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Teamwork matters

Growing up, I was always a foot shorter and roughly 20 pounds lighter than my age group, and my coordination was not exactly stellar.

As a result of all this, sports analogies can go right over my head. These days I rarely watch sports events on television, and I definitely haven't ever had a fantasy sports team. Yet as I thought about this column and the Membership Issue, I couldn't suppress the urge to compare our organization, the OAN, to a sports team. We know that getting together, sticking together and working toward common goals will get us more wins than doing things on our own.

As a player and coach, Phil Jackson has more NBA championship rings than fingers to put them on. He coached the Chicago Bulls as they shattered my childhood dream of a Portland Trail Blazer championship in 1992. One quote of his that certainly applies to teamwork and to a great extent membership in our association is, "The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team."

That proved true when Jackson won two championships as a player with the New York Knicks in the 1970s, and as a 11-time championship coach with the Los Angeles Lakers and Chicago Bulls. And it's been true for Oregon nurseries ever since we formed our association in 1933, which was 85 years ago.

Then and now, the power of being part of a collective and well-organized group gives us a stronger and clearer voice. While this was important in the association's very beginning, it is especially critical today. We're facing more complex challenges when it comes to marketing, government regulations, politics, pest and disease control and labor supply.

Because the members are the association, it should come as no surprise that the association has evolved to address member needs. These days we market ourselves and our products with the *Nursery Guide* and NurseryGuide.com. We host the West Coast's largest trade show at Farwest every August. We tell our story and provide indispensable business and grower knowledge through our publications, including *Digger* and online *Member Update*.

We host state and federal representatives on our farms and show them firsthand what we do and how they can help us do it better. We help fund research projects that affect our industry. We do our jobs whether that's growing plants, selling containers or building greenhouses while a trusting set of eyes watches every move in the capitol for us making sure our interests are understood.

We do all this together.

Individually, I couldn't begin to reach the market that our show and publications reach. I couldn't get a U.S. senator or representatives's lowest ranking staffer to come onto the farm, as the OAN did when U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici recently visited several nurseries. The research on pests and diseases, as well as new plant varieties, keeps our business strong and on the proactive side of things. I couldn't fund or direct that research on my own.

With all due respect for elected officials, I am grateful for every minute I don't have to spend navigating the halls and chambers in Salem and Washington D.C.. I'd rather be out on my farm producing quality products for happy customers.

I can't believe I am even attempting it but here's my best sports analogy: Together we are more than a guy that can dunk. We are an active and dynamic force working together to get the ball to the right place at the right time. More often than not, we win — even if the opposition puts all its efforts into stopping the dunk.



Josh Zielinski
OAN PRESIDENT