

Stanford skates into town for two-game showdown

■ **HOCKEY:** Oregon hosts the first-place Cardinal Friday and Saturday nights at Lane County Ice Arena

By Alex Pond
Freelance Sports Reporter

All games are important to the Oregon Club hockey team. However, there are certain games throughout the season where the importance is raised to a new level.

The coaches know it, the players know it and the fans know it.

The atmosphere surrounding the team is intense the entire week leading up to the game, rather than just hours before game-time.

The two-game series Oregon plays against Stanford at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday at Lane County Ice is one of these occasions.

Oregon is 4-4-1 in the Pac-8 and fighting for its playoff life with four league games remaining. Stanford is in first place in the Pacific-8 hockey league and has been re-

garded as the team to beat all season.

"They're huge," said goaltender Keith Barbato, who will be getting the start Friday. "I already have butterflies in my stomach."

Head coach Nick Ham, unlike many coaches who often downplay the importance of individual games, knows these games are more significant than any others his team has played in this season and expects them to have a big-game atmosphere.

"The games are going to be real tense," Ham said. "The guys are going to be a little tense in the first part, but we're going to try to take it to Stanford early."

"We're going to do a lot of physical play. We're going to stand them up and take our shots."

Ham said goaltending and team speed are the main strengths of the Cardinal.

"Stanford's got a real tough goalie," he said. "One of the things we're going to have to do is work on lots of shots on [him]. They've got a little bit of speed, but we've got four forward lines with a lot of

depth.

"Stanford's other strength is they get a little more practice time than we do, but all in all we can skate up with them and we can beat them. There's no question in my mind about that."

While these games have playoff implications, the Ducks also have a little revenge on their minds after losing

3-2 at Stanford Nov. 15.

"We had a loss to them on the road, but it's a lot different story when they come here," goalie Stuart Robertson said. "They've got to travel, they're in our arena and they've got to play us with all our players."

He said the first game against the Cardinal taught the Ducks some things they can use to be more successful this time around.

"They have a few designed plays we really need to watch," he said. "We just need

to play them really physical, bang them into the boards and just hurt them as much as we can, legally."

Revenge and physical play were popular topics of conversation among the players.

"We lost to them by one point, but we're definitely going to have to crush these guys, not just show them that we're going to be able to compete with them but show them that we can cream them," forward Justin Euteneier said.

What does he think will be the key to doing just that?

"We need to be able to dominate on our power plays and to be able to hold them off on penalty kills," he said. "We play really well five-on-five, but we need to be able to beat them on penalty kills and we need to have a set play that we can run against them that'll work."

If the Ducks want to make the playoffs, they must win both games this weekend. The players know that it's time to get the job done on the ice.

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