

Improvement is everywhere for Oregon women

By Scott Simonson
Oregon Daily Emerald

What a difference a year makes. What a difference the coach makes.

Last season, the Oregon women's basketball team finished tied for last place in the Pacific-10 Conference. One week from the halfway point of this year's conference season, Oregon is 11-5 and tied for second place in the conference with a 5-2 record.

Any game now, the Ducks may wake up and find out they're the same team that compiled a 15-39 record during the past three conference seasons. Then again, Oregon may prove that its fast start really isn't a dream and may end up in the hunt for an NCAA tournament berth at the close of the season.

"I think you pinch yourself and say how fortunate you are to have this opportunity and to have a team that's playing as well as we are right now," said Jody Runge, Oregon's first-year head coach, after Oregon beat Arizona State on Saturday.

Oregon won only three conference games last year. This year's team won three before the conference season was three weeks old. Last year's squad won nine games all season. This year's team won nine by the time the season was halfway through.

"The fact that we've beaten UW and the

fact that we've beaten Arizona and that we're tied for second in the conference — obviously they (the Pac-10) have to look at us as someone to be contended with," Runge said.

"We're certainly capable of having a shot at winning the conference. I probably shouldn't say that, but I think we can play with anybody in the conference."

Nobody's rushing to praise the Ducks just yet. Oregon received three votes in this week's Associated Press poll. That's only 594 votes behind No. 17 Washington, whom Oregon beat two weeks ago; and a scant 807 votes behind No. 14 Stanford, who is a half game behind the Ducks in the conference standings and plays Oregon Thursday.

"Since I've been here, nobody has respected us," senior guard Missy Croshaw said after Oregon beat Arizona Thursday. "When people think of Oregon basketball, they don't think of a great team or a real successful program. I think it's time that people realize that we're a team that people are going to have to deal with."

It wasn't a year of great expectations for the Ducks. The preseason media poll placed Oregon as the conference's eighth-place team. Despite a nucleus of talented seniors — Croshaw, forward Debbie Sporcich and center Sara Wilson — com-

plemented by a blend of youth and experience in supporting roles, nobody seemed to be giving the Ducks much of a chance.

What happened? The coach gives the players credit. The players give the coach credit. Both may be right.

Runge has acknowledged that she has a group of players that are talented and hard-working. In a conference loaded with excellent post players, the tandem of Sporcich and Wilson are as good as anyone. When the Ducks open up their inside game with consistent shooting from the perimeter, they are a formidable team offensively.

This is nothing new. However, in past years, injuries have hampered Oregon's chances for success. Sporcich and Wilson missed a combined eight games last season and sat out a combined 25 games during the 1991-92 season.

Oregon has stayed healthy this year. The Ducks are also a year older, a year better and a year more experienced. Wilson and Sporcich are on pace to set career highs for points and rebounds averaged in a season. Croshaw and junior forward Jessica Schutt also could set career bests in scoring.

The veterans have gotten help from two newcomers, freshman point guard Cindie Edamura and freshman forward Arianne

Boyer. However, the most notable addition to this year's team has been Runge.

She has brought an emphasis on defense to an offense-minded club. Oregon is holding below 41 percent shooting from the field, after allowing better than 45 percent shooting last year. After giving up 76 points per game against Pac-10 opponents last year, Oregon is allowing 67 points per game.

So what's the most important difference between this year and last year?

None of the above.

The biggest change for this year's Ducks may be in attitude. Runge brings an attention to detail and preparation, a penchant for accepting blame instead of making excuses and exudes plenty of confidence.

"Everybody knows how much your mindset can do for your game before you even get out on the court; it depends on how you think as a team and as individuals," Wilson said after the Arizona game. "I think that's the number one thing that has changed, our attitude."

Croshaw credits Runge with the change. "She makes demands that we be focused and that we come with her. Every little thing is important to her and I think she's instilled that into us. She's a very focused person," Croshaw said.

Hockey gets its first win this year

By Mark McTyre
For the Oregon Daily Emerald

Oregon hockey picked up its first win of the season in impressive style last weekend by beating the visiting Idaho Vandals 4-2 Saturday night, before tying the rematch game 4-4 Sunday.

The Ducks seemed to be a

changed team in these two games. Their defense played well, offense was relentless, and the strongest attribute for the Ducks was the play of their goalies.

In the first game, Oregon goalie Richard Densmore was literally unconscious between

the pipes.

"I haven't felt the same since the opening minute," said Densmore.

Densmore received a concussion when he was tripped up and fell against the goal posts, but he hung tough for the game and only allowed two goals on 23 shots. In the second game, Tom Bahls replaced Densmore and allowed four goals on 32 shots.

Because the goalies were playing so well for the Ducks, the offense decided that hat tricks were in order.

In the first game, Oregon forward Brian Clendenin picked up the pace for the Ducks after Oregon's leading scorer Mark Adams put one in the back of the net early for a 1-0 lead. At

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Recruits ready to sign

Today marks the first day college football teams can officially sign high school seniors to letters of intent.

Traditionally, this is one of the most optimistic days of the year for coaches and recruiters, and this year seems to be no different at Oregon.

Oregon head coach Rich Brooks said after last season that his biggest need in recruiting was a kicker and punter to replace Tommy Thompson, who filled each of those duties for the Ducks during the last two years. The Ducks have apparently received verbal commitments from a pair of high school seniors who can fill both positions.

Matt Belden from Glendale

High School in Phoenix, Ariz., and Josh Bidwell from Douglas High School will both reportedly sign on with the Ducks today and vie for the kicking jobs.

In addition to Bidwell, the other high-profile in-state recruit Oregon is expected to sign is Chad Normoyle, a 6-foot-5, 250-pound offensive lineman from West Linn.

Other top recruits who have reportedly made verbal commitments to Oregon include running backs David Crump of Stockton, Calif., and Kevin Parker of Oakland, Calif., quarterback Jason Maas of Yuma, Ariz., and wide receiver Patrick Johnson of Redlands, Calif.

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105 PERSONALS

Jennifer, I Met you in Reno. You're 24 yrs. old and a Psychology major. I'd like to talk again. John 916-758-1373

So are you a Freshman or a Sophomore?! We met 1/5/94, 2:30PM at Arby's-Eugene. You are a Grad student + 2 yrs., 30, nice, friendly. I am no rocket scientist, but hoping to talk to you again. If you are or know this person, please call (503) 538-4583, lv. mess.

105 PERSONALS

"Hey Chris!" I'm tired of being bored. Let's join the Student University Relations Council. They're looking for new members to help out with events like Mayfest, Homecoming and Parent's Weekend. We can get applications in 204 Johnson Hall. Catch ya later! Jason

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BY GARRY TRUDEAU