

"You can't use being nervous as an excuse any more."

Oregon's Maarty Leunen on the Ducks' 25 of 26 shooting from the free-throw line Monday night.

■ In my opinion



SCOTT J. ADAMS
INTENTIONAL GROUNDING

Stewart's turnaround shows new maturity

What a difference the second half of the racing season has made for Tony Stewart.

The grizzly orange crusher of Joe Gibbs Racing clinched his second Nextel Cup title with a 15th-place finish at Sunday's Ford 400 to the delight of his fans at Homestead-Miami Speedway. Despite his mid-season trio of finishes outside of the top 20, his plunge to 14th in the cup standings and his reputation as the short-fused bad boy of NASCAR, Stewart hoisted the cup trophy and took his career to new heights.

"Once you win more than one, it definitely puts you into an elite group and you are going to be looked upon differently," fellow multiple-cup winner Jeff Gordon told reporters after the race. "You win one, you are looked at differently. Win two and it takes you to another level."

Stewart's roller-coaster ride through seven seasons in NASCAR has seen his driving success be occluded by his off-the-track antics. They were in full-force heading into the 2002 season. Stewart's eye-for-an-eye attitude behind the wheel and his assaults on the media landed him on probation. Many still saw him as one of the top drivers in the circuit, but his image was taking a toll on him. It's hard for anyone to draw sympathy from critics after batting a tape recorder out of a reporter's hand or clocking a photographer, just ask No. 20.

I became a fan of Stewart early in his career following his rookie season in 1999. His driving caught my eye, but for all of the wrong reasons. For starters, he makes orange look good. Secondly, he drives a Chevy. Lastly is his style of driving — an echo of the late Dale Earnhardt. Stewart gives any driver ground only after giving him or her a handful of grief and trading paint along the way. I never cared for his hot temper, however.

This season, I've admired seeing his maturity accompany his driving to higher ground. His trademark persistence helped rekindle camaraderie between him and his teammates as made evident by their Coca-Cola showering of Stewart at the podium Sunday. His crew-chief Greg Zipadelli, who Stewart had the class to recognize on ESPN two days before the race, popped the first bottle.

