

Photo by Bob Baker

Jerome Williams and the Ducks are playing the best basketball of Jim Haney's four years as head coach of Oregon.

Best and rest of Pacific 10 basketball

UCLA, Oregon State will dominate league

The following Pacific 10 Conference basketball preview represents Emerald sportswriter Donald Coulter's subjective view of the conference race that already has had a few surprises. With most teams already having completed two league games, Oregon and Washington share first place with Oregon State with 2-0 conference records, while UCLA sits in the cellar at 0-2.

By DONALD COULTER
Of the Emerald

The 1981-82 basketball season will not be remembered as a banner year for the Pacific 10 Conference. Consider this:

- When was the last time the conference was not represented in the Top Ten of the national polls? Since UCLA lost two of its first three games in early December, it has been five weeks since a Pac-10 team made the Top 10. You'd probably have to go back to the late 1950s (before California won the national championship in 1959) to find a comparable drought.
- It's very possible the NBA won't choose any Pac-10 seniors in the first round of its draft next June. There are no ringers in the league this year. Unless Mark McNamara continues to average 25 points a game for the rest of the season, or the pro scouts overlook Dwight Anderson's poor defense, it could be a whitewash for the Pac-10.
- Idaho, of the not-so-mighty Big Sky Conference, defeated four Pac-10 teams in December by an average of 21 points. Granted, Idaho is a solid, well-disciplined team. But still, there's no way that Idaho should be carving up the Pac-10. Any other year they would do well to win one, maybe two, of those games.
- In addition, UCLA, the Pac-10's most talented team, has been placed on probation by the NCAA. The Bruins won't be able to play in the NCAA tournament, and they are ineligible for the conference championship.

It's definitely an off year for Pac-10 basketball, but with UCLA out of the picture, most experts agree the conference race should be up for grabs.

"UCLA should win the conference," Oregon head coach Jim Haney said before the Bruins were placed on probation, "but the other nine teams are all pretty even. No one else stands out."

"The whole thing is up for grabs," agrees Arizona State head coach Ned Wulk. "The conference is evenly spread out. How teams take advantage of their home courts could be a deciding factor."

Wulk is right. Of the nine games played on the first weekend of conference play, the visitors won only twice. And one of those two wins came in overtime.

So the conference championship — and the two or three spots available for the NCAA tournament — will probably go to the teams who can play extremely well at home and hold their

own on the road. Without being foolish enough to pick a numerical finish for each of the conference teams, here's a look at the Pac-10's caste system.

The Elite

UCLA (0-2 in the conference, 6-4 overall) has so much talent it could probably compete for the NBA's Pacific Division title. But talent does not win games by itself, as the Bruins' two losses last weekend point out. Still, UCLA's disaster in the state of Washington was understandable. After thumping Notre Dame, DePaul and Maryland on national television over the past few weeks, the Bruins were due for a letdown at the start of a conference schedule that is meaningless to them.

UCLA's Mike Sanders is the essence of a great team player. The 6-6 senior forward leads the Bruins in scoring (17.7) and rebounding (7.7), but he's just another face on a team loaded with all-stars. Sanders is surrounded by the likes of Kenny Fields, Rod Foster, Michael Holton and Darren Days. In addition to Stuart Gray, the 7-foot freshman center who was the focus of college recruiting battles last year. How this team has lost four games already is an enigma.

Considering that OREGON STATE (2-0, 9-2) lost three seniors to the NBA from last year's 26-2 squad, the Beavers should be contending for the second division instead of first place. But Ralph Miller has once again assembled a cast that will be tough to stop from winning a third-straight conference title.

The key to OSU's success in recent years has been defense. And Miller says this year's team plays stronger defense than his squad which was rated number one in the nation for most of last season. The Beavers' swarming defense makes even good teams look disoriented by forcing them into taking bad shots and making turnovers.

After a sluggish month of December, 6-8 sophomore forward Charlie Sitton came to life against the Arizona teams last weekend. Sitton shares the spotlight with senior guard Lester Connor, who is one of the most underrated guards in the country. Connor leads the Pac-10 in steals and is among the leaders in assists. And in 6-8 forward A.C. Green, Miller has one of the best freshmen in the Pac-10.

Respectable

USC (1-1, 7-4). In terms of consistency, it is a different matter. USC split a pair of overtime games in the state of Washington last weekend that it should have won easily. Atrocious free throw shooting (25 of 47 for 53 percent) didn't help the Trojans in those two games.

