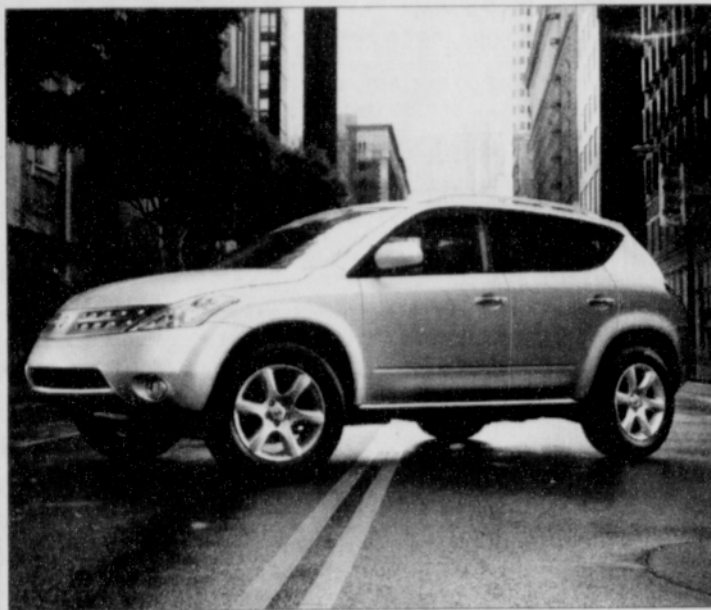


Portland Observer Auto Review



2006 Nissan Murano SL AWD

BY KATHLEEN CARR

The 2006 Nissan Murano is a good example of a crossover vehicle: It's designed to haul cargo like a sport-utility, but ride and drive like a car. The Murano reflects an emphasis on refinement and over-the-road confidence over off-road ruggedness.

For 2006, the Murano's styling has been freshened with a new grille design, a chrome lower grille insert and other subtle changes. It also gets LED taillights that look distinctive.

The Murano has combined a complete package with a smooth ride, responsive handling of a car, the cargo space of a wagon, and the high driving position of a sport utility. Murano integrates aerodynamics and high fashion, with a sleek front end and smooth lines from front to back.

The CVT Transmission in the Murano has just three ranges: D for normal driving, S for sportier acceleration and L for the lowest range. Shifting from D to S raises engine revs 2500 rpm at a given road speed. Dropping from S to L increases engine speed by another 1000 rpm.

The SL upgrades with a 10-way power adjustable driver's seat, upgraded audio with steering wheel controls, a compass, a garage door opener, automatic headlights, auto-dimming rearview mirror, power outlets, fog lights, and a theft alarm. SL and SE models wear new brushed aluminum trim on the rear bumper and chrome accents along the sides. Base price of the SL is \$30,600.

The Nissan Murano offers the roominess and practicality of a sport utility with the handling, power and smoothness of a sporty sedan. It comes well equipped and its luxurious ambience gives it the feel of a luxury SUV.

Tested Vehicle Information: Price: \$40,335; Engine: 245 HP 3.5 Liter DOHC V6; Transmission: Xtronic CVT (Continuously Variable Transmission)

SPORTS

Florida Gators Take NCAA Title

Gators chomp Bruins to win

AP—The Florida Gators won the NCAA men's championship Monday, blowing out the UCLA Bruins 73-57.

Joakim Noah dominated the Bruins on with 16 points, nine rebounds and a record six blocks for Florida's first title in that other sport.

"It's like I'm in a cloud," Noah said. "Not only does this feel good, but it smells good and it tastes good. I can't even describe it."

The Gators and all their fans would certainly agree, especially after watching this runaway-a-pick-your-score kind of game that was decided early.

Many thought it couldn't be done 10 years ago when Billy Donovan took over a basketball program that lived well in the shadows of Steve Spurrier's brash, high-flying football juggernaut. Now, Spurrier is long gone and the Gators have as many national championships in hoops as they do in football. "It's undecidable," said Noah, who now will decide whether to turn pro, "better than I've ever felt in my life."

For 40 lopsided minutes, the Gators (33-6) were too big, too long and too quick for UCLA, which came up a win short of its 12th national title on a night when 95-year-old former coach John Wooden watched from a hospital bed in LA. He was admitted for an undisclosed illness that was said not to be serious, but the Bruins didn't try to use that distraction as an excuse.

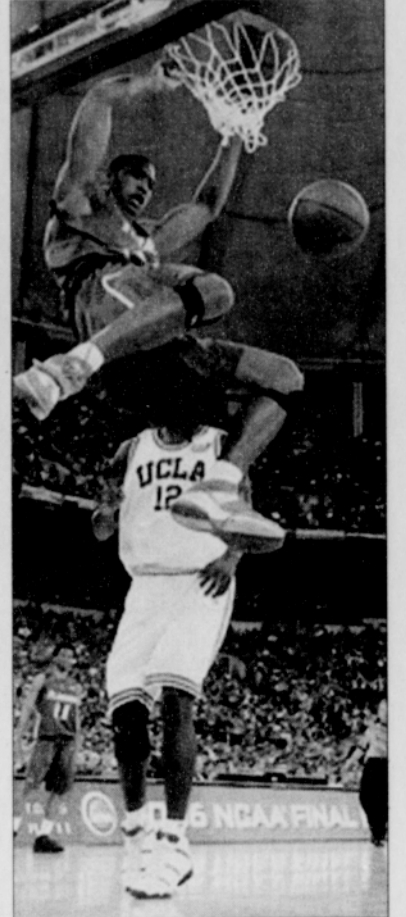
"Our heart and everything we do on the floor is always a tribute to him, whether he's healthy or not," UCLA guard Arron Afflalo said.

