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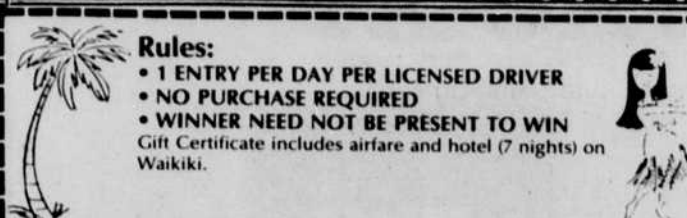


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Sports

Struggling Ducks to face Trojans in Pac-10 playoffs tonight at UCLA

By Dennis Fernandes
 Of the Emerald

The one thing that Don Monson dreaded most this season will come into being tonight.

Oregon has to play in the preliminary round of the inaugural Goodyear/Pacific 10 Conference tournament at UCLA's Pauley Pavilion in Los Angeles. All year long the Oregon coach, who has long supported the idea of a post-season tourney in this league, has been touting the importance of finishing in the conference top six to gain that first-round bye.

Tonight, dread turns to reality because the Ducks had three chances to get a first round bye and blew them. Now they take an 8-10 conference record, a seventh-place finish and a three-game losing streak up against the last-place USC Trojans, coached by an old Monson nemesis, George Raveling.

Gametime is set for 9 p.m. and will be televised nationally on ESPN (cable 5) and regionally on the Pac-10/RayCom network on KVAL Channel 13.

The winner is slated to play University of Arizona tomorrow night at 9 p.m.

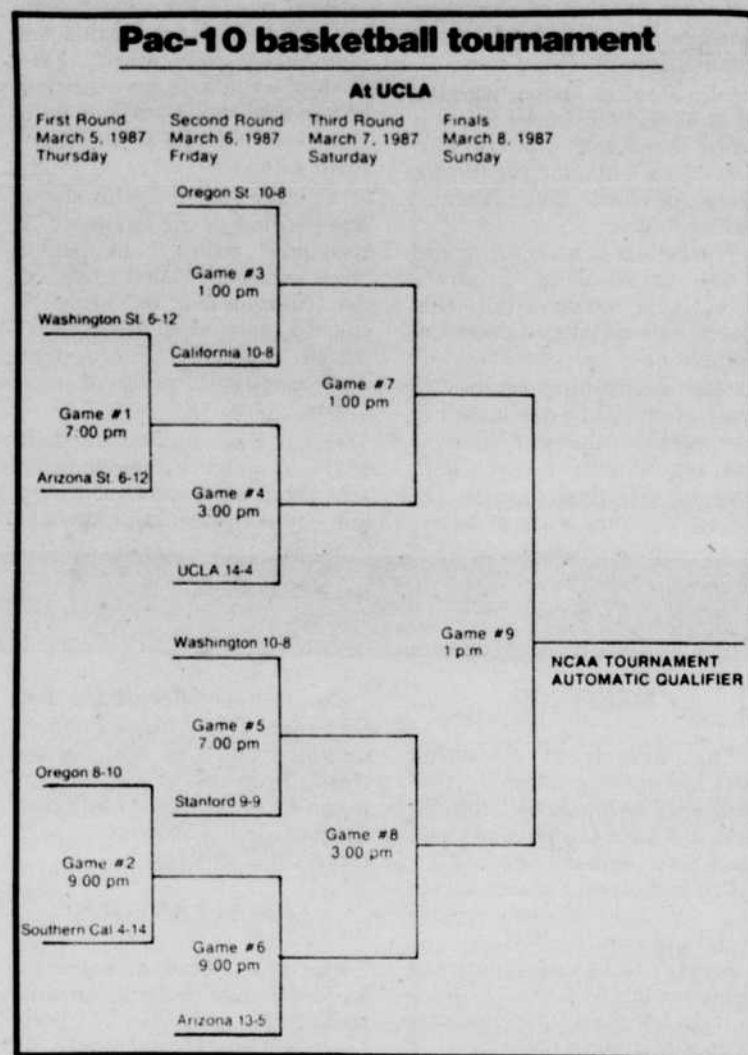
The Trojans, incidentally, are the last team the Ducks beat. And in that game, over two weeks ago, Oregon needed a late rally and 61 percent shooting from the field in the second half to overcome a nine-point deficit before winning it, 57-55.

Since then, it's been all downhill. The Ducks shot a combined .396 from the field in losses to UCLA, University of Washington and Washington State University.

"We were striving to get the first-round bye; we don't need the extra game this time of the season," Monson said. "Teams go through this sometime during the year. It's unfortunate for us that we're not playing our best basketball right now."

"But," he added, "It's probably best for us to play a game and try to get going again."

USC finished the season in the Pac-10 cellar at 4-14, 9-18 overall. They too are struggling, having fallen to defeat in eight of their last nine. However, the last three contests were encouraging: The Trojans had good efforts in losses to the Ducks and UCLA, and shocked



everyone by stunning Oregon State University by 10 points in Corvallis.

The Ducks will need to find some way to stop — or more realistically, slow down — USC's Derrick Dowell, who may arguably be the best all-around player in the Pac-10. The 6-foot-6 senior compiled 20 points and eight rebounds in the Trojans' 60-56 win in the first meeting between these teams in Los Angeles. In Eugene, he managed 16 points, eight rebounds and five assists. He has led USC in scoring and rebounding in the same game on 14 occasions this year.

The Trojans also have a tendency to frustrate Oregon ace Anthony Taylor. They held the 6-foot-4 guard to just 12 points the first game, and he scored all 18 of his points during the final 13:34 in the Oregon victory.

"I've played against George a few more years than most of the guys (coaches) in the league," Monson commented. "His

teams are very physical and do a good job on the boards. Their pressing and changing defenses have given us problems."

The Ducks, at 14-13, will now need at least two wins to even be considered for a National Invitation Tournament bid and one win to secure a winning season. They need three wins to end up in Sunday afternoon's championship game.

But for now, it's tournament time. And post-season festivities such as this are designed to give hope to floundering teams — and to create the bona-fide "Cinderella" team. And especially in the Pac-10, where, on any given night, an inferior team like Washington State or Stanford can turn back the UCAs and the Arizonas.

"Any team can beat anyone in our league, and it's more true this year," Monson said.

The glass slipper has to fit on some team's foot. Maybe it will be webbed.

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