

Whatever happened to Kamikaze Kids?

COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO. — It was supposed to be a laugher.

The Oregon basketball squad traveled to Colorado Springs last Friday night to play the Air Force Academy during a two-week respite from the Pac-8 wars. Instead of breezing through Air Force as the seers predicted, the Falcons enjoyed the last laugh in the form of a 76-66 upset victory over the Ducks.

Not only were the Ducks soundly beaten, they were outthrustled, outrebounded and outmuscled throughout the game. The aforementioned were former traits of the Oregon basketball program which had carried them to a perfect 4-0 record in Pac-8 play and a share of first place with UCLA, who joined the ranks of mortals in their upset loss to Notre Dame Saturday.

Coach Dick Harter didn't take his squad's sorry performance lightly. "There was no excuse for it," said a disappointed Harter. "We didn't hustle. There was no defense out there except for four to five minutes in the first half. We didn't execute, there was no leadership, and we got no play out of anybody tonight."

Although it was a flat performance for the Ducks, now sporting 10-5 won-loss record overall, they still had their chances to escape Cadet Field House with a victory.

Two shooting slumps, one in each half, sealed the Ducks' doom. The first one occurred with the Falcons behind 37-30 late in the first half. The Ducks went on a three-minute scoring drought while Air Force retaliated with a 11-point scoring binge towards making 43-39 halftime score.

The second non-scoring spree was more disastrous. With Oregon making their bid late in the game with 10 minutes remaining, the Falcons ripped off another 11 points and the Ducks broke down offensively for nearly six minutes. Air Force's 14-point lead at 66-52 was too much to make up in the limited time left.

It was a game the Ducks would soon like to forget. The Falcons garnered 18 more rebounds, 42-24, without a player on the floor over 6-5. Rick Nicholson, who happens to be that 6-5 center, pulled in nine rebounds and scored 15 points. Air Force's Dan Kraft was the main gun, scoring 22 points.

The key to the game lay in the free throw situation, however. Although the Ducks scored four more field goals than Air Force, the Falcons connected on 22-29 free throw attempts, while Oregon only received eight chances from the free throw line, making four of them. "Air Force outthrustled us to the ball and we fouled them," said Harter. "It was a lack of effort; we didn't block out and we didn't do it."

Gerald Willett, who was a question mark before the game after missing a week of practice due to injury, kept the Ducks looking respectable through a major portion of the game. The 6-8 center, who usually has to look up to his opposite match-up at center, obviously enjoyed being the tallest man out on the floor in scoring 18 points on nine of 12 shots. Greg Ballard, who is leading the Pac-8 in rebounding, was held to a scant four rebounds. It was that kind of night. Ron Lee made only one third of his shots in scoring 12 points, mishandled the ball with six turnovers, and allowed his man Dan Kraft to lead all scorers with his 22 points.

After the weekend sweep against the Washington schools last weekend, Harter gave his players an uncharacteristic two off days from practice, but that will soon be a forgotten luxury in the wake of the Air Force loss. Harter has indicated that he will "increase the work load considerably" for the Ducks return to Pac-8 ball against Oregon State, Saturday. And that will mean tougher and more demanding practices in preparation for the OSU encounter.

It was just after a series of practices following the Far West debacle last month that Oregon started clicking in Pac-8 play. With considerable work during the practice sessions with the coming week, the Ducks should ably defend their share of first place. No one can take that away from them — yet.

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