foster hosted the Big Brothers Big Sisters 2003 Holiday Hoopla.

Details about the OYCP Program can be found by visiting the OYCP Web site at www.oycp.com or by calling 541-317-9623.

sadams@dailyemerald.com

Dransfeldt: Jack expected to lead when he plays

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years ago he guided a stacked Yellow Jackets team to the national championship game of the NCAA Tournament. When you think of Jack, think calm, level-headed point guard that can distribute the basketball and score.

Blake has his first opportunity to start after playing behind Gilbert Arenas in Washington. Matched up with Dixon again, the pair has a second opportunity to translate their NCAA title success at Maryland to the NBA level.

Jack faced Blake in college and now on the same team, the pair are competing again — this time for minutes.

"Everybody is going at each other hard," Jack said. "I think it'll help us in the long run."

In a way, Jack, as point guard, is a coach on the court and is expected to lead when he plays.

"You have to make sure everything

is under control," he said.

Even though he is old by rookie standards, with two high school players, Telfair and Webster, on the roster, the 6-foot-3 guard approaches this season knowing he'll have to earn his minutes.

McMillan, in his first stint coaching in Seattle, worked with Luke Ridnour, the three-year Oregon point guard who flourished in his second season with the SuperSonics. Ridnour, along with Nick Collison and Rashard Lewis, made McMillan's decision to leave Seattle extremely difficult, the new Blazers coach said.

"(Luke's) going to be a great player at this level because he works at his game," McMillan said.

Last season, Ridnour averaged 10 points, six assists and a steal a game, nearly double the averages of his rookie season. He gained his first

playoff experience with the Sonics making the second round against San Antonio. Ridnour's growth into an elite point guard came under McMillan, who now works with a new set of guards in Portland.

"His desire, his will to become the best of the position is his motivation to work hard at it," McMillan said.

The emphasis on hard work, something McMillan preaches daily, is commendable. Far too often, fans read of player misbehavior, whether it's disobeying a coach or the law. To see the current Blazers team with McMillan as coach should bring back fans disgusted by the actions of former players.

The Blazers aren't championship material, at least not yet, but they do have quality players and a revitalized franchise worthy of support.

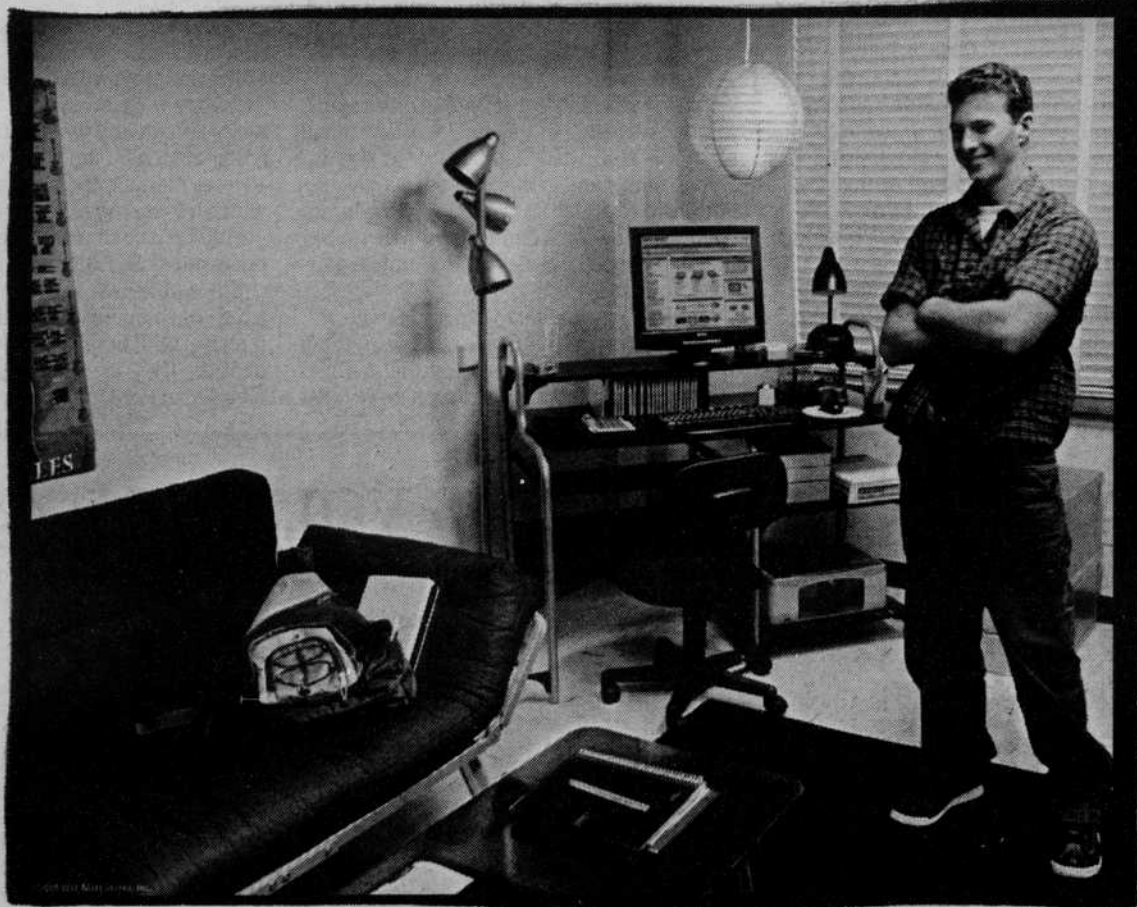
jdransfeldt@dailyemerald.com

Check online at www.dailyemerald.com tonight after the Portland Trail Blazers/Utah Jazz basketball at McArthur Court for complete coverage.

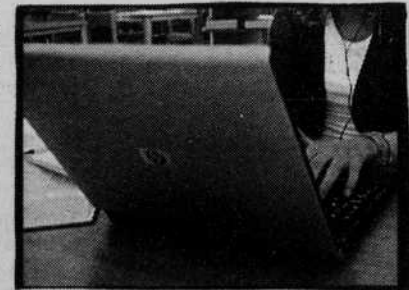
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