

Powerful USC tramples on Oregon

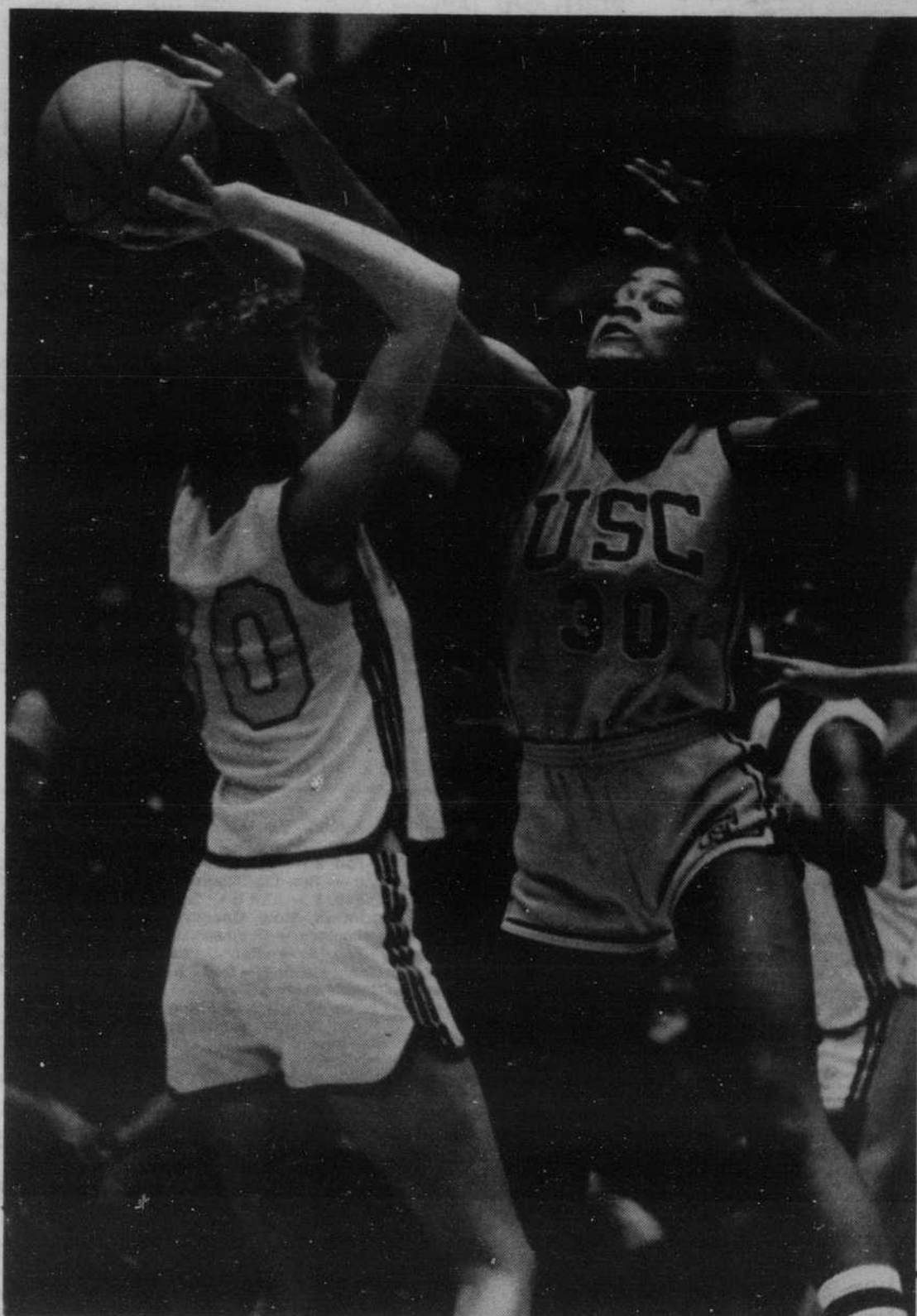


Photo by Bob Baker

Pam McGee (30) may have been the one who grimaced here, but the Ducks were the ones who felt the pain as the Trojans romped to an 86-71 win Sunday night at McArthur Court.

By Debbie Howlett
Of the Emerald

The game went just about like everyone expected. The Southern California Trojans ran roughshod over the Ducks and pocketed a 15 point victory, 86-71, Sunday night at McArthur Court.

For all but the most ardent Oregon fans, the game was over at the 7:35 mark of the first half. In fact, the only thing the partisan crowd had to yell about in the final period was some lopsided officiating. The referees whistled a grand total of three USC fouls in the second half.

At 11:20 of the first half, USC took its first lead of the game, 17-16, on 6-2 forward Cheryl Miller's second free throw. The Ducks answered with a short jump shot from 6-0 forward, Mary Ann Stoican to regain the lead before USC rattled off 12 unanswered points — mostly on fast breaks and rebound balls.

Before the Trojans marched to the 11 point lead, the Ducks were holding their own. 6-0 forward Chris Metzger hit nothing but the bottom of the net from the baseline corner to score the first points of the game. The Ducks jumped out to a five point lead at 15:37 when 6-4 center Helen Higgs tucked a rebound neatly into the hoop for a 9-4 lead.

And for a few minutes it looked as though the Ducks might make a game out of what was supposed to be a blow out. Nearly every one of the 3,504 fans in attendance were stomping their feet and clapping their hands. For the next eight minutes, Oregon and USC looked like they might be the best matched team to hit the hardwood.

Then the Trojans pulled it together and cruised to the win.

"We always have a tendency to start out slow," said USC coach Linda Sharp. "I wasn't worried when they were up by five — I'd of been worried if they went up by seven."

