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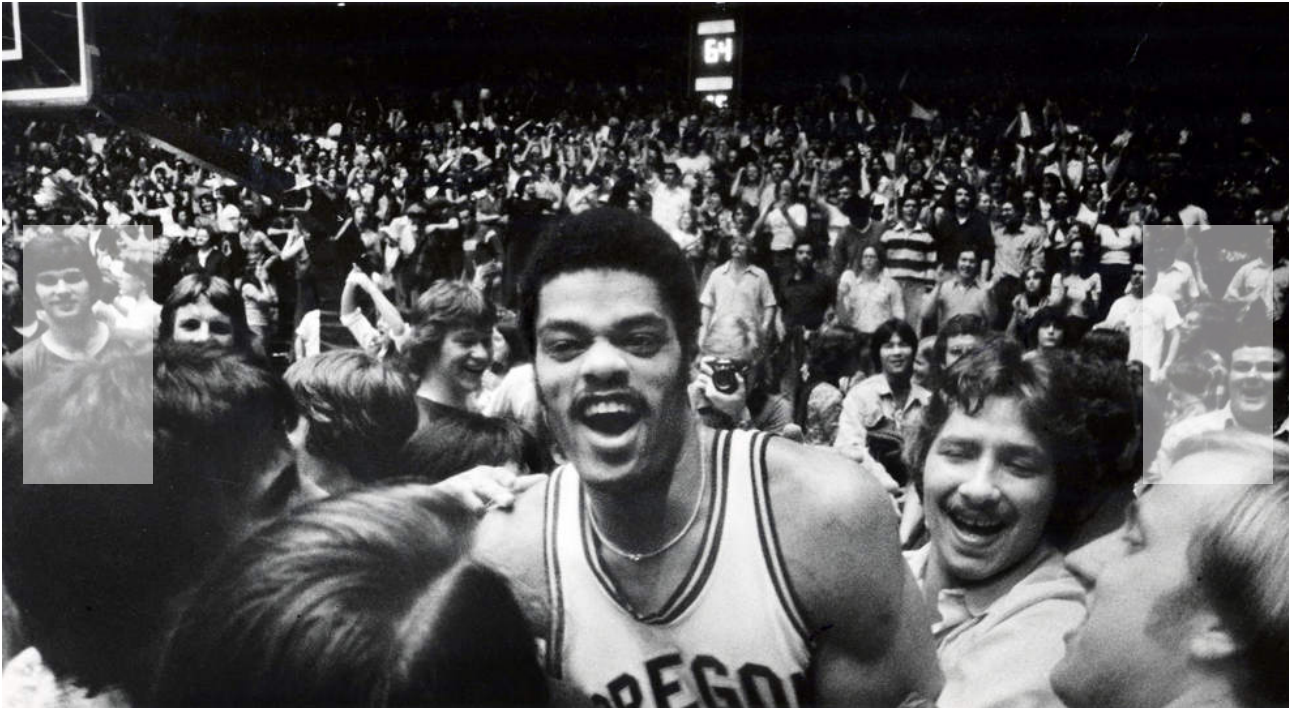
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OREGON MEN'S BASKETBALL

Former Oregon basketball Kamikaze Kid Greg Ballard dies at age 61



1/3 – Greg Ballard celebrates with fans after the Ducks upset UCLA at Mac Court in 1997. (Steve Thompson/The Register-Guard)

By **STEVE MIMS**

The Register-Guard

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Greg Ballard, one of Oregon's famed Kamikaze Kids who won an NBA championship with the Washington Bullets, died Wednesday morning of prostate cancer in his hometown of Tyrone, Ga. He was 61.

Nearly 40 years after his playing days at Oregon, Ballard remains the school's all-time leading rebounder and ranks fourth in career scoring. He also holds the single-game scoring record with 43 points in a 90-89 win over Oral Roberts in the National Invitation Tournament on March 9, 1977.



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"He was never pretentious and so humble, but when he got his hand on a rebound, he was going to get that ball," former teammate Rob Closs recalled.

