

# Pond: Free throws cost women wins

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crossroads.

Twelve games have been played, including four in the conference, and the Ducks have been, well, mediocre.

Not bad, but not very good. Oregon is at exactly .500, six wins and six losses overall, and two wins and two losses in the conference.

The Ducks' only consistency has been their inconsistency.

There was the hard-fought, two-point loss at No. 18 Western Kentucky. But that admirable effort was preceded by a lackluster 67-59 loss at Portland.

There was the impressive first-half effort at Stanford, where the Ducks led midway through the half and were still in the game at halftime, down by 10. That, though, was followed by a collapse in the second half, and they lost by 25.

Then, of course, there is the free-throw shooting, which has been consistently bad at 61.9 percent. Then the Ducks had to show fans that they are indeed capable of making free throws, as evidenced by their 92-percent effort at the line against California.

But the inconsistency returned, as they have shot just 52.9 percent from the line in the three games since.

Youth, inexperience, injuries. These have all been excuses.

Enough of that.

With 12 games and countless practices under their collective belt, inexperience can't really be much of an excuse anymore. The freshmen and other young players have been toughened by eight

games on the road and have been in enough close games that it should be habit at this point. The pressure should not get to them anymore.

There's the Jenny Mowe excuse. They've been without her for eight straight games now and should be used to playing without the 6-foot-5 center. Yeah, it hurts, but it hasn't been the deciding factor in the Ducks' losses. With the exception of the game at Stanford, they have been in a position to win each game they've lost. Oregon head coach Jody Runge even admitted after the UCLA loss that the absence of Mowe is not the problem.

The obvious problem, and everyone knows it, is free-throw shooting.

It is costing the Ducks wins — pure and simple. They play hard and well, for the most part, but throw victories away at the line.

It's maddeningly frustrating for fans, players and coaches.

The most frustrating part is that Runge said the players make them in practice.

It's just that in games something happens. Perhaps it's a chain reaction. One player misses, then another, then another. It starts to weigh in the back of their minds, and before long it's all the players are thinking about when they step to the line.

That is where the problem starts.

Free throws need to be automatic. Just step to the line with confidence and knock them down.

Perhaps confidence has the most to do with it. You would

think the performance at Cal would have helped, but apparently not.

All I know is something better change — and quick.

These next four games, at Washington and Washington State this weekend and home against Arizona and Arizona State next weekend, will make or break the season.

A 2-2 record in those games won't cut it. The Ducks, in order to have any chance to make the tournament, need to go at least 3-1 in this little stretch. That would put them at 9-7 overall and 5-3 in the Pac-10. More importantly, it finally would give them a little breathing room between the wins and losses.

At the beginning of the season, a loss at Washington would have seemed acceptable. But the Ducks stubbed their toes at home against UCLA and need to make up for it.

Basically, for a team that thinks it's good enough to make the tournament, wins against Arizona State and Washington State need to be automatic, and it needs to be expected that they win one of two against either Washington or Arizona.

If they can do that, the Ducks will be in good shape to make a final push for the tournament.

Go 2-2 in the next four and maybe the NIT is the more realistic goal.

Any less than that and you might want to start focusing on next season.

Alex Pond is a sports reporter for the Emerald.

# Women: Runge will put freshman Meharry on Hall

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lection of players who are at or near the top of the conference in a number of categories.

Amber Hall, the Huskies' 6-foot-1 rebounding machine, leads the Pac-10 in double-doubles with nine and pulled down a Pac-10 best and career-high 21 rebounds against Arizona State. Adia Barnes of Arizona is second in double-doubles in the conference with four.

"You've got to be able to keep [Hall] off the offensive rebounds, that's the big thing with Amber," Runge said. "She's a great rebounder, and you just can't let her catch it and stick it back in."

Hall is the conference rebounding leader, averaging 11.8. She also leads the Pac-10 in offensive rebounds with 69, 19 more than the next closest total.

Behind Hall on the Pac-10 rebounding chart is teammate Gena Pelz, a 6-2 center who is averaging nine boards a game.

As a team, Washington averages almost seven rebounds more than its opponent, tops in the conference. The Huskies also lead the Pac-10 in offensive rebounds (21.3 per game) and three-point field goals (70) — 30 of which

have come from 5-10 guard Jamie Redd.

Runge said freshman Brianna Meharry will draw the defensive assignment on Hall because of Hall's quickness and athletic ability, which is why Runge won't go with the 6-foot-3 Angelina Wolvert. Wolvert is more prone to get into foul trouble guarding Hall, Runge said.

Forward Sonja Curtis compared Washington's frontcourt depth to Stanford's, which is considered to have the conference's top frontcourt.

Not to be forgotten on this deep and talented Washington team is Redd, who seems to subscribe to the never-met-a-shot-I-didn't-like school of thought.

Redd leads the conference in scoring, averaging 22 points per contest, but is shooting only 29.1 percent from the field.

"Jamie is a real defensive handful when it comes to transition," Runge said. "She will catch it out on [the perimeter] and drive it and spin dribble. We're going to have to keep her in front of us and pressure the threes."

The radio broadcast will be aired on KWVA (88.1 FM) starting at 6:45 p.m. Tipoff is scheduled for 7 p.m.

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