

Here come the Bulls

It's that time of year again, the only time between November and May when National Basketball Association games mean anything.

That's right, the NBA playoffs get underway this week. The playoffs represent the only time throughout the seemingly endless NBA season in which the players actually play defense, superstars don't pace themselves until the fourth quarter and the referees occasionally blow their whistles on obvious violations.

With the way the league has shaped up this season, the NBA's stretch run through June should be one of the more interesting title chases in recent years. It is probable that the Chicago Bulls, winners of an NBA-record 72 games, will chew up the rest of the competition like George Foreman at a breakfast buffet en route to the team's unprecedented fourth title this decade.

So, should the NBA save everyone a lot of time and just give Chicago the trophy now? I think Michael Jordan and company have that I-haven't-eaten-in-three-days look in their eyes these days. It might only be a matter of time before the Bulls can put another trophy in Chicago's crowded cupboard.

However, several teams, namely Orlando, Seattle, Houston and San Antonio, just might be able to slow down the mighty juggernaut that is the Bulls.

In the Eastern Conference, the early round match-ups will only be a warm-up for Chicago and Orlando before the two teams meet in the semi-finals. Expect the Bulls to sweep through Miami and Cleveland, as Jordan, Scottie Pippen, Toni Kukoc and Dennis Rodman put on a clinic of how to dominate opponents with team basketball.

If veterans Dennis Scott, Horace Grant and Nick Anderson can keep Anfernee Hardaway and Shaquille O'Neal from getting too distracted, then the Magic should slice through Detroit and Indiana like a hot knife through butter.

If Reggie Miller can recover from a broken eye socket, the Pacers might make things interesting for Orlando, but the Magic have too many weapons and playoff experience for Indiana to be much of a problem.

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Ducks look to overcome rain and Beavers

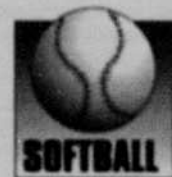
■ **SOFTBALL:** Oregon visits Corvallis, hoping rain won't wash out yet another doubleheader

By Chris Hansen
Sports Reporter

Weather permitting, the Oregon softball team will play a doubleheader against Oregon State this afternoon in Corvallis.

Five of the Ducks' last six games have been called because of rainy weather. With the forecast calling for showers, today's games against OSU may be no different.

Last Wednesday, the Ducks' doubleheader against Portland State was rained out. On Saturday, only one of the scheduled games against California was played before rain forced the cancellation of the second game. The weather on Sunday was so bleak that the doubleheader against Stanford was canceled early in the morning and rescheduled for Monday — which, of course, was rained out. Currently, none of these games have been, or are going to be, rescheduled.



The timing of this recent string of rainouts couldn't have come at a worse time for the Ducks. This weekend, the No. 3 UCLA Bruins and the No. 2 Washington Huskies come to town for doubleheaders against an Oregon squad that has played only one game since its sweep of No. 20 Arizona State on April 14. Not to mention that the Ducks haven't been able to practice outdoors or hold scrimmages in more than a week.

"It's hard not being out in the field, and it's hard not playing in any games," said senior shortstop Kathy Stahl, adding that there is the possibility that the team might be a bit rusty. "But, as I always say, we've played softball all our lives."

Oregon (19-18 overall, 5-6 in the Pacific-10 Conference) is 11-3 in its last 14 games, including a string of seven consecutive wins that ended last Saturday in a 5-0 loss to No. 12 California. Another one of those three losses came in a doubleheader split with the Beavers (14-24 overall, 2-11 in the Pac-10) two weeks ago in Eugene.

The cancellation of the five games at the same time the Ducks have been playing exceptional ball also hurts the team's chances of improving its position in the standings, both in the Pac-10 and overall, particularly because those were games the Ducks should have won — games that won't be rescheduled.

Bristow forced out of Charlotte

■ **NBA:** Hornets' head coach resigns under pressure after dismal season

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Allan Bristow resigned under pressure as coach of the Charlotte Hornets today after the club had a nine-game drop-off from last season's record and failed to make the playoffs.

Bristow took a struggling 3-year-old franchise and molded it into respectability, but he was unable to turn the Hornets into a consistent winner.

"Allan and I came to a mutual agreement that it was time for us to make a change and head in a different direction," Hornets owner George Shinn said today at a news conference that Bristow did not attend. "Allan has been with us a long time, and I appreciate all of the effort and dedication he put into his job. I feel he already did the very best job he possibly could."

Bristow did not go out after a losing record. But the Hornets' 41-41 mark and failure to make the playoffs represented much less than had been expected from Charlotte this season.

The Hornets were coming off a franchise-record 50 victories last season, and fans were hoping this would be the year Charlotte took its place among the NBA's elite.

Instead, the Hornets ranked at or near the bottom of the league in several defensive categories, contributing to wildly inconsistent play in the stretch run that cost Charlotte a playoff berth.

The Hornets, who lost four of their last six

games, closed the season with a four-game losing streak at the Charlotte Coliseum, a slide that did not set well in a city that consistently is among the NBA attendance leaders.