Sharp credited the Oregon defense with taking away a lot of USC's opportunities to run. "I think

we only ran about 60 percent of the time we usually run."

The Trojans shook off the scare the Ducks threw at them in the final seven minutes and held to a double figure lead for the rest of the half. Cynthia Cooper, a 5-9 guard, drove through the Oregon defense like it was a thin fog to score 10 of her 16 points in the first half. She also came up with eight first half rebounds.

But if the first half stats belonged to Cooper, the second half was all Pam McGee. The 6-3 center, tossed in 22 points and grabbed 13 rebounds in the second half to finish with game highs in points — 28, and rebounds — 17.

The Trojans, led by the McGee twins, came out in the second half and reeled off 16 points to Oregon's two. Part of the Ducks non-existent offense was due to a defensive switch by the Trojans. Foul-plagued Paula McGee, who had been guarding 6-3 center Alison Lang, switched assignments with Miller, who had no fouls. Miller mucked up a couple of Oregon's offensive plays and the Ducks, not wanting to force the ball to the middle, didn't look for Lang as often.

"I think the McGees are better than Cheryl," Lang said. "I feel sorry for them because they kind of get overshadowed."

A source of concern with some of the reporters after the game was the appearance that Miller was not "up" for the game.

"I was up for the game," Miller said. "I play every game like it was a championship."

"They wanted to play Oregon," Sharp said. "They respect Lang." Sharp also pointed out that because of the USC transition game, the player's look a little undisciplined at times. "It takes just as much discipline to run a transition game," Sharp said.

"I think they came in here thinking 'We're just playing Oregon,'" Lang said. "I'm not that disappointed, I think we gave it a good shot."

Trojan's trio out to change the game

By Debbie Howlett
Of the Emerald

Sitting in the coffee shop of the Eugene Hilton, it's hard to believe that the three women seated in a circle around a small table, are three of the best women's college basketball players around.

Their conversation is effortless, they talk about themselves and their abilities, but they laugh about it too. They won't take what they say too seriously, but they won't slight their abilities either. They play with the straws on the table, dipping them into the candle wax. What they are most interested in, is making the 9 p.m. show at one of Eugene's theaters.

Cheryl Miller and twin sisters Pam and Paula McGee are the nucleus of the University of Southern California squad that for most of the year has been ranked number one in the nation. They are the most exciting front line to hit the hardwood floors in women's basketball.

But the three women, kicked back in the rust colored chairs, their legs stretched out for about a mile-and-a-half, would rather talk about the movie they want to see.

Miller asks if she can go. Paula McGee asks if she's 18. With a laugh Miller asks, "What movie are you going to see?"

"I don't know, something dirty," Paula says. Realizing that a tape recorder is on, Paula starts to giggle and leans close to the microphone. "Just kidding," she says, taking great care to enunciate clearly.

They giggle a lot during the interview, about having babies and about head coach Linda Sharp. They say very little about Sharp, because as Pam puts it: "We all want to play tomorrow." That comment is also followed by a well enunciated "just kidding."

As much as the three players kid around, they

know that the USC program is designed to be taken seriously. Sharp is a disciplinarian. Ten years after earning her B.S. at Cal-State Fullerton, she turned an 11-14 team into world beaters. Sharp is careful with the players. Interviews are one day a week and she's made an exception to let her three superstars do this interview.

"She's a great conditioning coach. She'll always have a great conditioned team," Paula says.

"She is a perfectionist," Miller adds.

Other than saying that Sharp is an extremely adamant advocate of team effort, they won't say anymore.

And if Sharp won't settle for anything less than perfection, neither will Miller or the McGee sisters.

With just two losses this year, the first to second-ranked Louisiana Tech and the second to number six Long Beach State, SC has little to complain about. But, they make the most out of what they do have to complain about.

"Long Beach played phenomenally well, out of their minds," Pam says. "But I think it motivates us, keeps things in perspective, tells us we can be beaten and makes us work a little bit harder to perfect the game we want to play."

But Miller, a freshman, had some trouble handling the losses, especially to Long Beach.

"It's just hard," Miller says. "When I look at the twins, like after we lost to Long Beach, they can hold their composure so much better. I'll get, maybe a little immature at times."

"I was able to accept losing to Tech, because I'd rather have a split decision then to go into the championship of the NCAA with two wins. No team is going to let you beat them three times in a row," Miller says.

"Unless they're awfully sorry," intones Pam.

"No team is any easy game for SC because everyone plays out of their minds."

"Come on gang," interrupts Paula. "Oklahoma Baptist was certainly not a challenge." They all giggle and throw out a few other team names that might not have been great challenges.

But Pam's point is well taken. Teams do play "out of their minds" against the Trojans — as with every other top ranked team.

"See, we can't beat a lot of teams with just talent alone," Paula says. "When they play us, the adrenalin is flowing so much and they're so pumped for our game."

"Maybe they average 50 points a game," Miller says, "but against us they'll score maybe 70. They're good for another 20 points."

What upsets the trio more than the losses though, is the lack of recognition women's basketball gets. But they think that situation is being turned around.

"I think we've gained a lot of respect, especially this season," Pam says. "I think it's long overdue. I can recall a time people would say women's basketball and shrug their shoulders. I think now we are trying to come into our own, we're not trying to compete with the men, we're trying to play women's basketball."

"So many people say 'don't you want to do it like this, like the men' and we're not trying to be like the men," Pam says.

"Sometimes the spectators will come and they'll say 'Oh my goodness, I never knew women could play so well.' And they come back for more," Miller says. "I kinda figure, once you see us, your hooked."

And none of the three said they were kidding.