Senior guard Dwight Anderson is one of the most impressive shooting and ball-handling guards in the country. Anderson, who transferred to USC last year from Kentucky, is averaging almost 24 points a game. The Trojans start a pair of veterans alongside Anderson — forward Maurice Williams and

guard Jacque Hill — and a couple of freshmen in Wayne Carlender and Ken Johnson.

Look at who's tied for first in the Pac-10 standings? And look at who they had to beat to get there! WASHINGTON (2-0, 9-2) looked questionable at best going into the conference opener, having fattened its record on a diet of schools that aren't exactly college basketball powers.

But the Huskies made short order of USC and UCLA last weekend. The sweep over the Los Angeles schools, the first for Washington since 1977, was engineered by forward Kenny Lyles and guard Steve Burks. Lyles scored 24 in the overtime victory over USC Saturday night, while Burks pumped in 17 in the 56-50 win over UCLA Monday night. Another key for the Huskies is 6-8 senior forward Dan Caldwell, who is averaging 15.9 points per game.

Too Young?

STANFORD (0-1, 5-5) always seems like it is one year away from being a good team. Once again, the Cardinals are a young squad, but this time around they have a good amount of talent to compensate. Stanford returns all five starters, including sophomore center John Revelli. At 6-8, Revelli would be a forward on most teams, but he manages to average a respectable 17 points and 10.7 rebounds in the post for Stanford.

OREGON (2-0, 7-4) has improved almost 100 percent from the clods that stumbled to victories over St. Martin's and Cal-Riverside in December. Jim Haney's young-but-talented team is playing with confidence now, giving McArthur Court fans perhaps the most exciting basketball of Haney's four years as head coach. But for the Ducks to finish in the first division, they need to play much better defense and learn how to win on the road.

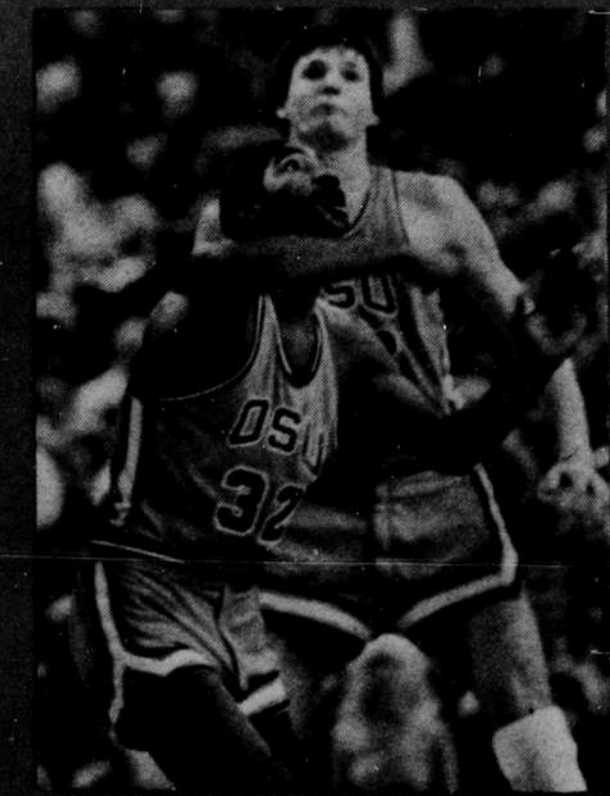
Now a senior, Mark McNamara is finally starting to develop into the quality center CALIFORNIA (1-0, 7-3) hoped he would be. McNamara is shooting almost 70 percent from the field this season, and poured in 30 against Stanford last week. McNamara is joined by guard Butch Hays and forward Michael Chavez — both are averaging about 10 points a game — on a youthful team that returns nine players from last year.

Also-rans

If its two fiascos last weekend are an indication, this year's version of ARIZONA STATE (0-2, 5-6) is a far cry from team of the last two years. All that remains of the team that appeared in two straight NCAA tourneys and spent most of the last two years in the top twenty is guard Lafayette Lever — who is averaging 17.2 points per game — and that's not enough. Intra-state rival ARIZONA (0-2, 5-6) has a fine guard of its own, 6-3 sophomore Jeff Collins, but the Wildcats probably won't win a road game all year. Neither will WASHINGTON STATE (1-1, 7-7), which has already played its game of the year by stunning UCLA in triple overtime. Among the Cougars' losses this year were games to Oklahoma City and Eastern Montana (Eastern Montana?).

Standouts of the Pac-10

Connor, Sanders top list of stars in '82



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