

Sports

Soviets power by Ducks, 78-63

By John Healy
Of the Emerald

It was just one of a multitude of plays, but Arvidas Sabonis summed up Wednesday night's Oregon home basketball opener about as well as could be expected.

The 7-2 Soviet National Team

center grabbed a rebound directly under his own basket with the Soviets leading Oregon 76-59 and just over a minute left on the clock.

Sabonis took a second to get himself oriented, then another second to gather up a bit more energy, and finally a third second to sort of let the two

Oregon players standing on either side of him know that he wasn't a man to be messed with.

Sabonis soared, then delivered a crunching stuff, one of many that the Soviets used to muscle their way to a 78-63 win over Oregon.

But Oregon never backed down from the Soviets, thanks to 14 first half points from David Brantley and an equal number of points in the second half from Blair Rasmussen. But in the final equation, the Soviets were just too big and too disciplined.

Or, as Soviet coach Alexandr Gomelsky summed it up in his stilted English, "They (his team) a little better, so they win. Simple."

It wasn't always that simple after the Soviets had methodically erected a 16-2 lead in the game's early moments. The Ducks played the Soviets to a virtual standstill for the rest of the game, and when Rasmussen got hot in the first eight minutes of the second half

to lead the Ducks to within 58-49, Mac Court began to rock in expectation.

But the Ducks broke down on defense, and the turnovers that plagued them early in the first half returned.

"I wasn't happy with anyone defensively," said Oregon coach Jim Haney. "We looked scared. A lot of guys on the team haven't seen much playing before, and we were real tentative, very soft."

That was a description for the opening minutes of the first half. Oregon looked tentative on offense, and when the Ducks missed a shot or turned the ball over, the Soviets were quick to hit a 15-foot jumper or work the ball inside to Sabonis for one of his rolling stuffs.

Case in point: Down 8-2, Brantley threw a crisp pass across the key to starting point guard Greg Bell, who was cutting toward the baseline. All 3,591 fans in attendance could

almost see Bell turn around, catch the pass, and hit a lay-in. But he didn't — the ball bounced off his shoulder and out of bounds.

"My team better on the bounce (dribbling)," said Gomelsky. "Defend your (Oregon's) bounce well. Make you pass and it go in crowd. Sure we go in crowd too (with his team's passes) but not so much as you."

Brantley, too, could see room for improvement in the Ducks' execution.

"For a first time out, effort-wise we played hard," said Brantley. "But we have lots of work to do in terms of execution."

Haney felt Oregon's offensive problems, which were seemingly endless early on, but only appeared in flashes as the game progressed, were due to a combination of two things.

"When we started to stand, it was because of fatigue, not other things. And they played us a lot of different ways. You won't find many teams that change defense that much," said Haney, in his fifth year at Oregon.

"Last year, it was get the ball and shoot," said Brantley. "This year, it's more structured. Mentally, we're at a better level this year."

