

■ In my opinion



SCOTT J. ADAMS
INTENTIONAL GROUNDING

Memorable season ends for writer and team

Of all the sports I have covered in my collegiate career, I would have to say I have the least amount of expertise in soccer. Hence, when I was asked to cover the women's team here, I had my doubts. With the season over, I can say that the experience was indeed rewarding for me because it gave me the chance to see a team practice and play together as the model for team chemistry.

I think if average people who go to soccer games at Papé Field had a chance to see them practice together or listen to their post-game remarks, they would be truly amazed. Take for instance three seniors whom I asked the same question to following their 2-0 season-ending loss to Stanford last Sunday: "What is one thing you could say right now to your fellow classmates in light of this past year?"

Senior midfielder Andrea Valadez's eight-word response spoke volumes of the team's camaraderie.

"I'm proud of you and I love you," Valadez said.

It was the first time I've heard those three words in a post-game interview, and it was the quintessential follow-up to her comments made before the season-opening Oregon Classic. Valadez said the team molded well in the offseason and that they were like a family. Teammate and fellow senior Katie Abrahamson shared her sentiment.

"I absolutely loved every moment on the field and every moment off the field," Abrahamson said. "To the team next year, I will either be cheering here in the stands or I will be checking go-ducks.com every Friday and Sunday."

Unfortunately for the those reading this, a printed quote can only capture so much emotion.

Nicole Garbin has enjoyed playing alongside both Abrahamson and Valadez for the past four years and had parting words of her own for them Sunday.

"Thanks for everything," Garbin said. "They sacrificed so much and were the ones who fought for us. They helped create the future for this program."

As Oregon's second team in school history to have a .500 record at season's end, I have to congratulate this year's squad and admit that it broke my heart to see them finish one win shy of being the first team in program history to put together a winning season. I have also to thank the players and coaches for waiting in the pouring rain after games and practice to answer my stammering questions. I wish you good luck next year.

In retrospect, I learned quite a few things about soccer this past fall. How to judge offsides, what results in an automatic red card, when the goalkeeper can pick up a ball and that goal spelled backwards is "loag," isn't it? But the most important thing I learned is how far being close with your teammates, staying positive, never giving up and playing with heart can take you. This lesson is the legacy for the 2005 Oregon women's soccer team, a team that I know will reach the postseason next year.

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■ Men's basketball

Oregon exhibition season tips off

After a 14-13 record, the Ducks shoot for improvement starting tonight at Mac Court at 7 p.m.

BY SHAWN MILLER
SPORTS EDITOR

To say last season's 14-13 record, ninth-place finish in the Pacific-10 Conference and not playing in the Pac-10 Tournament or postseason play was a disappointment is a huge understatement.

However, those motivating factors and the addition of two transfers have created a team ready to beat its opponents one by one beginning with an exhibition against Southern Oregon at McArthur Court tonight at 7 p.m.

Oregon head coach Ernie Kent believes junior college transfer Ivan Johnson and Xavier transfer Churchill Odom will help the team on the court in the near future. He also said signing the two athletes showcases the level of the program.

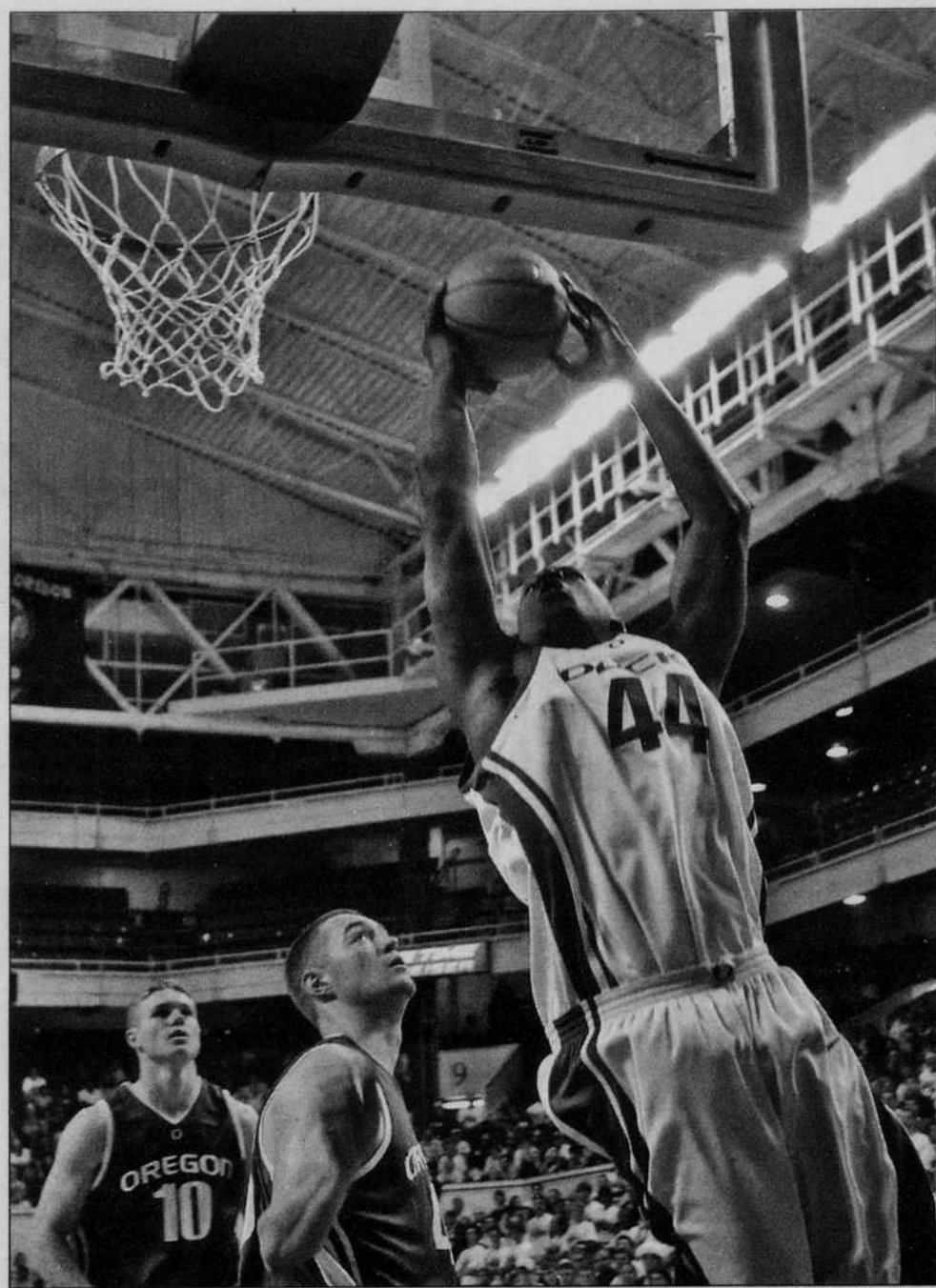
"It was huge. Both of them are transfers — one from a junior college and one from a Division I school. I think that says a lot about who we are," Kent said. "The fact that they contacted us, they looked at Oregon, they wanted to come here and everything, so it was huge for us."

