



ON THE TUBE
Men's College Basketball,
Michigan at Iowa,
ESPN (34), 4:30 p.m.

SPORTS

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Women's basketball league set to begin first playoffs

■ **ABL:** San Jose, Columbus, Richmond and Colorado will battle for the inaugural championship

The Associated Press

As its inaugural season draws to a close, the women's American Basketball League is preparing for the playoffs despite some grumbling about the format.

The Columbus Quest play the San Jose Lasers, and the Richmond Rage take on the Colorado Xplosion when the postseason starts Sunday.

Although five regular-season ABL games remained Wednesday and Thursday, the playoff picture was solidified with the Lasers' 78-76 double-overtime victory Monday over Columbus, the league's top team.

The Quest, who jumped out to an 11-0 record to start the season and went on to capture the Eastern Conference title, appeared virtually unbeatable until teams started to catch on to their motion offense.

"I think we can take them down," Lasers coach Jan Lowrey said, boosted by her team's victory earlier this week.

San Jose is 2-0 against Columbus at home, but 0-2 against the team in Ohio. The Lasers and the Rage are the only two teams to beat the Quest more than once.

The way the best-of-3-games series is set up, Columbus must travel to San Jose for the first game.

The Lasers, runners-up in the Western Conference to Colorado, play the final two games at Columbus.

It's a format that doesn't sit well with Brian Agler, the Quest's coach and general manager.

"In most cases, the team that finishes in first place usually plays at home," he said.

Olympian Nikki McCray, who is among the league's top scorers with an average of 20.1 points per game for Columbus, agreed with her coach.

"I wish we could play our first game at home — with our record, we should," she said.

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Trying to regain the groove

Jamal Lawrence fights opposing defenses and his own confidence as he tries to regain his shooting touch

By Chris Hansen
Sports Reporter

Don't tell Jamal Lawrence that basketball is a thinking man's game. Because if this were the case, his shots the last five games would probably have been dropping.

Instead, the Oregon men's basketball team's second-leading scorer has been in a shooting slump the last two weeks, including a season low four-shot performance against Stanford last Saturday.

His season scoring average has steadily dropped from 16.4 to his current 14.3 points during that streak, and not coincidentally, the Ducks are only 2-3 in that time span. For Oregon to be successful in its final five games scheduled for the year, Lawrence needs to become the productive scorer that he was in the first half of the season.

"I'm struggling right now because I'm thinking too much," Lawrence admitted. "Early on, I was basically a spot-up shooter that came off screens to shoot threes."

But the word has long been out that Lawrence is one of the conference's premier three-point shooters — a player that needs to be double-teamed often and can never to be left unguarded.

"Defenses are now playing him close enough to touch him," teammate Kenya Wilkins said. "Because he was so hot early in the year, he hit a streak where he couldn't miss. Other teams are scared of him and scared to leave him."

