



Burying a case of the Kamikaze blues

When we last left the Kamikaze Kids, they had completed a successful four-game home sweep and were looking forward to a shot at top-ranked Indiana, another thrashing of Providence and their second straight Far West Classic title.

But just as your expectations were dashed when Grandma came up with a purple and green turtle-shaped cashmere key chain for Christmas instead of the new Aretha Franklin album you wanted, so did the Ducks meet with disappointment.

The holidays were a Kamikaze downer. If you think it was tough listening to Aunt Milly trying to recall how many of her great cousins were lefthanded, consider what Oregon's basketball team went through. the Ducks

- Lost four of seven games.
- Lost two of those four games despite having ten and nine point leads at halftime.
- Lost one of those games 76-68 to Providence, a team the Ducks beat at home 86-73 last year.
- Lost one of those games to Oregon State to finish out of the top five in the Far West Classic.

"We've been a step slow all year," said Dick Harter. And if he shudders at the past, he also fidgets at the future.

Of course, what coach wouldn't feel the pinch if his team's next three opponents boasted a combined 34-2 record? That's what UCLA, USC and Washington are now and all three have a good chance to be in the AP's Top Ten this week.

Meanwhile, Oregon, a team which was 9-0 at this point last year with wins over Nevada-Las Vegas, Villanova, Arizona State and Providence, finds itself 7-6. With losses to Duquesne, Virginia Tech and a service team.

A 68-51 win over San Jose State Saturday restored some of your faith in the Ducks but Oregon is still not the Oregon of old. Teams that miss their first seven shots don't normally contend for Pac-8 titles. Nor do teams that are outscored 51-18 in the second half by Virginia Tech, outshot from the field by nine of 13 opponents and outthrust by a handful of teams they've played.

"We've been beating ourselves," said Harter.

"I'm sure our problems have stemmed from the disaster in Hawaii, but we can't hide behind that all year. We've gotta start playing like we can and let the wins and losses take care of themselves."

There's little doubt that six losses, two lengthy trips and the NCAA's new ten-player limitation have taken their toll on Oregon. Not only have the Ducks been losing on the scoreboard, they've been losing in the locker room as well.

Reports of internal team problems surfaced on the eve of Saturday's San Jose State game. Coaches and players refused to comment on the nature of the problem but said things had been ironed out at a Friday afternoon meeting.

"I think losing and traveling contributed to the problem," said Harter. "It's frustrating."

Back on the court, Oregon's main problem, obviously, is the lack of a solid, consistent center. Harter wanted one by Christmas but the freshmen haven't progressed as fast as he'd liked.

The Ducks have missed playing more games closer to home and having 12 players at away games. But more than that, the Ducks have missed Gerald Willett, the unsung hero of the three previous years.

"I didn't realize we'd miss him so much," said Harter. "He played good offense, good defense and was a real emotional leader. He was the most physical player we had and did a lot to bring the team together."

Averaging 16 points and 11 rebounds per game, Greg Ballard has taken up a lot of slack left by Willett's departure. But not many players have the defensive solidarity of Willett.

"He kept guards from driving in and was so tough in screening out that it left me with a lot of rebounds," said Ballard.

The freshmen that Harter has tried to plug the gap with — Dan Hartshorne, Kelvin Small and Gary Nelson — have all had moments to suggest the problem was over. But not enough moments.

At this point last year, Willett was averaging 10.7 points and 8.4 rebounds per game. Hartshorne and Small, the two who have seen the most action thus

far, simply don't have the experience. Hartshorne is averaging five points and 3.2 rebounds a game; Small 2.5 of each.

Willett's contributions went beyond the court, too.

"Willett made a great leader," said Ballard. "When we were behind, he'd always be there to get us charged up. I think our lack of leadership is hurting this year."

Another thing that's hurting is Harter's problem of teaching both experienced and inexperienced players. "Last year everybody had played together and was experienced," he said. "Now we're having to work with players on two distinct levels."

Harter's decision Saturday to slow down and plot rather than run-and-gun with other teams seemed inevitable. "We're not good enough to trade shots with people," he said.

If the Ducks are missing a solid center, they're also finding it difficult playing without a pure shooter. Oregon's top percentage shooter of last year — Willett — isn't around. Mike Drummond, the only other Duck to hit over .500 last season, hasn't been the stick of dynamite he was at the tail of last year. Ernie Kent's field goal percentage has fallen from last year's .497 to .435 and Ronnie Lee, who Harter predicted would shoot at least .500 this year, is hitting only .438.

All of which paints a pretty depressing picture, unless you consider what went on in the Pac-8 last year. Oregon State, you'll recall, fired back to finish second in the Pac-8 after three early season losses to weak teams; Washington beat UCLA one Monday night 103-81 and Oregon, after storming to an 10-0 record, lost eight Pac-8 games by a total of 14 points and went on to the NIT with an 18-8 record.

Anything could happen and Harter would like to see it happen now. The potential is there; it's just a matter of reaching it.

"We need a breakthrough more than anything," Harter said. "It's already been a long, tiring season but I'd walk 4,000 miles to our away games if we could win these next two."

IM entry deadline Thursday

Entries for IM basketball, handball and raquetball are due by 2 p.m. Thursday, according to John Broachardt, IM head. Schedules

can be picked up at the IM office (PE 171) at 3:30 on Friday and play begins Monday, Jan. 12.

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