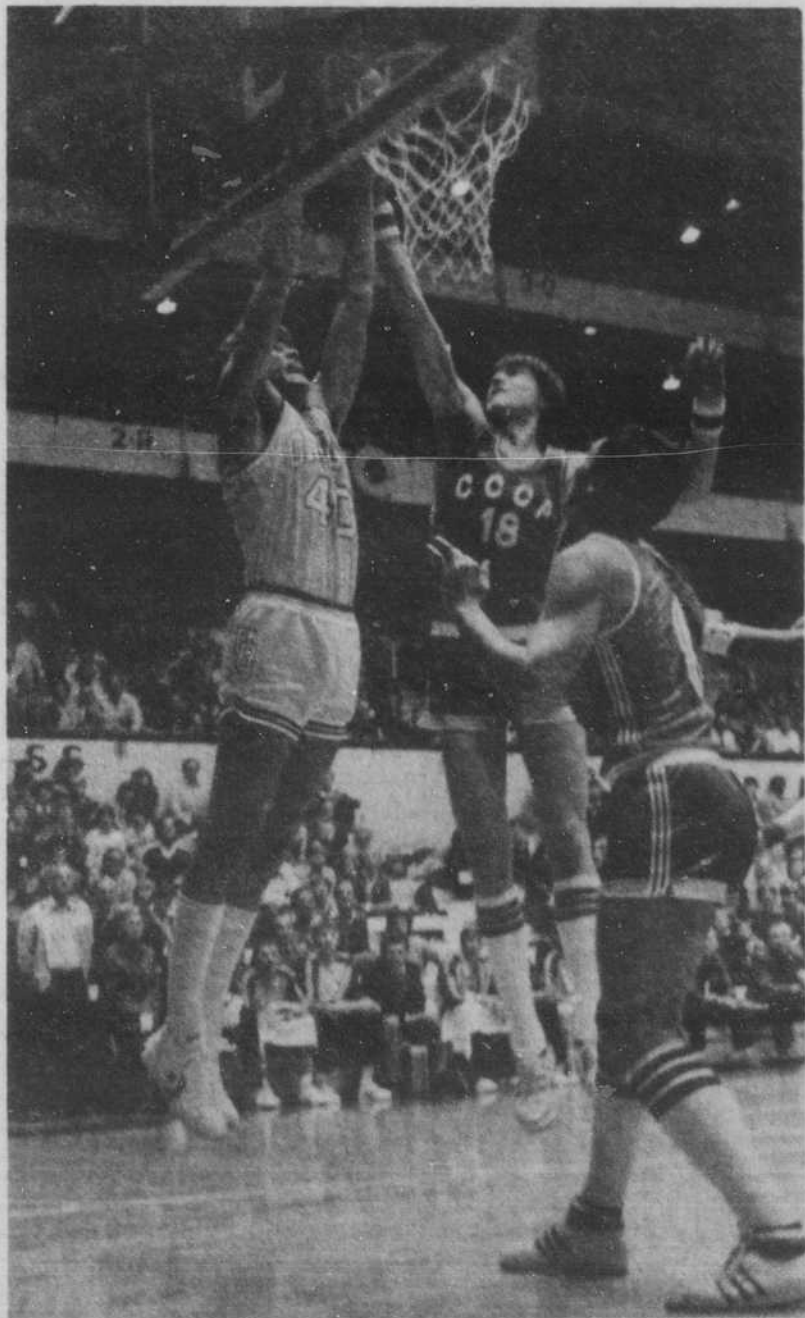
Oregon has until Nov. 26 — when UC-San Diego is in town — to work on its new team game, and that leaves Haney a happy man.

"This isn't the end of the preseason — it's the new beginning of the preseason."

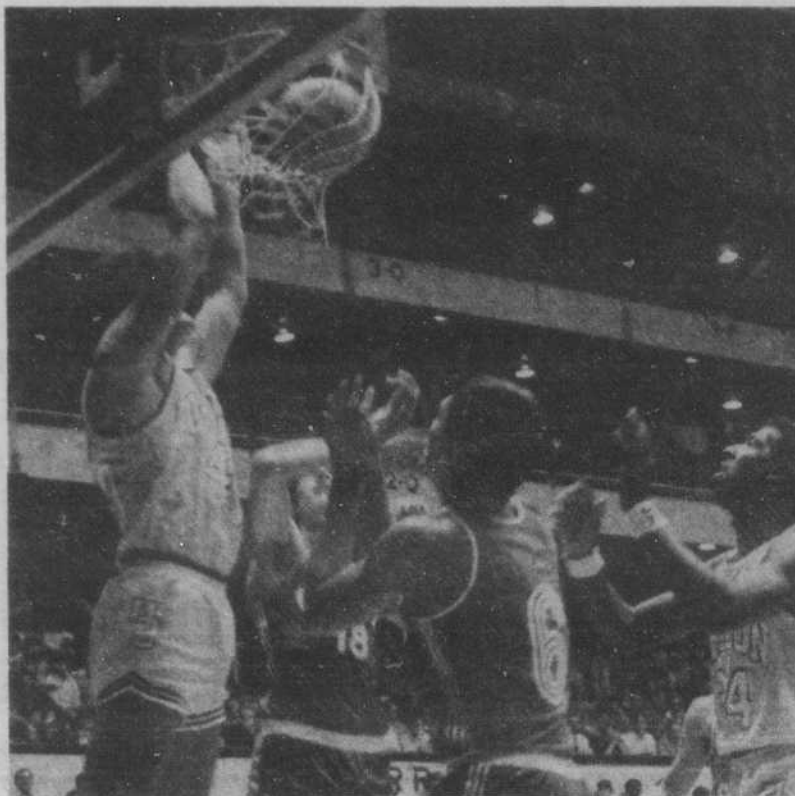
Soviet National Team (78) — Zhukanenko, Ender, Berezhnoi 2 0-0 4, Derugin 3 4-5 10, Tokhonenko, Valters 5 0-0 10, Jovajsha 5 1-3 11, Biriukov 5 2-2 12, Belostenny 1 0-0 2, Khomichus 5 4-4 14, Babenko, Sabonis 6 3-5 15.

