

Ducks beat Gonzaga, end season ranked second

Oregon trounces short-handed Bulldogs, who lost half their ranks to spring break in California

By Doug Carter
Emerald Contributor

The Oregon club hockey team ended its season in good fashion this weekend, sweeping two games against a short-handed Gonzaga squad by the scores of 14-4 and 5-0.

Sunday's game wasn't nearly as close as the final score indicated, as Oregon outshot the exhausted bunch of Bulldogs 48-6. Of the 11 players on the Gonzaga bench, only seven were regulars; half of the team chose to spend its spring break in California rather than face the Cold Ducks in Eugene.

The shortage of skaters forced Gonzaga to do some unanticipated weekend recruiting, but captain Lee Brand was able to persuade three players from the preceding games at Lane County Ice to stick around for a sort of double header.

Even Cold Duck Brian Clendenin donned a Gonzaga uniform on Sunday morning after drawing a game misconduct for fighting on Saturday night.

"They waved the game suspension and let me play with them," Clendenin said. "I just did it to get the ice time."

Oregon coach Shane Peters admired the way that Gonzaga stuck with it. Even after being dominated in every area of the two games, the Bulldogs didn't let their frustrations get the best of them.

"I have to give them credit, the way they came to play even with half of their guys in California," Peters said.

But determination alone can't win hockey games when the gas tank is only

half full, especially against a team looking to close out a long season of ups and downs on a high note.

The Ducks came out playing physical, drawing two penalties in the game's first five minutes. But even while playing a man down, the Ducks could do little wrong, as defenseman Jeremy Kaplan found the net with a blast from the point for a 1-0 Oregon lead.

Wing Mike Rousell scored less than two minutes later, and when captain Scott Brown and center Darin Varzali scored 45 seconds apart in the second period, the Ducks led 4-0 and were assured of a second-place finish in the Hockey West League with a record of 8-10.

Not bad considering the transitions of the team in only its second full year of competition.

"We've come a long way as far as taking the program to a higher level in a short time," Varzali said.

Oregon clicked on high Saturday night, as nine different Ducks scored goals in a 14-goal outburst. Center Richard Tucker started the Cold Ducks off on the right webfoot by scoring twice in the first period, the first coming just four minutes into the contest.

Gonzaga cut the lead to 5-4 with 10:53 left in the second, but goalie John O'Donnell kept the gate shut from there on out and finished with 14 saves. Meanwhile, Gonzaga goalie John Hayes was busy getting pelted with shots from every angle, but he valiantly turned back 47 of the Cold Ducks' 61 scoring chances.

Oregon tried a new line, putting Brown and Varzali on the ice together for the first time this year. And the roommates came through when Varzali set Brown up in front of the net for the easy goal and the first of Varzali's game-high



The Cold Ducks finished the season in second place in the Hockey West League with two wins over Gonzaga this weekend.

four assists.

"We came together as a unit and had a plus six (goals-for to goals-against) ratio for the game," Varzali said. "I wished we'd tried (the line) sooner."

Everything went right for Oregon, as players were able to improve season point totals. Three Ducks scored two goals apiece—Brown, Mike McHugh and Ned White—and defensemen Nevin Harper and Damian Jorgensen each tallied three assists.

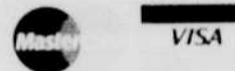
The Ducks also got their first hat-trick of the year, as Tucker added to his game total of two goals and an assist with one more net-seeking blast that made the score 13-4 with three minutes left.

Oregon will look to improve next year when it returns all but three of this season's players. Assistant captain McHugh, O'Donnell and wing Tom Lerra, who sat out all weekend with a bad leg, will be gone next year.

"Each year the program grows," Brown said. "I've got letters from guys in California, Alaska and Connecticut who are interested in playing for Oregon. I think it'll definitely be more competitive to get a spot next year."

The Cold Ducks also hope to attract larger crowds by inviting better teams, possibly Stanford, to Eugene next year and also plan to play a more condensed schedule.

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