

Cagers sink Cal — barely

Oregon wins in OT, 69-67

By John Healy
Of the Emerald

It's trite and it's been used time and time again, but it fits Oregon to a tee.

Call them the "Never-say-die-Ducks."

Thursday night in Mac Court, before 4,334 die-hard fans, Oregon clawed back from a nine-point deficit with six minutes remaining in regulation time to claim a breathless 69-67 overtime win over California in both team's Pac-10 opener.

"You have to credit Oregon for hanging tough and coming back like they did," said Cal coach Dick Kuchen.

Credit good marksmanship from the field in the second half — Oregon shot .619 percent — and some amazing free throw shooting — the Ducks were nine-for-nine from the line in overtime — as factors in Oregon's fifth win of the season.

And don't forget intensity.

"I feel like I just spent two hours in the dentist's chair," said Oregon coach Jim Haney, looking a bit drained after watching his Ducks play their fourth consecutive nail-biter.

"We got lucky tonight. If we give that kind of performance again we won't win a basketball game in our conference."

For over 35 minutes, every bounce, every twist of fate seemed to elude the Ducks.

Oregon shot a dismal .261 percent from the field in the first half. The Ducks' leading scorer and rebounder, David Brantley, picked up three quick fouls and was limited to 11 minutes. Even when he played, he appeared tentative.

And, after turning around a 10-4 deficit and forging into a 15-10 lead with 8:33 remaining in the first half, the Ducks dug themselves into a hole and Cal into a 52-43 lead with 6:02 left in the game.

Don't give all the credit to the Ducks. Pass along a helping to Cal center Michael Pitts, who used a soft turnaround jumper to register 12 points in the second half.

But as inept as the Ducks appeared, the Bears — with the exception of Pitts — seemed intent on matching the Ducks ineptness stride for stride. Cal committed 20 turnovers for the game — the same as Oregon — and shot a poor .470 from the field.

This game came down to the last seven minutes of regulation play and the first two minutes of the overtime period, nine minutes for the teams to decide "Who wants this game?"

The Ducks registered the loudest "We do."

"In the last seven minutes and the overtime period, we came back and executed," said Oregon forward Jerry Adams, who pulled down six rebounds and effectively shut down Pitts in those critical nine minutes.

This was almost a replay of the Ducks loss to Idaho in the semifinals of the Far

West Classic in Portland in late December, a loss in which Oregon managed to turn a four-point lead with 1:03 remaining into a 56-53 defeat.

Except on Thursday night, Cal wore the Ducks colors.

"They did what we have done," explained Haney. "You get ahead, pull the ball out, and get passive."

Cal did just that in the final minutes, and when forward David Brantley, who tallied 19 points, canned a pair of free throws with 2:37 left to cut Cal's lead to 52-49, Oregon looked like it had a chance.

Cal's Butch Hays and Oregon's Paul Bain traded free throws, and after Bob Owen could hit only the front end of a one-and-one — and Rasmussen came up with the rebound — Oregon got a bucket that Brantley launched from the free throw line.

At that point, Oregon trailed 55-53 with 1:23 remaining. Hays could manage only one of two free throws after being fouled by Gatewood, and Adams came down with the rebound. Gatewood took a rainbow-scraping jumper from 18 feet at the other end to cut Cal's lead to 56-55.

Then, with 48 seconds remaining, came a play that was a microcosm of Oregon's "never-say-die" attitude in the last few minutes.

Hays fed Cal forward Frank Avalos on the baseline, and after blowing by Adams and expecting an easy layin, he found himself face-to-face with the 7-foot Rasmussen. The result was a charging foul on Avalos and a critical turnover for the Bears.

Finally, with 26 seconds remaining, Brantley turned around near the free throw line and launched a shot directed somewhere in the vicinity of Mac Court's south bleachers. But Cal forward Darrell Haley got caught trying to take home a piece of Brantley, and the Oregon junior managed to hit one of two free throws to tie the game and send it into overtime.

After that, the Ducks breezed, as Gatewood hit a 15-foot jumper after Brantley stripped Pitts of the ball, and then Rasmussen converted an offensive rebound into a three-point play and a 61-56 Oregon lead with 2:47 left in overtime.

"It feels good to win," said Brantley, "but we didn't play as well as we should have."

Part of the problem seemed to be Oregon's lack of intensity, something Haney pointed to as being caused by Oregon's almost fanatical intensity at the Classic.

"The classic was such an emotional time," said Haney. "We had good practices on the 31st (of December) and on the 1st and 3rd (of January), but in the last couple days we looked like a team that lost its zip."

Except for nine minutes at the very end.



Photo by Mark Pynes

Blair Rasmussen skies over Cal's Michael Pitts to get two of his 19 points to lead the Ducks to a 69-67 overtime win. Rasmussen was high for the Ducks, while Pitts led the way for the Bears with 12 points.

Ducks lose pivot battle, drop to Aztecs

SAN DIEGO — The battle of the big centers was won by San Diego State's Judy Porter Thursday night, and so was the game as the Aztecs outscored the Ducks down the stretch to claim a 79-71 women's basketball victory in San Diego.

Porter, a first-team All-American pre-season selection, netted 21 points, 11 of which came at the free throw line.

Porter was able to top Oregon center Alison Lang despite connecting on only five of 13 shots from the floor. Lang sank nine of her 11 field goal attempts to lead the Ducks with 18 points.

Both teams connected on 45 percent of their field goal attempts, but Oregon lost at the free throw line where the

Aztecs outscored the Ducks by 12.

The Ducks played come-from-behind basketball most of the game. Oregon trailed by a small margin throughout the game and was down 37-36 at the half. But the Ducks managed to pull ahead with just under four minutes to play, 69-67.

Turnovers, and missed shot opportunities did the Ducks in though, as San Diego State came back with eight unanswered points to earn the victory.

The win raised the Aztecs record to 6-5 on the season, while the Ducks fell to 5-7.

In addition to her 21 points, Porter hauled down 13 rebounds. The senior center, who matches Lang in height at

6-3, got help in the scoring column from guard Marci Blackman, who scored 16 points, connecting on eight of 11 field goals.

The Aztecs had two other players in double figures. Forward Heidi Bauer tallied 12 points, while reserve Renee Overton came off the bench to score 12.

Despite the loss, Oregon's front line made its presence felt. In addition to Lang's 18 points, the 6-3 center added 10 rebounds, six blocked shots and five assists. Forward Helen Higgs was also a force as she scored 16 points, pulled down 13 rebounds and blocked four shots. Oregon also got a solid effort

from forward Chris Metzger who collected 14 points and nine rebounds.

But for all the firepower up front, the Ducks still came up short in the backcourt, where the lack of an experienced ballhandler has hurt them all season. The Ducks finished the game with 22 turnovers. Overton led the Aztecs with six steals, while Porter came up with four.

Oregon returns to action tonight against Pepperdine, a team which will present similar problems to San Diego State, with its pressing defense. The Ducks wrap up the California trip with a contest with Cal-Irvine Sunday afternoon.