Oregon (63) — Brantley 8 0-0 16, Bell 1 0-0 2, Taylor 1 0-0 2, Matheson 1 0-0 2, Bain 4 0-0 8, DiBlasio, Dutton, Gatewood 1 0-0 2, Adams, Sprague, Rasmussen 9 1-3 19, Thompson 1 0-0 2, Trendell 3 0-0 6, Burns 1 2-2 4.

First half score: Soviet National Team 38, Oregon 29.



Photos by David Corey



Will the real Blair please stand up

By Mike Riplinger
Of the Emerald

He was "tentative" in the first half, but shook it off and turned in a good enough performance to make the Soviet National Team coach wonder if somehow, the Ducks hadn't exchanged someone else for Oregon center Blair Rasmussen at halftime.

"Center play us well. Look like they put a new person in his uniform in the second half," said Alexandr Gomelsky after watching Rasmussen turn in a 19-point, eight-rebound effort as the Ducks fell 78-63.

The seven-footer did show a remarkable improvement in the second half after looking a bit lost in the first.

"I had the jitters playing in the first half. It just took a while for me to get into it," said Rasmussen, who scored only five points in the opening period.

Oregon plans on using a patient, disciplined offense this year, and if that strategy is going to work, Rasmussen "must play a good all-around game for 40 minutes," said Oregon coach Jim Haney.

If that's the case, it looked like Oregon was going to be in trouble after the Ducks were manhandled by the physical Soviets in the first half.

The first time Rasmussen touched the ball, he set the tone for the half when he pumped once, and then had the ball checked right back into his face by 7-2 Arvidas Sabonis.

But Rasmussen learned. The Ducks came back to him on their next possession, and the second-year man from Auburn, Wash., faked once, and then slid around Sabonis and dunked the ball.

That was about it, though, for Rasmussen until after the half.

"He was soft, tentative, ineffective in the first half," said Haney. "But he became more aggressive and went after the ball well in the second half. I wasn't at all happy about that first half, though."

In the second half, Rasmussen caught fire and started the Ducks on a surge that brought Oregon within reasonable striking range — only nine points down.

He started it by stripping Russian guard Victor Berezhnoi of a rebound, and then completed the play at the other end of the court by nailing a two-foot

bank shot to make the score 51-39.

After a Soviet basket, Rasmussen then hit Duck guard Bryan Trendell streaking down the lane for two more to keep Oregon close.

Rasmussen came right back with a left-handed hook, to bring Oregon back to within a 55-43 margin.

The Soviets hit a foul shot, then Rasmussen went back to work with a jumper for two, and then hit a hook shot over the Russian's 7-2 back-up center Alexandr Belostenny to bring Oregon to within nine at 56-47.

The Ducks then traded baskets with the Soviets, but that was as close as they got.

Still, it was better than many expected from an Oregon team that has been practicing only a few weeks, while the Soviets won the world championships last year.

"Rasmussen looked passive and he seemed to be intimidated in the first half," said Haney. "In the second half, he was aggressive and demanded the ball."

The Duck pivot man definitely looked good in the second half, better than last year when he seemed disoriented.

Haney noticed the improvement, though he "was a little uncertain after that first half. A little scared, as a matter of fact. But he showed signs of being a good player in the second half when he became more aggressive and went after the ball. He looked good then."

"I have to be ready to play right at the beginning," said Rasmussen. "I have to come right out, instead of waiting 20 minutes to start."

Rasmussen was "intimidated" at first, but seemed to get over that as the game wore on. He said playing against Seattle Supersonics center James Donaldson last summer helped him overcome being intimidated by physical centers.

"I'm not as intimidated as easily. I played against James Donaldson for two weeks at the end of the summer. I was intimidated for the first couple of days, but he talked to me and told me that I'm not going to stop him every time. I have to wait and get him when I can."

"I just felt it was a matter of time before I did well tonight."

It may take him a while to get started, but once Rasmussen gets going, it should be worth the wait for the Ducks.