

Preview: Several Ducks will be playing near their homes



Terik Brown and the Ducks will try to avenge an earlier loss to USC.

MATTHEW STIFFLER/Emerald

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Wilkins was forced to sit on the bench while his team was fighting to catch up to the surging Trojans. Although he attempted to play about a minute and a half, he winced when attempting a shot and came out of the game with over two and a half minutes to go.

Oregon's Jamar Curry said after the game that the Ducks had the wrong mind set when they had the lead.

"It seemed like we were just trying to protect something," he said. "We weren't really trying to take them out of the game. Instead of protecting the lead, we needed to build on the 12-point [lead] so we could get them out of the game early."

But since that game, Oregon has gone 4-2 and hasn't had a problem keeping a lead. The two losses came to California and Stanford, both of which took early leads and never looked back. In fact, the Ducks were able to beat both Arizona and Arizona State last weekend by outscoring the teams in the last few minutes of the game.

But after Oregon beat the Sun Devils last Saturday, head coach Jerry Green said it would take more effort to beat the Trojans and Bruins.

"We have got to play better down there than we did [against Arizona State]," he said. "No road game is easy. We just have to put two halves together."

Oregon has only won two conference games on the road this season — against Oregon State and Arizona State. Nonetheless, some of the Ducks may feel right at home playing in Los Angeles.

"We'll be enthusiastic about it because several of our kids are from that area," Green said.

Among those making the trip home are Andre Larry, Jamal Lawrence, Jonathan Nelson and Wilkins.

And among those who will need to perform for the Ducks to beat the Trojans, are Green's three key players — Lawrence, Wilkins and Kyle Milling.

After going through a short shooting slump, Lawrence scored 20 against Arizona and 18 against Arizona State. Since the loss to USC, Wilkins has been the leading scorer in four of the Ducks' six games, including 24 points against Washington State, Stanford and Arizona State.

Milling will be a major factor in Oregon's inside game. Last time the Ducks played the Trojans, USC had a monopoly on the board, out-rebounding Oregon 48-28.

But Milling said the Ducks are playing better now than they were then.

"We're back on the upswing a little bit," he said. "We have to go play the way we did against Arizona."

"We played well down there last year, so we have the confidence that we can win. The start of each game is going to be the big thing — the first five, ten minutes, if we can get into the game and not let them get into the groove, we can be successful."

Oregon beat USC in Los Angeles last season, 99-78. But the Trojans finished ninth in the conference at the end of the year, and since have added players like Rodrick Rhodes and Elias Ayuso, who scored 21 against the Ducks.

As always, Oregon will also have to contend with Stais Boseman, who leads USC with an average of 16.2 points per game. Boseman is also the all-time leader in steals for the Trojans with 200 in his collegiate career. In addition, he is among the leaders in career points and assists for USC.

The game will be televised on the fx channel. Tipoff is at 7:30 p.m.

Women: Thompson, Clark lead USC

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home a week and a half ago, the Trojans bounced back to beat their cross-town rival, UCLA, by 13 points at Pauley Pavilion.

"Going into the Oregon game, the win over UCLA will give us some momentum," USC forward Tina Thompson said.

Thompson comes into tonight's game tied with Kate Starbird as the conference's leading scorer, and is second in the conference in rebounding. But there is more to USC than Tina Thompson, and Boyer knows that.

"We can't just concentrate on her because they have other players that can score and hurt us," she said.

Center Michelle Campbell and guard Kristin Clark, who has stepped into the starting role with Erica Mashia's season-ending hip injury, have been the main part of Thompson's supporting cast this season.

Campbell is averaging 11.9

points, 7.6 rebounds and a conference-leading 2.1 blocks per game.

Clark is leading the Trojans with 2.5 steals per game and is second in scoring with 12.0 points per game. At Arizona earlier this season, Clark hit five three-pointers while scoring a career-high 25 points. Then against Oregon in Los Angeles, the sophomore single-handedly put the Ducks away.

After Natalie Hughes hit a three-pointer with 2:35 remaining in the game to pull the Ducks within one point, Clark hit a three-pointer of her own, then converted a three-point play to give the Trojans the 73-65 win.

But the Ducks' close call in Los Angeles has them confident about the rematch at home.

"We came close to beating them down there, we were in the game right until the very end," Boyer said. "[Southern California] is a great team. They've played well at times this year, but I think they are

definitely beatable, especially on our home court."

Runge agreed with her senior's assessment.

"I think that has to bring us confidence," she said. "I think the fact that we played them even to 1:49 down there has to have us playing fairly confident with them coming into our place."

In The Pit this season, the Ducks are 9-2, and have won 24 of their last 29 games at home. With their last home game being a loss to Stanford, the Ducks will have a streak on the line tonight.

The last time Oregon lost two straight at home was February 1993.

But coming off two wins in Arizona, Oregon guard Elsa Oliveira said the Ducks are headed in the right direction.

"We're peaking right now at the right moment, I think that we won't have a problem with USC," she said.

Hughes earns Player of the Week honors

Oregon junior Natalie Hughes was named co-Pacific-10 Conference Player of the Week for the week ending Feb. 23.

Hughes scored 32 points on 12-of-24 shooting from the field during the two games. She also dished out

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10 assists, while turning the ball over only three times. The guard also shot

3-of-4 from three-point range. Hughes shared the award with Stanford's Kate Starbird, who won her seventh such award.

The award was her first, and the second for a Duck this season. Forward Arianne Boyer earned the award for her play at Washington and Washington State earlier this season.

Postseason: Green will be 'elated' with two wins in L.A.

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Head coach Jerry Green, on the other hand, said Oregon could still have a chance if they win two out of its remaining three games.

"I think we can win two and have a shot," he said. "I don't think that they are going to take seven out of the league. They might take five, possibly six."

If the NCAA does take five teams from the Pac-10, Oregon could be in trouble even if it ends the season at 19-8. UCLA (17-7 overall, 11-3 Pac-10) and Arizona (18-7, 9-5) are sure bets. California (19-7, 10-5) is also considered to be a lock. Although with the loss of Ed Gray, Cal's leading scorer, the Golden Bears are in serious danger of losing their remaining three games against Stanford, Arizona and Arizona State.

That would leave Cal with a 19-10 overall record and only 10-8 in the conference. If Oregon does sweep its final three games, they would be 19-8 overall and also 10-8 in the Pac-10.

Stanford (16-7, 9-6) will make it without much of a fight, probably because of the

popularity of point guard Brevin Knight, even though the Cardinal could end the season unimpressively.

Washington (15-8, 8-6) and USC (14-9, 9-5) are the other two Pac-10 teams that are on the bubble. Both teams have wins against Oregon and better Pac-10 records.

Regardless of how the rest of the league finishes the season, Oregon's only true shot to get to the tournament is if it takes care of business on its own end. If that happens, it would be hard to overlook a team that beat UCLA twice, Arizona, Temple and Fresno State and that started the season 10-0 finishing it 7-2.

"What I want out of it," Green said of Oregon's trip to Los Angeles, "is to go down there and get both. If we get one I'll be pleased. If we get two I'll be elated."

What will be disappointing, though, is if the Ducks finish the season strong and fail to make it to the NCAA tournament. Chances are, if the Ducks win just one more game, they will be a sure bet for the National Invitational Tournament.

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