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Ducks glide into season

By Jake Berg
 Emerald Sports Editor

Elwin Heiny is not surprised by the Oregon women's basketball team's best start in eight seasons. He's pleased.

The coach has reason to be happy about the beginning of his 16th season at the helm. Heiny's young team played like a group of veterans during the last week, winning the season's opening three games — all on the road, including a win at No. 16 Northwestern.

"It feels great," he said. "We performed as well as we expected to."

And he wishes for equally good things from his team when the Ducks take to McArthur Court tonight against Boise State at 7:30 and Saturday against St. Joseph's at 5 p.m.

Boise State won its opening two games last week behind Bulgarian center Lidiya Varbanova's two 20-point efforts. St. Joseph's, who beat the Ducks by six points a year ago, are 2-2, including a 91-66 loss to seventh-ranked Penn State.

The play of three individuals — Debbie Sporcich, Missy Stowell and Staci Wallenborn — particularly stands out when looking at the trio of victories, but Heiny said the winning is nothing short of teamwork.

"The key," Heiny said, "is when the team is playing together and making good decisions when it counted."

Still, Sporcich has definitely made things count. The sophomore forward is the Ducks' top returner and is making a bid to be it again, earning Pacific-10 Conference Player of the Week honors this week.

She is averaging a phenomenal 19.7 points a game, 12 rebounds, is shooting 53 percent and has recorded eight steals during the first three games.

"She is showing what she can do," Heiny said.

So are Stowell and Wallenborn. Stowell is averaging 12.3 points and is among the Pac-10 leaders in three-point shooting, and Wallenborn is the team's second-leading scorer with 13.3 points and rebounder with 9.3 boards a game.

Oregon has needed all the firepower it could muster with the loss of injured sophomore Sara Wilson. The Ducks' starting center suffered a stress fracture in her foot and missed the first three games, but Heiny said he hopes to have her back in practice by next week.

Castle named All-American

Oregon free safety Eric Castle was named to the All-America football third team as a defensive back Thursday.

The junior is the first Duck to be given the honor since cornerback Chris Oldham made the first team in 1989.

Castle, who was named to the All-Pacific-10 Conference first team last week, led the team in interceptions with four, running back two for touchdowns. He was also second on the team in unassisted tackles and fourth in total tackles.

The Lebanon native was also voted Oregon's team MVP by the players this season.

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