

METZ

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Southern California, they packed Mac Court in record numbers to watch the basketball version of the Ducks wipe out yet another No. 2 team in the nation in the opening game of the Pac-10 season.

What the hell has happened around here?

After all, when I came to this school in 1992, Duck basketball hadn't exactly reached a fever pitch.

The miserable 5,818 average attendance for games at the Pit was the third lowest since 1971 and was almost 2,000 a game fewer than the year before.

Of course the school was in the

advanced stages of "Monson-itis" and Johnnie Reece was still around.

Oregon football, while holding its own with four postseason appearances in six years, hasn't been as good as what people had expected.

Now, the Duck hoopsters are staples on SportsCenter and scraping up a ticket has become quite the chore.

Heck, it's worth the wait in line to see Jerry Green rip through his list of theatrics in helping his team to victories.

So Green is in the third year of the big rebuilding of Oregon basketball. Most coaches would probably tell you that improvements, if there were to be any, begin to take root in the second year of a rebuilding process and begin to surface in

the third or fourth year.

The Ducks are by no means on easy street now that they have cracked the Top 25 for the first time in 18 years, but it is quite a tribute to the fans and the program in general to finally be recognized after such a drought.

And the win against UCLA couldn't have come at a better time. The win not only eased the Rose Bowl blues just three days after the 38-20 loss to Penn State, but the excitement generated by the win over what would have been the No. 1 team in the nation had they not lost to the Ducks, sets the tone for the entire season. It also makes the Pit, already one of the toughest places for opposing teams, that much more of a menace if the recent

attendance boom continues.

The weekend sweep also kept the energy from the Far West Classic Championship going. It was a well-kept secret, but the Ducks beat two respectable teams up in Portland.

So Jerry Green is already well on his way to his best season with the Ducks. His 10 wins this season already qualifies the 1994-95 campaign as his best in Eugene, at least with one more win, but with the football team doing so well and considering the incredible start for Green's squad, expectations have changed — for the better.

Chris Metz is the sports editor for the Emerald.

AGREEMENT

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Glen Sather, who had to gut a championship team that once included the likes of Wayne Gretzky, Mark Messier and Jari Kurri to keep Oilers owner Peter Pocklington in business.

"The deal the union had been working under was better than terrific — so good that the league couldn't survive," Sather said. "That's why we did what had to do in Edmonton. Now we can survive."

Bettman, who spoke briefly, didn't answer questions from the media and had to be asked by photographers to produce a smile, said he was "thrilled that this is over."

"It was important that the league come together with the

players ... to take this league to the great heights that it can come to," he said. "I retain the optimism that I've always had for the future of this sport."

Bettman said some "transitional issues" — more minor but still essential to a final agreement — had to be completed.

Goodenow also had little to say, answering only a few questions before returning to NHLPA headquarters in Toronto.

"This has been a long, difficult process, one that has come to a conclusion that both sides can live with," he said. "It's important that we get the focus where it belongs — the competition."

The NHL only hopes its short

season will be as competitive as the negotiations were.

The lockout began over the owners' demand for a cap on players' salaries, something the union refused to even consider.

It finally came down to player freedom. The NHL players went into the talks as the only one of the major pro sports without any form of unrestricted free agency. They fell short of getting what they wanted.

The owners didn't want players to become unrestricted free agents until after they turned 32 years old. The players at first wanted it at 28 but came up to 30 last week.

The final contract gave players free agency at 32 in the first three years and at 31 in the last three. But because either side

has the right to scrap the agreement after the 1997-98 season, there might be only one year in which 31-year-olds have complete freedom.

"I still have mixed feelings," said Bob Corkum, player representative of the Anaheim Mighty Ducks. "A lot of guys will be hurt. At the same time, something had to be done. We didn't think it was worth missing a season for it."

Perhaps the owners' best new wage-control system will be the rookie salary cap, \$850,000 in the first year of the agreement. By ending the run of multimillion-dollar rookie contracts, owners should be able to slow a trend that has seen salaries triple in the last three years.

It was a major concession for

players, who for months said they would never accept such a cap.

Owners also negotiated the right to walk away from three salary arbitration rulings of at least \$550,000 over each two-year period.

Players liked the old arbitration system — in which a club had to abide by an arbitrator's ruling — before grudgingly offering one walkaway in a proposal last week. Owners at first wanted to eliminate binding arbitration all together, but they proposed two walkaways in an offer last week.

"We gave up a lot. It's really hard to say if it's worth it right now," Boston Bruins star Cam Neely said. "But the main thing is, we're going to be back playing."

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