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UO hockey enters vital weekend

■ **CLUB SPORTS:** A weekend sweep will put Oregon in place for a playoff run

By Alex Pond
Freelance Sports Reporter

Ready or not, the Oregon club hockey team will begin the most crucial stretch of its season this weekend with a three-game road trip to Southern California, facing Pacific-8 Hockey Conference foes UCLA Friday and Southern California Saturday before closing out the trip against Long Beach State in a non-conference game Sunday.

The Ducks (9-3-1) have not played since Dec. 7, and have practiced only twice since returning from a three-week Christmas break. That's not exactly the ideal situation to be in heading into a stretch of the schedule that will make or break the team's chances of making the playoffs, but neither head coach Nick Ham nor his players were concerned that the layoff will be a factor.

"Monday's practice was almost totally devoted to conditioning, to get them back on their legs, to get the lungs back up," Ham said. "They worked really hard and I was real impressed with the practice they gave us."

Right wing Seth Prouser echoed the sentiments of his coach.

"I think the layoff will affect us a little, but I think most of us have probably got our legs back by

now," he said. "We've had two practices and I think by game time we'll probably be OK."

Both were more concerned about the upcoming opponents

and the importance of the next three weekends. Oregon, currently 3-3-1 in the Pac-8, will play six conference games during that span, four of them away from the friendly confines of the Lane County Ice Arena. Even one loss will severely hurt the team's post-season chances.

Before looking ahead, however, the Ducks must take care of business in Los Angeles.

"These are probably the two most important games we have all season because, for the first time, we are looking at a situation where no win means no going to the playoffs, so we've got to win these two games and I'm confident we will," Prouser said.

Ham also is confident of his team's chances this weekend.

"UCLA and USC have good teams but we should be able to put it to them pretty good, and they are critical [games] because this is the only opportunity this year we have to play them," he said.

As has often been the case this season, the Ducks do not have a lot of information about their opponents.

Any time you are on the road it's a little bit harder on the team. There are more distractions, especially when you're going to Los Angeles, but the team is very focused right now. I'm impressed with their attitude and that they're focused on winning the games.

— Nick Ham
head coach

"The only thing I know about them is that I understand that both teams have lost to Washington State and we have beaten Washington State so that gives us some confidence going in," Ham said. "We know we can beat the teams going in now, we just have to put it together. On their individual play and their style, though, I really don't know."

One factor working against the Ducks this weekend is that they are playing away from home, where they are just 2-2-1 this season.

"Any time you are on the road it's a little bit harder on the team," Ham said. "There are more distractions, especially when you're going to Los Angeles, but the team is very focused right now. I'm impressed with their attitude and that they're focused on winning the games."

Five Idaho State athletes suspended

■ **NCAA:** The men's basketball players were sentenced for a shoplifting

The Associated Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — Five Idaho State University basketball players have been suspended from the team for the rest of the season after being sentenced to probation and fines for shoplifting.

Senior forward David Hickman, junior guard Dedric Bell, freshman guard Stephen Brown, freshman forward Cedric Robinson and sophomore guard Rapheal Fondren have been suspended since Dec. 21, missing the last five games.

"They will neither represent the university in competition nor practice with the team," athletic director Irv Cross said Thursday. "I want to emphasize that all five

will remain on athletic scholarships at Idaho State for the remainder of the school year and attend classes."

Hickman is a senior and has no more eligibility remaining, but the other four will have the chance to retain their scholarships and participate on next year's team, Cross said.

"We'll put these things behind us and move on," ISU coach Herb Williams said. "We'll do what we have to do."

He's left with just eight players, seven scholarship players and a walk-on, but the Bengals have won four of five games since the players were suspended.

Bannock County Magistrate R. Ted Israel sentenced them on Tuesday to six months probation. They also were fined \$300 and assigned to two days on a county labor detail for each count against them.

They could have received up to one year in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

Robinson pleaded guilty Dec. 26 to one count of misdemeanor petty theft. The other four pleaded guilty the same day to two counts each. All five were arrested for stealing an estimated \$1,600 worth of electronic equipment and other items from the ShopKo department store in the Pine Ridge Mall from Nov. 13 through Dec. 14.

"It was a tough but fair sentencing," Cross said. "I can tell you it's very important to us that we can have a good, solid program that can be respected not only in this community but also all over the country."

Although the five players who were suspended were averaging a collective 25 points per game, the Bengals opened Big Sky Conference play last weekend with two victories.

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