

## I bet you don't show up to games either



By John William Howard  
Sports Editor

If you were in Oregon City on a Saturday afternoon in the mid 1970s, it's likely that your plans would include taking in a football game. Not by driving down to Eugene or Corvallis but right there in the city. You'd pack your food and beverage of choice and head over to join the horde of fans at Pioneer Stadium and take in real college football with several thousand other fans.

Community college football wasn't the only sport that drew the attention of the public. Basketball games held in Randall Hall were full, complete with a pep band and a cheer squad. Football and basketball games were covered by *The Oregonian* and people came from all over the area to watch the teams play. After all, the college sports teams were made up mostly of hometown players from schools just a few minutes away by car.

That was the '70s. Somewhere along the line, things changed. Football was cut in 1978 and many sports have been added since, but attendance and fan support seems to have dwindled miserably. Oftentimes a women's soccer game can't muster more fans than players and the holes in the audience at basketball games would imply that the teams are terrible and not worth watching. This, however, is completely backward. Clackamas has built one of the strongest athletic programs in the entire league, winning 16 NWAACC titles and one NJCAA title since 2000. They've taken either first or second 32 times in the last 11 seasons including back to back men's basketball titles in 2009-10 and back to back women's soccer titles in 2004-05.

That begs the question: where are all the spectators? Normally when a team has success, the fans follow. In this case, the success is largely unknown to outsiders. Few even know about the 2011 NJCAA title won by the wrestling team. Even fewer know that women's soccer has advanced to the NWAACC Final Four six out of the 10 years that the program has existed.

I happen to think that sucks. It's not entirely on the athletic department. This is happening at the junior college level all over the Northwest. Media coverage has gone down the toilet, fans have dwindled to naught and the programs are often dismissed as "just community colleges."

The source for that, I think comes from several different places. The first is that it's much easier now to see sports without getting off of your living room couch. ESPN made things easy enough, but with the rise of handheld technology like the iPad and the Android, fans can see stats, highlights and even stream televised games live wherever they are.

That's a far cry from the '70s and '80s where the hometown team was by far the easiest team to watch. It wasn't Division I but by golly it was still college football right in our backyard.

That leads to another reason. Many, many years ago, the college teams in the state of Oregon were good for nothing. They were at the bottom of the then Pac-8 and were hardly worth watching. Memories from those decades are mostly bad, including the 1983 "toilet bowl," a Civil War ending in a scoreless tie and featuring 11 fumbles, five interceptions and four missed field goals.

In recent years, things have changed around. Not only is college football considerably better at Oregon and Oregon State than it was years ago, but they've improved in many sports across the board. Fans that wouldn't have been caught dead in Ducks gear now sport it proudly and the hometown team is thrown to the wayside.

I think it's time there was a little bit of a revival. Yes, there are more players from outside the area than there used to be, but it's still a chance to see high school stars compete at the next level. The rosters are filled with athletes from Molalla, Rex Putnam, Oregon City, West Linn, Gladstone and Estacada high schools, to name a few.

They're hometown, they're hometown and they're good. Why not give them a chance? After all, retro is making a comeback.



Clackamas defender Brianne Paisley fights Pirate forward Shelby Solomon for the ball during the first half of the NWAACC Semi-final on Nov. 19. Clackamas lost 1-0 in on a goal in the 29th minute and were knocked from the tournament.

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It says a lot about the close-knittedness of a group when they can laugh together. It says even more when they can cry together, as was the case in the huddle around Head Coach Janine Szpara after the Cougars fell 1-0 to the Pirates of Peninsula College in last Saturday's NWAACC women's semi-final game at Starfire Stadium in Tukwila, Wash.

Looking across the field from the press box, it seemed that things might be a little in the Pirates favor. For one, Pirates fans made up the majority of the spectators, hooting and hollering and waving their black and gold scarves. For another, Peninsula fielded 25 women while Clackamas had only 14 players on their roster. That's 11 starters and only three subs.

"[Coach Szpara] has said it all season, it's not about how big the team is, it's about having the right players," said Assistant Coach Miriam Coto. "I think, with 14 players, we had the right players ... I'd rather have 14 and be a close team, a family."

Clackamas walked on to the field composed. Stoic and focused, it was a stark contrast to the team wearing yellow and white. The Pirates jumped up and down and cheered in their huddle while the Cougars stood together in a quiet, tight circle.

Clackamas kicked off and from the moment the ball was put in to play it was clear that it would be a rough, physical game from start to finish. For a while, the referee allowed the players to push one another around but before long, the whistles started to pile up.

In the 29th minute, the physicality took a turn for the worse. During an attack by the Peninsula offense, Clackamas defender Ali Scharbach made an attempt to steal the ball from Pirate forward Shelby Solomon and clipped her foot, bringing her to the ground inside the 18 yard box.

On the resulting penalty kick, Peninsula's Jackie Rodgers went high and left post, freezing Clackamas goalkeeper Tori Wilkinson as the shot sailed past her and into the net to give Peninsula the 1-0 advantage.

"Penalty kicks ... it's one of those things that you guess and hope for the best. If you guess wrong you guess wrong and if you guess right you guess right," said Wilkinson. "I could tell which side she was going to but you can never

tell whether they're going to go high or low. You just have to guess ... I tried and I just couldn't get there in time."

Wilkinson didn't take any time to dwell on the goal. She had plenty of other things to worry about, namely the fact that Clackamas was outshot 12-5 and the ball spent most of the game on Clackamas' half of the field. The defense and Wilkinson stepped, up but every time Clackamas made an attempt to push the ball down the field, Peninsula would corral it and boom it back on the attack, making it difficult for the Cougars to get a rhythm going.

"We like to play soccer. We don't just play kick and chase," said Coto, who spoke for Szpara after the post-game huddle. "We come out and we try to play our game, but it's hard to do that when teams are just booting the ball up and you can't get the ball on the ground."

After halftime concluded, Clackamas continued to be pounded by the Peninsula attacks, making little headway and having few chances at getting in to scoring position, let alone taking an actual shot.

The jeers from the Peninsula crowd grew louder when the men's team arrived and even louder as the clock ticked nearer to the Pirates first trip to the NWAACC finals in just their second year as a program. Clackamas hurried and made every attempt to tie but eventually the final whistle sounded, ending the Cougar's season and their hopes at a title.

"We don't know what we feel yet," said a tearful Sandra Tinoco. "I got hurt early and it just sucks that I couldn't be there for my team like I wanted to be. And I think most of us felt that way."

Tinoco's thoughts were echoed on the faces of nearly all her teammates with the exception of Wilkinson, who seems to share some of former NCAA star Szpara's steel.

"[As a goalkeeper] you see everything," said Wilkinson. "We'd have glimpses where I'd be like 'go go go! Keep doing that!' and then we'd break down again and we'd stop."

A team with a first year head coach and a large class of freshmen returning, Clackamas is sure to find further success next season after climbing to the Final Four as the second smallest team in the entire league. The Cougars finished the season at 11-5-1 and took home their sixth Southern Region championship since the program's birth in 2002.



Midfielder Sandra Tinoco looks to make a pass during Saturday's semi-final game. Tinoco was injured in the first half, but continued to play.



Midfielder Kelsie Knight and Deidra Woodward of Peninsula collide midair.

All photos by John William Howard The Clackamas Print