

TRASH TALK IS ACADEMIC

UW points to a different scoreboard

It is a truth known to everybody who's ever held a ball — or watched ESPN — that when you get waxed by a longtime rival, you have to say something. When you're the University of Washington, and the University of Oregon has just buried you, 53-16, even though it took the Ducks a full quarter to notice they were in a game, you have to get off some kind of parting shot.

There's no point being a Husky unless you do some woofing. You could declare that you may have lost the game, but your SAT scores are higher, or your cheerleaders are better looking. You could insult the Ducks' neighborhood, pointing out that Seattle is "Frasier," while Eugene is, well, fragrant.

But UW athletic director Scott Woodward went in a different direction. First, Woodward went off on the Ducks before the game, suggesting a certain lack of confidence in the outcome.

Second, instead of the standard "your school is so lame your mascot is extinct" approach, Woodward became as pointed as a tailgate beef skewer.

"It's an embarrassment what their academic institution is, and what's happened to them as far as their state

funding has gone," said Woodward. "In my mind, it's a wonderful athletic facility, but they've watched it at the expense of the university go really down.



DAVID SARASOHN

"... Any of the rankings you look at, you watch how far (the Ducks have) dropped because of their state funding."

So pin that up next to your No. 1 football ranking.

Woodward swiftly apologized, and then UW interim President Phyllis Wise ordered him to apologize again, telling him it was a mistake to "criticize publicly another institution's quality."

She's not saying he was wrong — just impolite.

Wise went on to say, in the comforting tone of a mother assuring someone else's child that next to last is an excellent place to finish, that the U of O "is an excellent public institution that continues to serve the citizens of Oregon well, particularly in light of diminishing state support."

Ouch.

Wise's comment was actually more stinging than Woodward's. He was at least being competitive; she was being sensitive and understanding about our shortcomings, which is a lot more insulting.

As the pundit Michael Kinsley has

noted, a gaffe is a true statement said unexpectedly. If Woodward, facing an athletic defeat, had mocked the quality of Stanford or UCLA, somebody would have just mocked back, with mild disbelief, and then everyone would have had a beer.

But this situation was more delicate; Woodward was doing the impermissible, chatting about rope in the home of somebody who'd been hanged.

After all, checking out the scoreboard maintained by the Delta Project on Postsecondary Costs, Productivity and Accountability — and let's see cheerleaders spell that out — we've gone beyond a rout.

In 2007-08, for public research universities — UO, Oregon State, Portland State — Oregon laid out \$3,849 per year per student in state funding. Washington spent \$14,002 per student per year, California \$14,835 and Arizona \$8,262.

(It's not an exact comparison — for example, the other states' figures include medical schools, which Oregon's doesn't — but that's no more than a holding penalty.)

After the Pac-10 expands next year, it will include the University of Utah, where the number was \$9,030. It won't be easy to have the president of the University of Utah being sensitive and understanding about Oregon.

On Woodward's other point, that

the university's academic funding problems sit next to athletic facilities that are galaxy-class — UO passed "world-class" a while ago — it would be embarrassing if he were revealing a secret. But there's some reason to think that the faculty has noticed. As two UO professors wrote in *The (Eugene) Register-Guard* in 2007, "It is worse than ironic that our academic rankings are dropping as our football rankings rise."

That'll happen when you've got a plasma-screen sports infrastructure and a covered-wagon academic budget.

Still, the Ducks did wallop Washington, and Woodward can just lump it. And maybe through this episode, there's a message for all of us.

We can look to a point first made by a great American educator, George Lynn Cross, president of the University of Oklahoma from 1943 to 1968, a time when Oklahoma won 14 conference titles in a row and three national championships.

As Cross once told the Oklahoma State Senate, "I want a university the football team can be proud of."

Put that up on the scoreboard.

David Sarasohn, associate editor, can be reached at 503-221-8523 or davidsarasohn@news.oregonian.com. See other writing at oregonlive.com/sarasohn/