

Volleyball wins tight Civil War

By Scott Simonson
Oregon Daily Emerald

It was difficult to say whether the Oregon volleyball team's victory celebration Friday night was caused by exuberance or relief. What was clear was that on the final night of its season, Oregon was what it had strived all year to become: a good volleyball team.

The Ducks defeated No. 23-ranked Oregon State in a dramatic 15-13, 15-7, 15-17, 7-15, 15-13 match at McArthur Court. In the process, Oregon, which finished the season 2-16 in the Pacific-10 Conference and 5-21 overall, may have killed the Beavers' slim chances of making the NCAA playoffs.

Blending emotion and intensity with execution through most of the first half of the contest, Oregon served for the match at 14-12 in the third game. The match finally ended on an Oregon State mistake almost an hour later.

In between what appeared destined to be a decisive victory for Oregon, nearly became one of its most devastating losses of the season.

Oregon was playing with intensity from the opening of the match, not allowing itself to fall behind early, as has been the Ducks' habit. In all but one of its losses this season, Oregon failed to win the first game.

Against the Beavers, Oregon never trailed during an evenly played first game, which the Ducks won 15-13. Oregon played confidently in the second game while Oregon State appeared rattled. Oregon won the second game 15-7 with a .250 hitting percentage, compared with .091 for Oregon State.

Starting quickly and blocking well, Oregon took a 7-2 lead in the third game. Oregon State fought back to take a 12-10 lead, but Oregon scored four unanswered points and served for the match.

Players and fans were on their feet in expectation, but quick hitter Angee Henderson served into the net. Oregon State looked tenacious and opportunistic instead of looking beaten, and the Beavers were able to steal the third game 17-15.

In the fourth game, Oregon looked like a team with the wind knocked out of it. Oregon's passing and setting was inconsistent and it wasn't hitting with much authority.

The Ducks looked shaken and were foundering. Oregon State led 9-1 before winning the fourth game 15-7, but Oregon head coach Gerry Gregory said the points in between were vital for the Ducks.

"I thought the difference was in the fourth game when we



Oregon's Karissa Meith led the Ducks in a five-set win over Oregon State Saturday with 19 kills and a .316 hitting percentage.

were playing as poorly as we were," he said. "Anne Swayne came in and made a couple of good plays ... It seemed like we were on a downhill slope and wouldn't stop ourselves, but we stabilized and played some decent volleyball."

Oregon started the fifth game by committing the cardinal sin in rally scoring: It fell behind early. Oregon State outside hitter Shelly Smith, who led the Beavers with 16 kills, had a block and two kills in the first three points of the game.

The teams alternated turns scoring in short bursts, with Oregon State taking an 8-4 lead. Oregon found the equalizer in quick hitter Karissa Meith, who supplied three kills in six Oregon points to tie the game at 10.

Oregon State managed to take a 12-10 lead, but the Beavers were no longer able to rely on Oregon to commit errors or self-destruct. Having struggled with its confidence all season, Oregon had found enough confidence to mount one final charge.

The Ducks scored five of the final six points of the match. All season, the team had talked about knowing it could win and

knowing it could play well enough to do so. For once, Oregon showed that it would not make mistakes and forced the opposition to raise its level of play in order to beat the Ducks.

"We just made the plays. Karissa Meith had an awesome block at a real key time," Gregory said.

The fifth game "was the first time (in the match) that we had a sustained series of exceptional plays. The blocking at the end of the game was a real key for us. I also think our hitter came through and made some swings. I'm sure Oregon State feels bad about netting at game point, but we know what that's like," he said.

Meith led Oregon with 19 kills and a .316 hitting percentage. Henderson and swing hitter LaReina Woods added 12 kills. Woods and swing hitter Amy McNeel led Oregon with 19 digs.

The victory provided a fond memory in a less than memorable season. Gregory hoped it also taught the young team a lesson.

"They are a good team and they can win in the Pac-10," he said.

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