

No matter how you slice it, Monson's team is hurting



There's a disease running rampant through the Oregon men's basketball team this season.

And it's one of those pesky ones. The disease's symptoms and their results are obvious enough, but there just doesn't seem to be a cure.

The disease is, of course, injuries. They come in different shapes and sizes but cause depressingly similar results — blowout losses.

It seems like it's becoming a chronic disease for Ducks in general. Back in the fall you'll remember the football and volleyball teams were left to battle the tough Pacific-10 Conference competition without some of their top players.

Both of those teams had poor seasons, and Don Monson's Ducks are caught in a fast-moving whirlwind of losses, with calm water beyond the horizon.

The men's team started the season with long odds, anyway. Oregon had only three returning players with much Pac-10 experience, and was picked by most to occupy the league cellar.

But after an embarrassing debacle in the season opener at Montana, the Ducks showed some potential, handing a Fresno State team its first loss and picking up the championship trophy at the Daiwa Ball in Japan by handily beating East Tennessee State — an NCAA tournament team last season — and losing to another tourney team — Northeast Louisiana — by two points.

Then, Georgetown transfer Antoine Stoudamire gained his eligibility and responded by leading Oregon scorers with 19 points off the bench in his first game against Oral Roberts Dec. 20. Suddenly the Ducks were looking like the surprise team in the Pac-10.

But then Oregon had to play co-host with Oregon State at the rejuvenated Far West Classic in Portland.

The Ducks were blown out by Minnesota in their Classic opener, but that was just a non-league loss to a solid Big-10 team. It wasn't something to be proud of, but it was certainly something Oregon could afford.

But the next night against LaSalle, Oregon lost something a lot more important — its point guard. Junior transfer Andre Collier broke his foot in the first half of an eventual 105-75 loss and is out for the season.

Collier had been progressing rapidly as the Ducks' floor leader, and his aggressive penetration and scrappy defense were a big part of the team's success in December.

With Collier out, even more pressure was put on sophomore Jordy Lyden, Oregon's leading scorer and most experienced player.

It was just a week — and only one game — later that Lyden, too, went down in the first half of a blow-out loss with a foot injury.

At first there was some consolation, as Lyden was expected to be out for only about half the Pac-10 season with a ligament injury.

And after Oregon played decently in its conference openers, beating Cal and losing to Stanford, there was some hope that with Lyden coming back the Ducks might just salvage an OK season.

But one day after another big loss, this time to second-ranked UCLA, the Ducks got the rest of the bad news they hoped to avoid — that Lyden was out for the rest of the season.

Oregon responded with its third-straight loss, a 29-point defeat at the hands of USC.

Since Collier's injury, which is starting to look like the little snowball that became an avalanche, the Ducks have lost six of seven by an average of more than 25 points.

But possibly the worst part of this situation is that nothing can be done to fix it.

When you lose two of your top three players for the season before the toughest part of the schedule — the Pac-10 season — even begins, it's time to start some serious head-scratching.

Even with Collier, Lyden and Stoudamire healthy, Oregon would have had a tough time in the Pac-10. It's pretty frightening to consider playing 18 games in a league where the seventh-ranked team in the country — Arizona — can lose to Washington, which beat only two Division I teams during its non-conference schedule.

But to play in that same league — which also happens to include second-ranked and undefeated UCLA and defending NIT champion Stanford, which has lost just once this season — without two of those three players, well, that's the makings for a top-notch horror movie.

And unfortunately for the Ducks, it isn't all happening on the big screen — and the lights won't come on at the end to make it all better.

Jayson Jacoby is a sports reporter for the Emerald.

his squad remain undefeated in the Pac-10, but he could only shake his head when asked about Fresno State.

"They're a real tough team," Finley said. "From top to bottom they have good wrestlers; there aren't any easy matches when you go against Fresno State."

"I think we also have to give a lot of credit to some unsung heroes for us this weekend," he said. "Hirai stepped in and did a great job, but some guys, like Jason Jones and Solomon Fulp also helped out even though they didn't win their matches. By moving up a weight class, they helped us avoid forfeiting any matches."

WRESTLING

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The bout was tied 7-7 when time ran out, but Hirai scored an additional point for accumulated riding time, giving him a narrow victory.

The Titans closed to within 17-15 with two matches remaining, but Scott Myers decided John Sanchez 12-4 to up the Duck lead to 21-15. Fullerton had no heavyweight, giving Anderson a forfeit victory and the Ducks another six team points, making the final score 27-15.

Head coach Ron Finley seemed pleased about seeing

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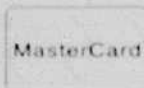
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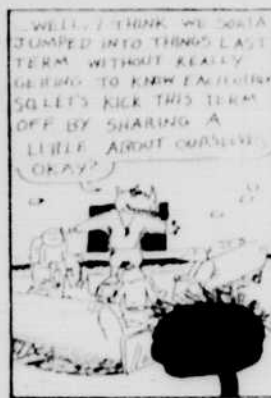
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