Florida and Noah, voted most outstanding player in the Final Four, won by putting on a thorough display of versatility and unselfishness, a trademark of this team all season.

Lee Humphrey added 15 points, Al Horford 14 and Corey Brewer 11 for Florida. UCLA (32-7) was on a defensive tear coming into the cham-



Florida players celebrate their 73-57 win over UCLA in the NCAA Final Four men's national championship basketball game in Indianapolis on Monday.



Al Horford of the Florida Gators dunks the ball over the UCLA Bruins defense.

pionship game, shutting down LSU's Glen "Big Baby" Davis in the semifinals and allowing a total of 90 points in the last two games. Florida, though, was just too much to handle.

The Gators ran to a double-digit lead early and staved off every UCLA run.

Noah capped it off with a monster dunk with 1:09 left. When the buzzer sounded, he lay flat on his back at halfcourt and let the confetti rain on him. His teammates were in a pile a few feet away and Donovan was sharing hugs with his longtime assistant Anthony Grant.

The Gators won this by taking it right to UCLA early, looking inside to Noah, Brewer, Horford and senior Adrian Moss. Unafraid to make the extra pass, even in traffic down low, they finished with 21 assists, eight by point guard Taurean Green. More impressively, 10 came from their frontcourt.

It couldn't have been what UCLA coach Ben Howland expected after Florida's 73-58 win over George Mason in the semis, a game the Gators won from outside and that Humphrey ended early in the second with three straight 3s.

The scrappy Humphrey, the lone junior in a starting lineup full of sophomores, did the honors again in this one, spotting up for open looks against a collapsing defense early in the second half.

His first 3, 80 seconds into the half, gave Florida a 39-25 lead and forced Howland to call timeout. A sloppy offensive possession ensued, then Humphrey came back with another 3.

After Ryan Hollins' dunk, one of the few easy baskets for the Bruins, Brewer hit a 3 to make it 45-27 and prompt yet another Bruins TO.

There was no strategy to stop Noah. The 6-foot-11 forward dunked, swatted shots and dominated the game much like his dad

did during his magical run to the French Open title in 1983.

Noah shot 7-for-9 and also had three assists and a steal. When it was over, the kid ran to the stands to try to find his family.

"I'm so happy," Yannick Noah said, wiping away tears from behind his sunglasses. "I'm so happy for him, but also for all of his friends. They deserve it. It's a beautiful story."

UCLA had all the history behind it, and a pretty good team, to boot. The Bruins just didn't have enough. Farmer, who chose UCLA over Florida, was their only scoring threat. He finished with 18 points. His backcourt mate, Afflalo, finished with 10, but was shut out in the first half, while this game was getting away.

Florida is still 10 titles behind UCLA, but this was one that should quiet the diehards who said it couldn't be done in Gainesville.



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Action-packed regular season begins April 6

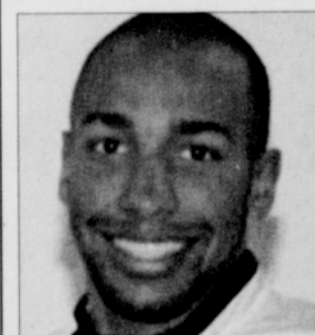
The Portland Beavers unveil their 2006 season this weekend with a summer of giveaways, theme nights, family-friendly events, three fireworks shows and the return of Bark in the Park and Mullet Night. The activities kick off a 72-game home schedule with PGE's traditional giveaway of 2006 schedule magnets during Opening Weekend, April 6 through 8, as the Beavers play Sacramento nightly at 7:05 p.m.

A long list of special dates highlight

the schedule, but regardless of day, the Beavers feature a theme for every game.

Tickets start at eight dollars and are available at area Ticketmaster outlets, the PGE Park box office, by phone at 503-224-4400 or online at www.ticketmaster.com. A variety of season-ticket options are still available by calling the Beavers ticket office at 503-553-5555. Ticket information is also available at www.portlandbeavers.com.

PSU Track Athletes Honored



Kenneth Mackins



Kerry-Ann Blackwood

Junior Kenneth Mackins and senior Kerry-Ann Blackwood were named Big Sky Conference Track Athletes of the Week Thursday by the conference office. Both Viking athletes qualified for the Big Sky Championship last weekend at the Oregon Preview in Eugene.

Mackins placed first in the 100-meter during a recent meet finishing in a time of 10.91-seconds. The race

marked the outdoor season debut for the reigning BSC Indoor 60m champion. This is the first athlete of the week award for the Thousand Oaks, Calif., native.

For Blackwood, the award is her second career award, having earned athlete of week honors during the indoor season on Jan. 25. Blackwood took second in the 100m hurdles March 18 with time of 14.65.

Negro League Comes to Portland

continued ▲ from Metro

on at the museum.

The 53-foot mobile exhibit titled "Times of Greatness,"

will travel through 25 cities from April to August, with historic photos, video, uniforms, and a local history of Portland-area leagues. The

museum rolls into town Wednesday from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. and Thursday from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the main entrance of PGE Park, 1844

SW Morrison. See hundreds of other photographs and exhibits at the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, in Kansas City.



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