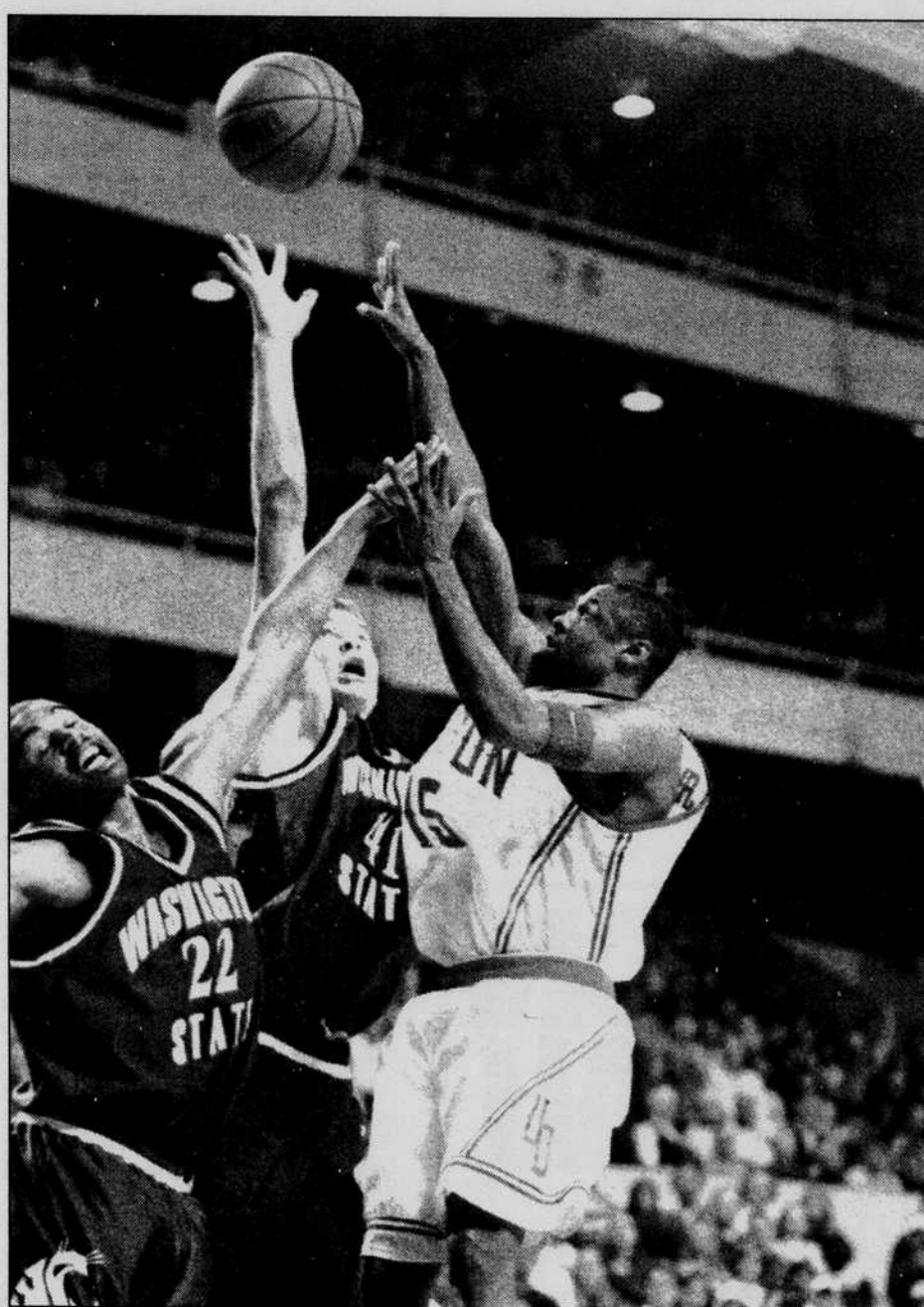
This has created a need for Lawrence to put the ball on the floor and either be willing to drive to the basket, or pull up for an open jump shot.

"I need to mix my game up a little bit more so teams won't be able to play me straight up and deny me the ball," Lawrence said. "They will have to worry about me driving also."

This statement was echoed by Oregon head coach Jerry Green.

"I think other teams are starting to play

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“Because he was so hot early in the year, he hit a streak where he couldn't miss, other teams are scared of him and scared to leave him.”

— Kenya Wilkins
UO point guard

Double-teaming Jamal Lawrence has become a common occurrence since teams have begun to recognize him as a scoring threat for Oregon.

MARK McTYRE/Emerald

UO women look to wrap up NCAA Tournament bid in Arizona

■ **DUCKS:** Oregon women will try to cool the red-hot Wildcats, who have won their last six games

By Ryan Frank
Sports Reporter

With a 16-6 overall record and a 9-4 Pacific-10 Conference mark, the Oregon women's basketball team appears to have a grip on its fourth straight trip to the NCAA Tournament.

But a win at Arizona tonight would make that grip even tighter.

The Wildcats (19-4 overall, 9-3 Pac-10) are arguably the hottest team in the Pac-10 after sweeping UCLA and USC for the first time ever last weekend, including a 82-64 spanking of the second-place Trojans.

The two wins in Los Angeles pushed Arizona's win streak to six, its longest conference winning streak in team history, and put it in sole position of third place, a half-game ahead of the Ducks.

"We knew they were playing well, but [the USC win] kind of proves that they're really focused right now," Oregon guard

Cindie Edamura said.

Lisa Griffith has been the player stepping up during the Wildcats' winning streak. The freshman guard averaged 19.5 points, 3.5 assists and one steal per game in Los Angeles while being named last week's Pac-10 Player of the Week.

While Griffith has been carrying the Wildcats in recent weeks, forward Adia Barnes has been a force for Arizona all season. The junior is averaging 19.3 points and 8.7 rebounds per game.

While the Wildcats come into tonight's

contest on a six-game winning streak, the Ducks are coming off a three-point loss to Stanford, its closest game against the Cardinal since 1987.

"It is hard because we came so close [to beating Stanford]," Edamura said. "But you can't hang onto that."

Stanford and Arizona have combined to hand the Ducks three of their four conference losses, and the Wildcats were the first team to beat Oregon at McArthur Court this season.

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