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Sports

Ducks make bid for tournament spot

By Dennis Fernandes
Of the Emerald

This weekend the Oregon women's basketball team will be trying to make an official run at a possible post-season bid in the National Collegiate Athletic Association tournament.

The problem lies in the fact that the two teams the Ducks host this weekend — league-leading USC and UCLA — are also gunning for tournament slots.

Oregon is currently the hottest team in the Pacific-10 Conference with a six-game winning streak, their most recent victory a 71-51 win over Oregon State University.

In tonight's game against the Trojans (11-2 in league, 17-6 overall), the Ducks will put their eight-game McArthur Court winning streak against a team Oregon has never beaten in six tries. A win over the

Associated Press' 18th-ranked team could pit the Ducks in excellent position to challenge for league title.

Game time at McArthur Court is 7:30 p.m.

USC eked out a 66-64 win in the last meeting between these two schools in Los Angeles last month, so beating the Trojans is certainly not out of reach for the 17-5 (9-3 in Pac-10) Ducks.

Southern Cal boasts one of the more balanced scoring attacks in the Pac-10 with four players averaging double figures.

Cherie Nelson, the second-leading scorer in the Pac-10, leads the way with a 20.3 point average, in addition to being the league's most proficient rebounder with an 11.5 average. Junior transfer Monica Lamb, an alternate on this year's U.S. national team, adds 15.6 points and 8.0 rebounds a

game.

Saturday night's matchup versus the Bruins of UCLA also will test the Ducks. The winners of five straight games, the fourth-place Bruins stand just a half-game back of Oregon, so this game holds equal importance.

Dora Dome leads the way for the Bruins with a 17.3 scoring clip, and Jaime Brown follows with 13.4 points per game. Dome also averages 6.3 rebounds a game.

"If their inside players get hot, it could be a different game in a hurry," Heiny said of the 16-7 Bruins.

The Ducks blew a 13-point halftime lead down in Los Angeles against this same club last month, eventually losing 75-71.

"That was a game we should have won, and the SC game is one we could have won," Heiny commented.

USC

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lead to one.

Rich Grande drilled a three-point shot and Dowell cashed in on a layup to douse Oregon's comeback attempt and force the Ducks to call a timeout with 5:52 remaining.

From here on out, the Ducks took command, outscoring the Trojans 15-7.

Nash stole the ball and dished off to Taylor on the break to start things off for Oregon. Taylor then converted a three-point play on a flying dunk off a David Girley pass to give the Ducks their first lead of the night, 49-48.

Taylor struck again with a 15-foot jumper to stretch the lead to three, but the Trojans' Brad Winslow hit a three-pointer to notch the score at 51.

The play that put USC away was another Taylor slam for a three-point play set up by another Nash steal and assist.

Nash made two crucial steals down the stretch.

"I was just playing the lanes, and we were trapping the corners...so I just tried to make good judgment and luckily I was in the right place at the right time," Nash said of his two steals that led to two Taylor dunks.

Nash was productive in all aspects of the game, finishing with 10 points on five of seven from the field, four rebounds — two of which were rebound baskets — two assists and three steals.

Taylor was also a definite force, especially late in the game as he scored all of his 18 points in the second half while shooting six of seven from the field and six of six from the freethrow line.

After missing all four shot attempts in the first half, Taylor admitted that it may have been fear of embarrassment that got him going in the second half.

"I didn't want to get embarrassed again...the crowd was booing us tonight...we had let them down enough this year with Idaho State and Oregon State," Taylor said.

The victory was an important one for the Ducks, who improved to 8-7 in the Pac-10 (14-8 overall) and strengthened their hold on sixth place enroute to a possible first-day bye in the Pac-10 Conference post-season tournament.

A victory Sunday over the UCLA Bruins will assure the Ducks of a first-day bye.

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