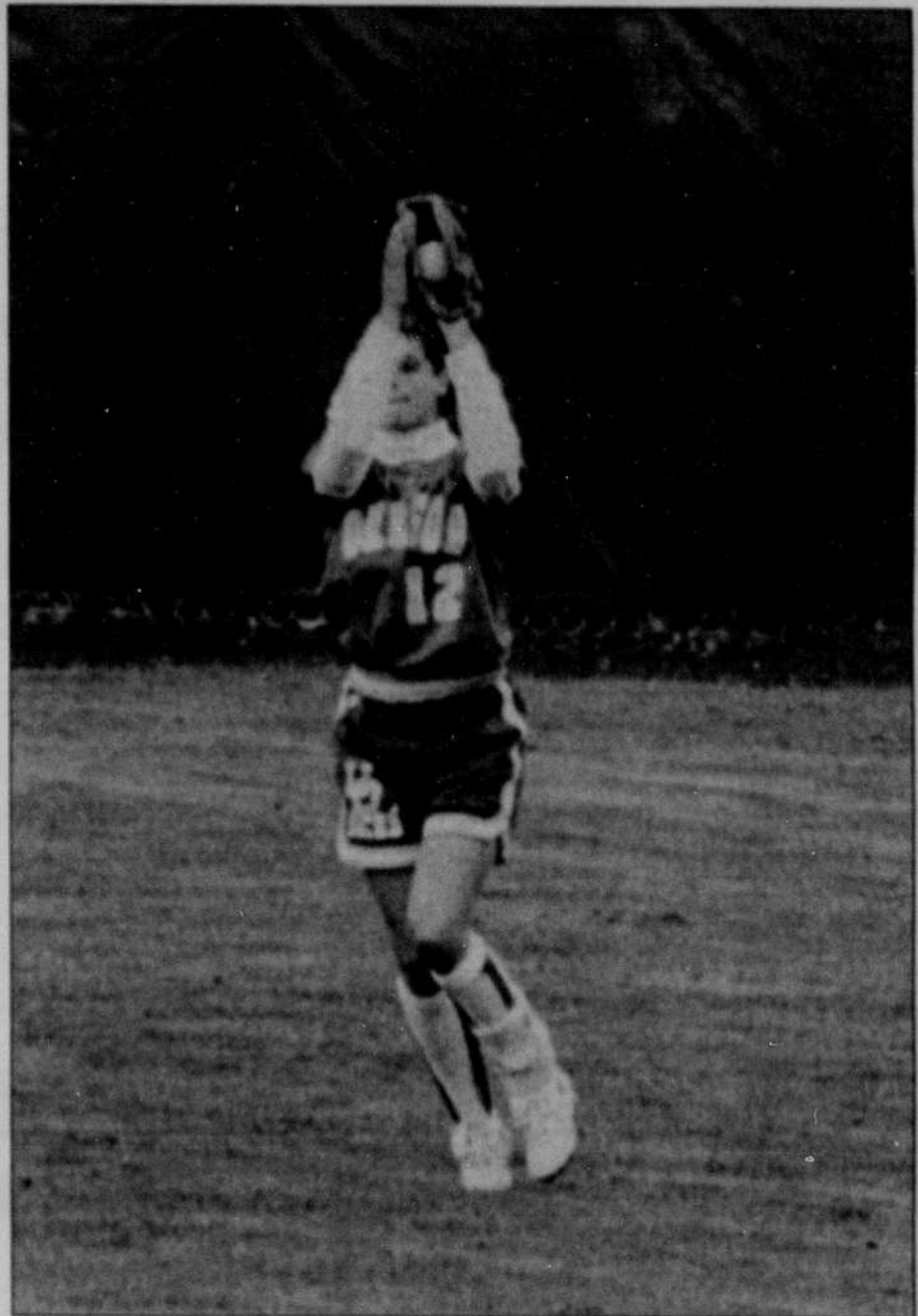
When asked what role fans played in Bristow's resignation, Bob Bass, vice president of basketball operations said today, "You don't want fans telling you how to run your business. At the same point, they're extremely, extremely important to us."

What made it even worse for the Charlotte fans was that their team lost its bid for the eighth and final Eastern Conference playoff spot to the Alonzo Mourning-led Miami Heat.

Mourning spent his first three NBA seasons as one of the most revered members of the Hornets, a status he lost when he and the club engaged in a bitter contract squabble that ended with his rejecting an \$11.2 million salary and the Hornets' subsequently shipping him to Miami in a six-player deal last Nov. 3.

The opening-day trade kicked off a season of major deals, injuries and defensive letdowns from which the Hornets were unable to recover.

The Hornets have sold out 317 consecutive games dating back to December 1988, but the nightly attendance figure of 24,042 at the Charlotte Coliseum represents tickets sold and distributed. The actual number of fans in the building rarely represents a sellout, a fact that prompted Shinn to say he needs to put a better product on the floor.



Right fielder Kim Kampfer and the rest of the Ducks hope the weather will let them finish a doubleheader today against Oregon State in Corvallis.

Ducks holding seventh place

■ **GOLF:** Christel Tomori moves up to a tie for ninth place at the Pac-10 Championships

The Oregon women's golf team stayed put in seventh place at the Pacific-10 Conference Championships in Tucson, Ariz., despite notching a strong team score of 303 in the second round on Tuesday.

Senior Christel Tomori bettered her 77-stroke performance from the previous day when she carded a one-under par 71 to move up from 18th place to a three-way tie for ninth place. Sophomore Paula Patterson came back from an 80 on Monday to shoot a 76 and move into a tie for 29th place with fellow Duck Karen Bristow, a freshman who had been tied with Tomori after the first round.

Host Arizona shot a 287 — the exact score the Wildcats carded the previous day — to stay in first place, some 11 strokes ahead of second-place Stanford.