Closs spoke with Ballard and his wife, Donna, on Tuesday. The Ballards have three children, Lawrence, Gabrielle, and Gregory Jr.

"The good news is he was surrounded by family and in hospice and everyone came in and got chance to say good-bye," Closs said. "I have been communicating with all my old teammates and those people who knew him and it has been extremely sad. Just something you don't expect. I am looking at a picture of him in my office. GB was such a gentle guy."

Ballard started as a freshman with Ron Lee as a sophomore in the backcourt and those two teamed up for three years on some of Oregon's most popular teams known for their tough style of play under coach Dick Harter.

"This is a sad time, but you have to think about all the good times we had," Lee said. "All the stuff we had to go through at Oregon made us stronger and gave us a bond. He will always be a part of my life. He was a fighter. I've always had the highest respect for him. He was a nice guy and loved his family. I liked everything about him. He played 11 years in the NBA and never got a big head about it. He was honest and down to earth."



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Closs was named a starter for the Ducks as a sophomore to begin the 1976-77 season and Harter roomed him with Ballard before the Ducks opened the season at UNLV.

"They had a good team with Glen Gondrezick and Reggie Theus and Jerry Tarkanian was the coach and they had introductions with spotlights, but Greg really calmed me down," Closs said. "He was always a gentle giant to me."

The 6-foot-7, 215-pound Ballard was the No. 4 pick in the 1977 NBA draft by the Washington Bullets after earning All-American honors as a senior at Oregon. He helped the Bullets beat

Seattle in a seven-game series to win the 1978 NBA title during his rookie season.

Ballard played as a reserve behind Hall of Famers Wes Unseld and Elvin Hayes on those Bullets teams, who reached the finals again in 1979.

Closs played baseball and basketball at Oregon and said Ballard, who was picked in the 10th round of the Major League Baseball draft by the Montreal Expos, could have been a two-sport athlete too.

"He was a pitcher in high school in Pomona, Calif., and (baseball coach) Mel Krause wanted him to pitch badly, but Harter said no," Closs said.

Ballard is the only player in Oregon history with 1,000 rebounds. He set the school record with 1,114 in 115 games for an average of 9.7 per game. He averaged 10.4 rebounds during his junior season.

Ballard scored 1,829 points and averaged 15.9 points per game as a four-year starter at Oregon from 1973-77. He averaged 21.7 points per game as a senior, the fourth-highest single-season average at Oregon, to win the Pac-8 Conference scoring title, totaling 629 points to rank eighth on the single-season list.

His 675 field goals are third in UO history and 479 free throws are second behind Luke Jackson.

"RIP Greg Ballard, Greg was a great Basketball player at Oregon and the NBA and always very kind to me," Jackson tweeted on Wednesday morning.

Ballard helped Oregon finish above .500 in each season for Harter, including three trips to the NIT. He was inducted into the University of Oregon Hall of Fame in 1993 and was Oregon's representative into the Pac-12 Hall of Honor in 2009.

"He was a hell of a basketball player," Lee said. "He was a bully and that was what I loved about him. I loved his attitude. He was a tough guy and he loved that. He smiled about it. I liked his charisma. He played because he loved the game and that came through when he played at Oregon."

The 6-foot-7, 215-pound Ballard matched Jim Loscutoff, who was picked fourth by Boston in 1955, as the highest-drafted player out of Oregon.

Ballard spent eight of his 11 NBA seasons in Washington before spending two seasons at Golden State. He finished his career with Seattle in 1988-89.

He averaged career highs of 18.8 points and 8.0 rebounds in 1981-82. He averaged 12.4 points, 6.1 rebounds, 2.2 assists, and 1.1 steals per game in his NBA career.

He worked as an assistant coach and scout for 21 years with Atlanta, Dallas and Minnesota after retiring as a player.

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Jim W

Nov 9, 2016

I met Greg briefly at Oregon and he was as a good a person as he was a ballplayer. We lost one of the good ones.



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