

SPORTS

Sporcich leads way for Oregon

Freshman averaging double figures in points, rebounds

By Jake Berg
Emerald Sports Reporter

An old photograph of Debbie Sporcich shows her as a baby seated on a blanket with a basketball almost bigger than the smiling toddler in the picture.

Today Sporcich is a powerful 6-foot-3 forward for the Oregon women's basketball team and has no problem figuring out what to do with a basketball. Although Sporcich is only a freshman, her play on the court has turned more than a few heads, including her own.

"It's a big surprise to me," Sporcich said of her success.

The freshman has consistently been Oregon's top player, averaging club-bests of 16.7 points and 10.1 rebounds a contest. Moreover, Sporcich has hit a team-high 74 field goals for a .514 shooting percentage from the floor through the Ducks' first 12 games.

Coach Elwin Heiny is another whose head has been turned by Sporcich's prowess in a game.

"You don't always expect this from a freshman," Heiny said.

All this for someone who didn't even begin playing basketball until the seventh grade and even then wasn't that dedicated to hoops.

"I didn't get serious until my sophomore year (in high school) Sporcich said. "I had fun playing basketball, so I stuck with it."

And Oregon is thankful that she continued to play. Sporcich became an all-conference player for three years and all-state for two at Pasco (Wash.) High School.

Her best season was her senior year when she averaged 18.4 points, 12.4 boards, and 5.5 blocks a game for an honorable mention All-America nod from *USA Today*.

Before determining that Eugene was the place to be, Sporcich visited Washington, Washington State, and California.

Washington and Cal proved to be just too big for her liking, and Pullman, Wash. (home of Washington State) was just too small. Oregon, on

the other hand, was "not too big, not too small," Sporcich said.

Sporcich is the cream of a crop of Oregon freshmen touted as one of the best recruiting classes this season in women's basketball. Also part of the class of '94 are starting center Sara Wilson, guard Missy Stowell — who has started five games for the Ducks — and Ilesha Smith, a crucial player off the bench.

"We really have some outstanding young players," Heiny said, "and they will only get better."

Other Pacific-10 Conference freshman have also been contributing in a big way to their schools, and tonight Sporcich will encounter one of the others in Natalia Mattick, a 6-5 center at Oregon State, who is averaging 18.8 points and 8.6 rebounds a game.

USC's Lisa Leslie is another freshman standout in the Pac-10 who has already become one of the best players in the conference.

Although Oregon fell in decisions at Stanford and California last weekend, Sporcich totaled 48 points on 20 of 31 shooting and had 19 rebounds in the two games.

What she remembered most though wasn't her stellar marks on the court, but instead the mystique surrounding defending national champion Stanford.

"I was in awe most of the (Stanford) game. I was like 'I can't believe I'm playing Stanford,'" she said. "Just last year I was sitting at home watching them on TV."

Sporcich hasn't let her amazing rookie season go to her head; instead, she is intent on improvement and greater dedication to basketball.

"I need to go to the gym on the weekends. I think that if I work a little harder, then my potential will start developing," Sporcich said. "I'm working on it."

"She hasn't let notoriety or success get to her," Heiny said. "She's a delight to coach."

"She still has a lot of potential," he said. "Her game will improve as time goes on."



Photo by Eric Evans

Just a freshman, 6-3 Debbie Sporcich leads the Oregon women's basketball team in both scoring and rebounding.

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