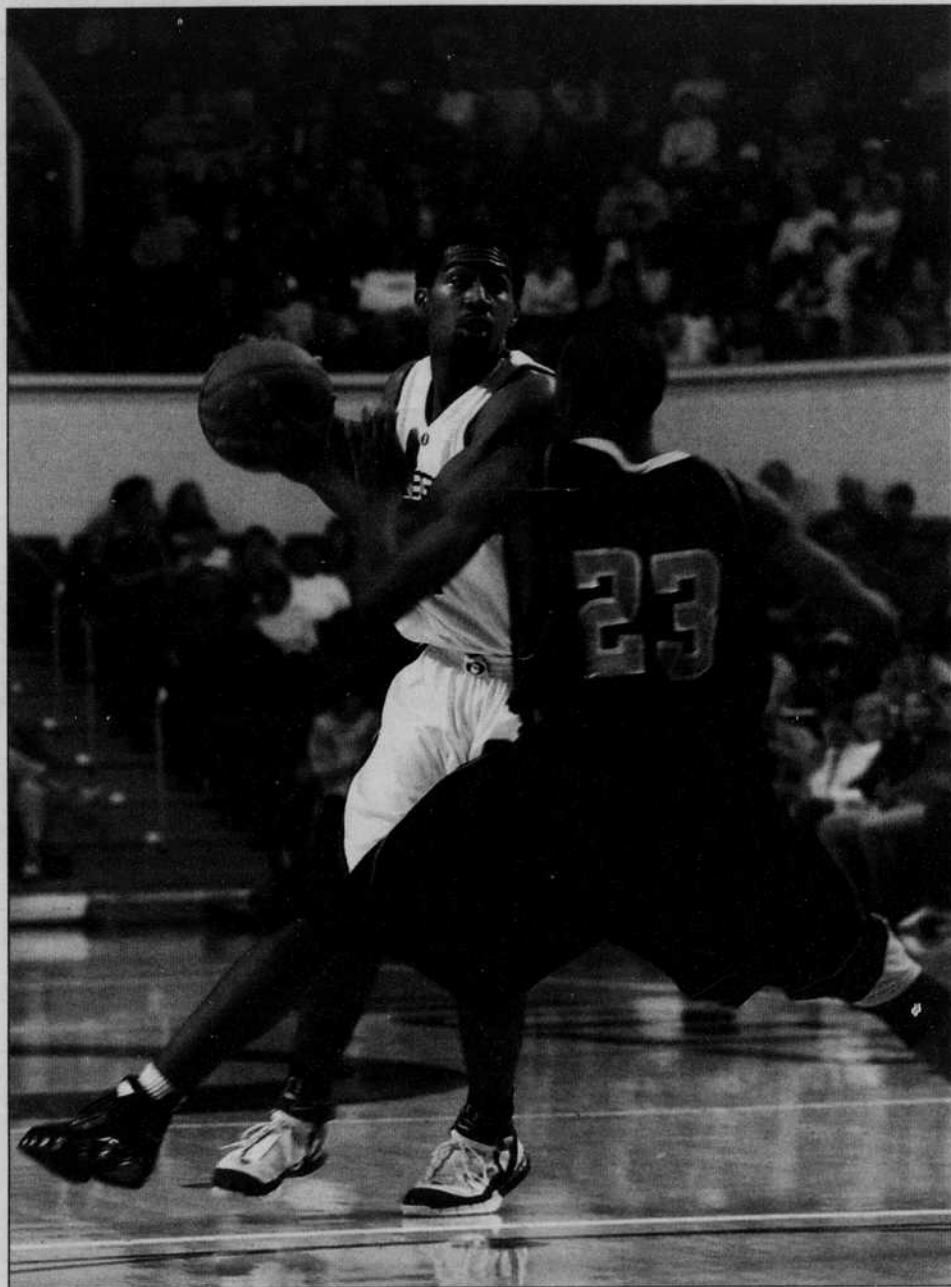
"This one I want to win for Greg Zipadelli more than the rest of the competition can possibly imagine," Stewart said. "It doesn't mean we're going to win it, but if they're going to win it, they're going to have to take it from me."

Aside from giving homage to his team, Stewart has improved his image with the media and fans. Following the Ford 400, he took time to cheer with his audience and spoke with tact to reporters. It was one of the many times he has chosen his words for the media this season. It was nice to see him still thinking about his team at the press conference.

"Let's get this over with as quick as possible so I can go drink a beer with my team," Stewart said. "That's what I want to do more than anything right now."

Congrats on the win Tony, and your place among the sports' greatest. You've earned it.

sadams@dailyemerald.com



PARKER HOWELL | EDITOR IN CHIEF

Oregon guard Brandon Lincoln guides the offense Monday night during an 80-55 victory over Bowie State. Lincoln scored 12 points, including seven of eight from the free-throw line.

■ Men's basketball

Division II Bulldogs no match for Oregon

The Ducks shot a near-perfect 25 of 26 from the free-throw line to beat Bowie State 80-55

BY LIKE ANDREWS
SPORTS REPORTER

The Oregon Ducks met a challenge Monday night but still improved to 2-0 on the season with an 80-55 win over Division II Bowie State in front of 8,211 at McArthur Court.

One night after a season-opening 83-23 win against Savannah State — the third largest margin of victory in school history — the Ducks were tested early and often by the Bulldogs, who finished last season ranked third in the Division II national poll.

Maarty Leunen had a career-high 15 points, including 13 in the second half, and Oregon shot 25 of 26 from the free-throw line to claim the victory in the first-ever meeting between the two schools.

"We came out pretty slow and didn't shoot the ball particularly well in the first half," Leunen said. "It's not the way we planned it to be, but we got the 'W.'"

