

Improving Ducks look to break .500 in Pac-10

By Dave Charbonneau
Oregon Daily Emerald

The Oregon men's basketball team will try to bring its record above .500 in the Pacific-10 Conference for the first time since Jerry Green took over when the Ducks face Washington State tonight and Washington Saturday at McArthur Court.

Oregon (1-2 in the Pac-10, 5-7 overall) is coming off one its most lopsided and important Pac-10 wins in the past two years when it defeated Oregon State 74-64 Saturday. The Ducks were blessed in scheduling with a rare three-game home stand and they face two of the three Pac-10 teams they defeated last season.

For Green, the most important aspect of the Oregon State win was not the fact it will be followed by two more home games, but by the fact his team finally may realize they have the ability to win.

"I've seen us getting better, but I'm not sure the kids were gaining any confidence," he said. "After Saturday, I think the team now realizes it's improving. You can tell them they're getting better, but players need to have proof they're improving. The Oregon State game proved that."

The Ducks held a 20-point lead for much of the game, and not until the final five minutes did Oregon let the Beavers get back in the game.

Perhaps the biggest boost the Ducks got Saturday was the play of junior transfer forward Darryl Parker. Parker scored 15 points and pulled down 10 boards and drove Beaver point guard Stephane Brown crazy with tough, in-his-face defense which forced Brown into committing six turnovers in the first half alone.

"I've been waiting for someone to step up at the 2-3 spot and Darryl did that," Green said. "Darryl definitely came to play Saturday."

Parker is averaging nearly 10 points and seven rebounds in Pac-10 play. He was averaging less than two points and two rebounds in non-conference games.

The Ducks have also got some much-needed help inside from

the emergence of forward Jeff Potter. Potter was Oregon's leading scorer Saturday with 21 points and eight rebounds. Potter, who missed the Ducks' first two games with an injury, has averaged 11 points and five rebounds a game, and 14 points and seven rebounds in Pac-10 play.

"Jeff has improved a great deal from where he was last year," Green said. "He's a lot more solid than he was last season. He's played well inside, but more importantly, he's developing a shot from 15 feet or so out, which makes him a lot more difficult to guard."

Opposing coaches are starting to take notice of the performances Potter and Oregon's other inside players.

"Jeff Potter has made himself a good Pac-10 player," Washington State head coach Kelvin Sampson said. "Up front they have a lot of kids that can bang."

Washington head coach Bob Bender said he was impressed with what he saw of Oregon's low-post players during the first half of the Oregon State win.

"Oregon is getting better," Bender said. "Their inside players seem to be playing with more confidence."

The Ducks will need to continue their solid play if they are to have a shot against the Cougars tonight.

The Cougars (1-3, 11-5) are coming off a split at home with USC and UCLA. Against the fifth-ranked Bruins, Washington State led for 38 minutes, but eventually lost by two after a questionable no-call on what looked like a obvious UCLA goal tend in the closing seconds.

Sampson said the last weekend's games have left him pleased overall, even if it did leave a bad taste in his mouth.

"We played as well as we could against USC," he said. "But we also played well against UCLA. Sometimes things out of control happen. But I was pleased with our mental toughness coming back the day later to beat USC."

The Cougars have been picked by many to finish in the top five



MARK McTYRE/for the Emerald

Oregon forward Jeff Potter has been receiving praise for his improved play this season.

in the conference after going 9-2 in non-conference games, with one of the losses coming at Indiana by only five points.

Sampson said he'd be a lot happier if Thursday's game were in Pullman rather than at McArthur Court.

"Oregon has continually improved," he said. "At home especially, they have confidence they can beat teams and they can. It's a game for us to start play-

ing better on the road."

Saturday, the Ducks will face a team that looked a lot like Oregon did a year ago. The Huskies (0-4, 2-11) are in a transition year with Bender, a first-year head coach, trying to cope with a Washington team predicted by everybody to finish in the cellar of the Pac-10.

The Huskies are coming off losses to USC and UCLA, and Bender is viewing this weekend

as a chance to get rid of the goose egg in the win column.

"This weekend we face two teams as hungry as we are to get out of the Pac-10 cellar as we are," he said. "I saw Oregon against Idaho and their first half against Oregon State. They are getting better and their inside players are playing with confidence."

Both games start at 7:05 p.m.

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