

Ducks face last-place Trojans, jockey for bye

The Oregon men's basketball team will be put to the test

tonight when it hosts the University of Southern Califor-

nia in an attempt to bounce back after a discouraging last-second

loss to Oregon State a week ago.

The Ducks and the Trojans clash at 7:35 p.m. in McArthur Court in a very important game for Oregon.

"It will be a test for the coaches, students and fans, and a big test for our players," said Oregon Coach Don Monson. "Our team morale was down initially, but we're back to normal and practicing hard — we know we have two big games at home, a trip to Washington and the Pac-10 tournament ahead."

Not only will the Ducks be trying to bounce back after the shocking Civil War loss, they will also be trying to stay in the race to escape a first-day appearance in the Pacific-10 Conference post-season tournament.

Oregon, 7-7 in Pac-10 play and 13-10 overall, is currently lodged in sixth place in the conference — six teams receive a first-day bye in the first-ever Pac-10 tourney — and Oregon knows it needs to win this

weekend to maintain its present position.

"I don't think we're in a must-win situation, but mathematically we know if we win these two (USC and UCLA Sunday) we'll be assured of the bye, and that's our goal right now," Monson said.

The Ducks had a tough time with USC and UCLA in Los Angeles earlier this season, losing both despite many opportunities to register wins.

At USC, Oregon could not overcome a 25-23 halftime deficit. The Trojans managed to put a damper on the Ducks' Anthony Taylor, holding him to just 12 points, as they claimed a 60-56 victory.

USC's Derrick Dowell did damage to the Ducks inside, pouring in 20 points and grabbing eight rebounds.

"We'll have to handle their different full-court and three-quarter pressure defenses," Monson said. "We didn't turn the ball over a lot (at USC), but we didn't attack them."

The Ducks will have to limit the production of Dowell, who ranks second in the conference in scoring (20.5 a game), sixth in rebounding (7.8) and leads in steals (2.6), Monson said.

The Trojans occupy the Pac-10 cellar with a 3-12 mark.

After confronting the last-place team in the conference, Oregon will turn right around and face conference-leading UCLA.

The Ducks were 64-59 victims of the Bruins in the first meeting, failing to make a field goal in the final six-and-a-half minutes of the contest.

Oregon relinquished a 41-32 halftime lead, shooting just 25 percent (six of 24 from the field).

The Ducks will have to shut down the offensive production of UCLA's starters, all who are shooting better than 50 percent from the field in Pac-10 play.

"We'll have to keep them (UCLA) out of a full-court transition," Monson said of UCLA's quickness. "We'll also have to extend our defense on their outside shooters and hope the inside doesn't kill us."

UCLA boasts the third-leading scorer in the conference in Reggie Miller, who is averaging 20.4 points a game.

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