

Women to face Bruins, Trojans

By Steve Mims
Emerald Sports Reporter

The Oregon women's basketball team begins the second half of the Pacific-10 Conference season tonight hoping to improve some ugly numbers.

The Ducks have lost ten consecutive games — the longest streak in school history. They have a 13-game conference losing streak and are 0-9 in the conference this year.

Things won't get any easier for Oregon this weekend when the team faces 16th-ranked USC tonight followed by UCLA on Saturday at McArthur Court. The Trojans are on a three-game winning streak and are tied for first-place in the Pac-10 at 8-2, while the Bruins are tied for third-place at 5-4.

"Both of this week's opponents are very good teams who will be in the NCAA tournament and both are capable of going a

long way," Oregon head coach Elwin Heiny said. "Both teams have individuals who will be very difficult to stop."

USC is led by 6-foot-5 junior Lisa Leslie, who is second in the league in scoring and rebounding with averages of 19.2 and 10.1, respectively. Leslie leads the conference in blocked shots with 3.6 per game and is third in field goal accuracy at 56.2 percent. Senior guard Joni Easterly is averaging 16.1 points per game for the Trojans and scored a career-high 28 points earlier this year against Oregon in USC's 78-69 victory.

UCLA features Natalie Williams, the Pac-10's leading scorer and rebounder. Williams, who is also an All-American in volleyball, is averaging 22.2 points and 14.2 rebounds per game. Williams scored 24 points and grabbed 21 rebounds in UCLA's 79-75 victory over the Ducks earlier this season.

"Natalie is an amazing athlete," Heiny said. "We must be ready to do anything defensively against her and Leslie. We will open the game playing them both straight-up, but we may switch to zone later in the game."

The Ducks are coming off a 67-63 loss to Oregon State last Friday when they were ahead 61-56 with 5:15 left in the game before losing. Oregon has been tied or ahead at halftime in six of its nine conference games this year, but has been outscored by an average of 43.1-30.6 in the second half.

Oregon's Debbie Sporcich appears to be recovering from an ankle injury as she scored 15 points and pulled down 11 rebounds against the Beavers. Sporcich leads the team with an average of 13.5 points and 8.3 rebounds per game. Center Sara Wilson is second on the Ducks in scoring (12.8 ppg.) and rebounding (7.2 rpg.).



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