Oregon was cold from the field in the beginning and finished the first half shooting 1 of 8 from three-point range and 14 of 27 from the field. But the Ducks compensated with an 18-10 rebounding advantage and 8 for 8 shooting from the free-throw line.

After a layup by Ivan Johnson gave Oregon a

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■ Duck volleyball

Ducks can't grab win in Washington

Oregon could not close out WSU after a 38-36 game-four victory, falling 15-6 in the final game

BY JEFFREY DRANSFELDT
SPORTS REPORTER

The Oregon volleyball team's season moved closer to its conclusion after losing two matches on its final road trip of the season.

A short trip that began with a flight to Pullman, Wash., Thursday morning and a match against Washington State that night, which ended with a bus ride to face No. 3 Washington on Friday night.

Succinct travel plans didn't match Oregon's play with the Ducks (12-16 overall, 1-15 Pacific-10 Conference) losing to Washington State (9-21, 2-15) in five games and the following night to No. 3 Washington in three.

The Washington State loss marked Oregon's third consecutive match lost in the fifth game after previous home defeats against Oregon State and UCLA.

"It's the first time since the '80s that we'd either won or went five (games) with three straight Pac-10 teams, so there's

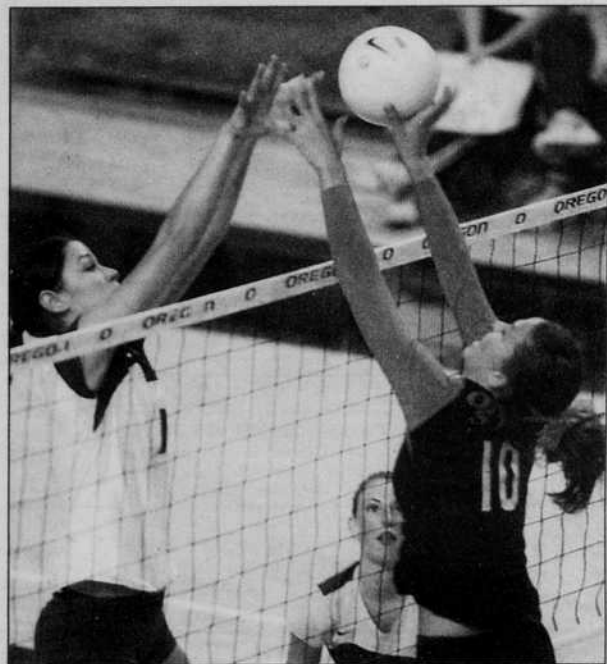
some good that can come out of that," Oregon coach Jim Moore said. "It's just really frustrating when not a single one of them was a win."

The progress Oregon had hoped for was a .500 record and more Pac-10 wins than in the past, but that goal has been altered. The team now uses challenging Pac-10 teams rather than winning as the current measuring stick.

"The hard part is you have to measure it by wins and losses," Moore said. "But the reality is it comes down to a pride thing on how you play and how you perform and it becomes an internal thing."

Oregon started Pac-10 play with high hopes for possibly an NCAA Tournament berth, which disappeared as optimism changed to frustration. Oregon lost its first two road matches at Arizona State and Arizona without an injured Jaclyn Jones.

Oregon earned its lone conference win against Washington State in October and had



NICOLE BARKER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Senior Kelly Russell goes for the block against Oregon State's Abby Windell as libero Katie Swoboda looks on. Oregon lost two matches last week against Washington State and Washington.

looked forward to playing the Cougars again.

Instead, Oregon fell behind early as it lost two of the first three games. Oregon tied the match at two games apiece with a 38-36 game four win in the Ducks longest game of the season. Washington State won with a 15-6 game five and

prevented Oregon from earning its first sweep of a Pac-10 team since 1996.

Oregon freshman Mira Djuric had a team-high 20 kills. Senior Kelly Russell contributed 18 kills and 10 digs, and freshman Erika Bartruff had a career-high 12 digs

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