

Ducks' post-season hopes dim after being swept

By Gary Hoh
Emerald Contributor

In a year of ups and downs, the Oregon volleyball team took their biggest slide of the season by being swept at McArthur Court by USC and UCLA this past weekend.

The Ducks have now lost four consecutive Pacific-10 Conference matches, and dropped into fifth place with a 5-7 conference record (14-9 overall).

Even worse, the loss to unranked USC means the Ducks have almost no chance for the post-season, with only six conference matches still to play.

"You look at the regional rankings, and it just doesn't look good for us to attend post-season play," said Oregon Coach Gerry Gregory after the team's 15-10, 15-9, 13-15, 17-15 loss to USC Friday.

It was the must-win match of the weekend for Oregon, who came in looking for a split of the Los Angeles schools. But USC took the lead in the first two games, and the Ducks just couldn't recover from those two deficits.

Oregon did come back from an early 3-1 lead by USC in the third game after junior Ali Watkins served for four consecutive points to put the Ducks in the lead to stay.

Watkins played in every game during the weekend, despite a nagging sprained ankle. Watkins was still able to contribute 12 kills and 15 digs against the Trojans.

However, USC's "big three" - Lonise Norfleet, Megan McCallister and Stefanie Bodison - provided the offensive firepower to prevent a Duck comeback.

The combination of Norfleet and Bodison pushed the Trojans to a 9-2 lead in the fourth game, but the Ducks scored nine consecutive points and took the lead at 11-9. McCallister, a two-time all-Pac-10 player, then came alive and chipped in five kills and a block to help USC prevail 17-15 and eliminate the chance of a fifth game.

In the match, USC made 76 kills, with 31 attack errors for a .227 hitting percentage to Oregon's 67 kills, with 47 attack errors for a .093 hitting per-

centage.

The Bruins easily defeated the Ducks Saturday night, 15-5, 15-8, 15-8. UCLA remained undefeated in the Pac-10 with a 13-0 record (21-1 overall) and continued its 48-game winning streak extending back to 1987.

A noisy, fired-up crowd of 1,123 looked for an upset, but UCLA made few mistakes and demonstrated why they are the

number one team in the country. The Bruins made 39 kills against 12 attack errors for a whopping .300 hitting percentage to Oregon's .065.

UCLA trailed only twice in the match, and both times came on 1-0 Oregon leads in games two and three. The Bruins were never even forced to call a time-out during the match.

"You have to give UCLA

their credit," said Gregory. "They are the number one team, and to beat them you have to be more consistent and put more pressure on them, and we just weren't able to do that."

"They have probably the best athletic talent in the United States," he said. "They're big and strong, and a very experienced group."

If a quick loss to UCLA wasn't bad enough, Dawn Charroin, who leads the Ducks with 315 kills this season, sprained her ankle on the second-to-last play of the match. Charroin's ankle injury is the third on the team in six days, with Watkins and sophomore Jennifer McGinnis also injured.

Charroin is listed as probable for next weekend's matches.

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