



Jody Runge and the Ducks' bench celebrate during their 70-53 win over Southern California Thursday. The win puts the Ducks in sole possession of second place in the Pac-10. MATHEW STIFFLER/Emerald

Oregon's win 'huge' for its NCAA Tournament plans

■ **WIN:** With victories in their final two games, the Ducks could host the first two rounds of the NCAA Tournament

By Ryan Frank
Sports Reporter

For a team looking for its fourth straight NCAA Tournament bid and a possible home berth in the first two rounds, Thursday night's 70-53 win over Southern California is as big as they come.

The win catapults the Oregon women's

basketball team into second place in the Pacific-10 Conference, a half game in front of the Trojans, and makes them nearly a lock for an NCAA Tournament bid.

"I think it is huge for us. We came out and didn't just beat them — we dominated them," Oregon forward Arianne Boyer said. "Anyone who watches this game is going to see that."

What Oregon did to the No. 14 team in the *USA Today* Ratings Power Index was nothing short of spectacular.

The Ducks held the Trojans to 17 first-half points, which tied their season low for

points in a half, and 53 points for the game, 23 below their season average.

While the Trojans whimpered to an 8-of-28 shooting performance in the first half, the Ducks hit 16-of-32 for a 25-point halftime lead, which never got below 15 points in the second half.

"I think looking at hosting the tournament was another motivation for us," Oregon guard Natalie Hughes said. "We knew if we beat them and beat them big, then we're going to

have a chance to host that first and second round."

For the Ducks to host the first two rounds of the NCAA Tournament, like they did in Jody Runge's first year with the Ducks in 1994, they would most likely have to move into the top 16 of the *USA Today* RPI.

A home berth in the first two rounds of the tournament requires a top 16 bid from the NCAA selection committee, and the RPI plays a large part in the NCAA's decisions, Runge said.

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Women: Oregon's defense remains tough throughout second half

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the three-point arc.

"I think [Boyer] probably had one of the best defensive games I've ever seen her play," Oregon head coach Jody Runge said. "I'm just really pleased."

While Thompson finished the night with 14 points, her second-half scoring was not nearly enough to overcome the lead Oregon built in the opening half.

After USC went on a 9-0 run to close within 2 points with 13 minutes remaining in the first

half, the Ducks blistered the Trojans for 31 points, closing the half 42-17. The 17-point output by USC tied its lowest point total in a half dating back to Dec. 7, 1996, against then-No. 3 Louisiana Tech.

"Oregon is a great defensive team. They are one of the top 10 in the country in defense and one of the best in our conference," USC head coach Fred Williams. "We had 28 shots in the first half, but we just couldn't put them down, we couldn't finish. Being

on the road, you can't let those things happen."

The Trojans made 8-of-28 shots from the field in the first half, while the Ducks shot an even 50 percent, hitting 16-of-32.

"I thought we did a good job of changing offenses when we saw different defenses," Runge said. "I think particularly Lisa [Bowyer], Natalie [Hughes] and Cindie [Edamura] are doing a really good job of finding the open man, of taking the shot when it's open, and driving through the lane."

To open the second half, the Trojans attempted to claw their way back into the contest with a 15-5 run over the first six and a half minutes. However, USC would get no closer as the Ducks re-extended their lead to 24 points, at 57-33, with a 10-1 run over a 2:09 span.

"I thought we were a little bit flat at the beginning of the second half, but we did bend off [Thompson's] run," Runge said. "She is a great player, and you know she is going to get her

points in the second half, but I thought even then we did a good job of having a hand in her face on her shots."

Oregon's Renae Fegent led all scorers and rebounders with 15 points and 11 boards. Hughes and Boyer each had 14 points.

For USC, Thompson led in scoring, but shot only 4-of-19 from the field.

The Ducks will next face UCLA in their final regular-season home game on Saturday night at 7 o'clock.

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