

# Ducks' trip to the cellar no fault of Green's

When Don Monson was fired as men's basketball coach by the University of Oregon last year, he sued the University and new coach Jerry Green to get his job back. If Green knew then what he knows now, he probably would have either pleaded guilty and given Monson the job back, or countersued on grounds of mental cruelty.

With the Ducks 0-6 in the Pacific-10 Conference and coming off of two blowouts at the hands of Washington and Washington State, two teams expected to finish near the bottom of the conference, Oregon is the unanimous choice for worst team in the conference. If the bottom 10 were still a regular feature in newspapers today, Oregon would probably be included.

Oregon has been outscored by an average of 13 points per game in Pac-10 contests this year and has not even faced the first- and second-place teams in the conference.

The Ducks are shooting 44.6 percent from the field this year, including 41 percent in Pac-10 games, with only forward Damon Runyon making more than one-half of his shots. The Ducks have no players averaging more than five rebounds per game. But the ugliest statistic for the Ducks is they have more turnovers (308) than assists (305).

That last statistic speaks volumes about one of the Ducks' biggest missing ingredients, lack of leadership at point guard. When looking at most competitive college teams, many of them have a steady player at point guard who has the ability to handle the ball, make the important pass to a teammate and score when needed.

Andre Collier has played most of the time at point guard for Oregon this year, and although he has shown flashes of brilliance, (13 assists against UCLA) he has been inconsistent. Green, and Collier himself, admit he has had a hard time adjusting to the new system, but that is no excuse for his assists/turnover ratio of less than two to one.

Oregon's other point guard, Johnnie Reece, came out of Colorado with enough press clippings to make some Duck fans forget the recently departed Terrell Brandon, but he has yet to show much of that potential. Reece showed the ability to hit the jump shot last year, but is shooting only 33 percent from the field this year. Reece still has not proven he has the quickness to lead the fast break or guard Pac-10 point guards.

Oregon's lack of muscle in the front court is the main reason for their low shooting percentage and lack of rebounds. Only Jeff Potter and Aaron Johnson have shown an affinity for banging the boards and not backing down from opponents, and others up front tend to settle for the short jump shot rather than challenge the defender with a dunk.

Oregon's only consistent threat to score the last one-and-a-half years has been Antoine Stoudamire, but he has been in a slump lately. Stoudamire's offense has fallen off since last year when he was the No. 1 option on almost every one of Oregon's plays, and he is suffering from opponents putting their defensive stopper on him. Because no other Ducks have stepped up on the offensive end, defenses have hounded Stoudamire.

After a recent Oregon basketball game, a local TV reporter looked down the Oregon roster and said, "Where did Monson find these guys?" It is questionable as to how many Oregon players are of Pac-10 caliber, but it is safe to say that not all are.

Even Green appears to have questions

about Monson's recruiting ability. During his post-game interview a few weeks ago, he said, "If people wanted a team to be great this year, they should have hired me three years ago."

Oregon's soft preseason schedule was supposed to get the team off to a quick start and boost confidence, but instead, it only created false confidence. The Ducks beat up on Division II teams regularly and looked good in stretches, but the only Division I teams they beat were Idaho from the Big Sky Conference, Hartford from the North Atlantic Conference and Brigham Young in an upset.

The Ducks compiled a winning record during the preseason and won seven games — more than last year's team won all season — but they will be hard-pressed to better last year's 2-16 conference record.

Making things even more difficult for Green is the fact that his former team, Kansas, is now No. 1 in the country, while Oregon will probably win as many conference games as Kansas will lose.

One of the biggest obstacles in Green's way is his team's youth, an ingredient that is usually favorable for a poor team that is looking to improve in the future. In Oregon's case, Green did not recruit these players but has said he will keep them around, allowing himself less scholarships to give players he recruits.

Given time, Green should transform Oregon into a competitive Pac-10 team, and he cannot be judged too severely on his performance this year because it really is not his team. However, he better make sure his first few recruiting classes are good ones, because if the Ducks continue to struggle like this for a few years, he could find himself the scapegoat.

Steve Mims is a sports reporter for the Emerald.



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