

Cardinal still the team to beat

PREVIEW 1994

The Emerald examines the Pac-10 women's basketball season in a two-part series.

TUESDAY: A look at Washington, WSU, USC, UCLA and Oregon State.

TODAY: A look at Stanford, California, Arizona, Arizona State and Oregon.

By Scott Simonson
Oregon Daily Emerald

Never bet against Stanford. Picking Stanford's women's basketball team to win in the Pac-10 has gotten to be a no-brainer. The Cardinal has won or tied for the Pacific-10 Conference title each of the last five seasons. In the seven-year history of Pac-10 women's basketball, it has an .817 conference winning percentage that includes an 82-10 record since 1989.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Stanford is once again one of the favorites to win the conference championship. The 11th-ranked Cardinal, 1-1 in the conference and 8-3 overall, has only the fourth-best record in the conference, but all of its losses have come at the hands of nationally ranked opponents. The most recent was a 78-61 drubbing at the hands of No. 16 Washington last Thursday.

The Cardinal program isn't the powerhouse it was a few years ago, but it still puts plenty of points on the board. Stanford leads the conference and is ranked among national leaders in scoring offense, with an 81.8 points per game average.

Stanford returns only two starters from last season's NCAA tournament team, but the team's strength is balance: The conference's highest-scoring team

doesn't have any players averaging more than 15 points per game. Stanford's roster lacks a star like the Val Whitings and Jennifer Azzis of seasons past, but it has good players and plenty of them.

California, on the other hand, boasts a tradition of mediocrity. The Bears have finished fourth or fifth in the conference in five of seven years of conference play.

This year's Golden Bear team, 0-2 in the Pac-10 and 6-6 overall, will do well to finish that high. Cal is 0-5 on the road this season and is allowing more points per game (78.9) than any other team in the conference.

The Golden Bears do know how to play some offense and have two of the top 10 scorers in the conference in center Ingrid Dixon and guard Jackie Lear. However, with Arizona and the Oregon schools improving, Cal will be hard-pressed to place in the upper half of the conference. The Golden Bears would do well to write this season off as a rebuilding year.

No team may be harder to figure out than Arizona. The Wildcats are 1-0 in the conference and 7-2 overall, including a two-point loss at home to No. 1-ranked Tennessee at home in December. The Wildcats are also the same team that finished in eighth place in the conference last season with a 7-11 record.

The Wildcats are trying to make it to postseason play for the first time ever. Arizona has eight seniors and four returning starters. Included in that group is guard Shawn Coder, who averages 15.4 points per game and is shooting 47.4 percent from the three-point range; and center Kim Conway, who leads the conference in field-goal percentage and is eighth in rebounding.

But are the Wildcats for real? It may take time to tell. The Wildcats probably aren't tough enough

to challenge for the conference crown, but they have a legitimate shot of making it to postseason play. After traveling to Stanford and California this weekend, then hosting USC and UCLA next weekend, Arizona will have a pretty clear idea of whether it's a pretender or a contender.

If Arizona State isn't the worst team in the conference right now, it should be by the end of the season. The Sun Devils, 0-1 and 2-7 in the Pac-10, lost to the likes of Appalachian State and Southern Illinois in the preseason.

On paper, the Sun Devils don't appear much more threatening. Arizona State ranks last in seven major statistical categories, including scoring offense, rebounding and field goal percentage.

Bright spots for Arizona State include forward/center Melani Francis, who's ninth in the conference in scoring, with a 16.0 average; and forward Nikki Thompson, whose average of 4.9 steals per game places her eighth in the nation.

Last, but not least, is Oregon. The Ducks are essentially the same squad that went 3-15 in the Pac-10 last year to finish in a tie for last place. However, first-year head coach Jody Runge has brought a change in attitude and an emphasis on defense.

Oregon, 1-1 and 7-4, looked impressive in its opening weekend of conference play. McArthur Court is always a tough place to play; it remains to be seen whether Oregon will be able to get wins away from home.

If forward-Debbie Sporcich and center Sara Wilson stay healthy, Oregon's inside game will be good enough to challenge anyone. If the Ducks play solid defense and get consistent perimeter offense from forward Jessica Schutt and guard Missy Croshaw, Oregon is capable of winning just about anywhere.

OREGON HOOPS

The Emerald sports staff previews and forecasts the 1994 Pac-10 Men's Basketball season

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Fraternity Rush in Cedar A
Sorority Rush in Cedar B
Alumni Relations in Cedar C
Social Issues in Cedar D
Scholarship in Cedar E
Presidents in Cedar F
Please have at least one representative at each meeting.

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ΠΒΦ ΣΑΕ
Thanks for the party. The mock prom was a hit. Congratulations to the prom king & queen
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ΔΥ

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Dinner, tours & more
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