Johnson, a 6-foot-8 junior from Los Angeles Southwest College, will provide an inside threat, something the Ducks struggled with last season.

"His job is going to be to give us another inside presence that can really neutralize things in the paint for us," Kent said. "He's going to have to really learn some things in terms of what we do in our offense and defensive schemes."

Meanwhile the 6-foot-6 Odom has to redshirt for the entire 2005-06 season due to NCAA transfer rules, but will have three years of eligibility beginning the following year.

"His role is to help us win games by being very, very productive and effective in practice because he is redshirting this year," Kent said. "His games are going to be practice and he needs to really make sure he pushes this basketball team."



ZANE RITT | PHOTOGRAPHER

Oregon post Ivan Johnson (44) goes up for two during a recent scrimmage while teammates Ray Schafer and Maarty Leunen (10) can only watch.

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■ Duck football

Ducks brace for cold in Washington

With frigid weather forecast for Saturday, Oregon is preparing for the worst against Washington State in Martin Stadium

BY LUKE ANDREWS
SPORTS REPORTER

When Oregon's 2005 football schedule was released, a Nov. 12 game in Pullman against the Washington State Cougars elicited a very generic response for many: brrrr.

The forecast is calling for a chance of snow and the Ducks are preparing accordingly.

"It's going to be cold," senior strong safety Anthony Trucks said. "We have to mentally prepare for the worst."

Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti has seen the worst conditions Pullman has to offer.

In 2000, a snow plow had to clear the field before the Ducks and Cougars battled in a 27-24 Oregon win. A year later, although it didn't snow, there was a hail storm in a 24-17 Duck victory.

Bellotti expects the Ducks, regardless of weather conditions, to continue what has worked all season for a team that has won five straight games and eight of nine this season.

"You will see a similar game plan to what we did this past week (against California) because we felt like the weather was going to

be a real issue," Bellotti said. "So I think you'll see the same things and snow is better than rain, to be honest with you — 31, 32 (degrees) and snowing is probably better than 40 and raining."

Temperatures are expected to dip as low as 32 degrees for the 7:15 p.m. kickoff.

Cooler conditions could make Oregon's running game a critical factor as it was last week in rainy conditions against California when senior running back Terrence Whitehead rushed for 119 yards.

In a sleet-covered Martin Stadium during the 2001 season, then-sophomore running back Onterio Smith set an Oregon record with 285 yards rushing against the Cougars — a record that still stands as the highest single-game yardage total in school history.

Washington State is seventh in the Pac-10 this season against the run, giving up 160.2 yards per game. Oregon has surrendered an average of 137.8 rushing yards per game and ranks fourth in the Pac-10.

"Certainly as we go north, Washington State is going to have a little bit of an advantage

because it's significantly colder there than it is here," Bellotti said.

Oregon has won four of its last five trips to Martin Stadium, including last season's 41-38 comeback victory.

"We need to make sure that we are very hungry and understand that we have to go up there and play against the weather and against the home team," Bellotti said. "I need to make sure that this team understands that Washington State would like nothing better than to beat Oregon."

Ngata honored

Junior defensive tackle Haloti Ngata may have turned in the most complete game of his Oregon career Saturday in a pivotal game against conference foe Cal. Ngata had a game-high 11 tackles, one of which was a crucial 7-yard tackle for a loss of Marshawn Lynch, which took the Bears out of field goal range in the waning moments of the game. Ngata also had two pass break-ups at the line of scrimmage and keyed a defense which limited Cal to only 14 first downs and 301 total yards of offense.

For his efforts, Ngata was named the Pac-10 Defensive Player of the Week, making him the sixth Oregon player to be honored this season.

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