

Affinity of a mom-fan settles on another man

By **GENITA COSTELLO**

I learned at a young age that the quickest way to a man's heart is through sports.

Seven years younger than my jock brother, I clocked in hours rebounding his basketball shots and taking up an unofficial position as scorekeeper while we watched his favored Dodgers play baseball on TV. In return, he allowed me the privilege of spending time with him.

Essay

For someone who idolized her brother's every move, that was payment in full. Instead of seeing me as a pest that he tried to shoo away, he invited me into his athletic world, and I took him up on his offer every chance I could.

Today I live with two Giants and Blazer fans who hate the Dodgers and Lakers. So while my loyalties have changed, my strategies for staying close to the men in my life have not.

I watch March Madness, listen to my husband bemoan another Giants loss and

have clocked in more hours rebounding basketball shots and cheering on the home team. In return, my husband and son let me spend time with them — on the couch, on the court, in the gym. Once again, I consider myself paid in full.



But lately, my interest in sports has changed. I'm following them not so much for the men in my life as for myself.

Blame it on Greg Oden. Ever since the Blazers won the No. 1 draft pick, I find myself turning to the sports page first when I open the paper.

On draft day I sat next to my son as we watched Oden step on the stage and accept his nomination as the ticket to a Blazer transformation. When his mom stood up to hug him, I cried the tears of a happy fan and a virtual mom.

And therein lies the rub. Now I find the lines between mom and fan blurring as I feel an urge to mother Oden and protect him from the impatient public.

After he was practically carried into Pioneer Courthouse Square on a throne, the headlines following his first summer league game reminded this 18-year-old giant, as well as the rest of us, that he is only human, not God.

Declaring that the "Greg Oden era started with an overwhelming thud,"

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Greg Oden suits up for the Blazers during an NBA Summer League game in July.

Oregonian sportswriter Jason Quick shifted gears from promotional hype to cutthroat analysis. The fan in me got defensive; the mother in me got mad. One day he could do no wrong; the next, he got an F — as in foul. I'm hoping the skin covering that 7-foot frame is thick enough to withstand the scrutiny headed his way and that through it all he remains the nice, humble kid he appears to be.

The frenzy over Oden's play has died down over the past few weeks as he recuperates from a tonsillectomy. As much as I've missed my daily sports bite, I'm glad that he has had a chance to hide out from the media's glare.

With practices soon to get under way for preseason games, I'm taking my position and hope other Oregonians will follow. To paraphrase singer Tammy Wynette, I plan on standing by my man. It worked for my brother as well as my son. And if it's left up to me as a fan and virtual mom, it will work for Greg Oden.

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