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Hughes is back to her old self

In the final 50 seconds of their last two games, the Ducks have shot 76.9 percent from the line

By Ryan Frank
Sports Editor

Finally, Oregon head coach Jody Runge is getting the production she wants from Natalie Hughes.

Hughes, the Ducks' 5-foot-10 point guard, was an integral part of Oregon's trip to the second round of the NCAA Tournament last season, but in the last game of the nonconference schedule against Kansas this season and the first few games of the Pacific-10 Conference season, she was almost a non-factor.

Hughes never was a traditional point guard for Oregon, rather she has been one of the team's top scorers.

She is second on the team at 13.8 points per game, just one-tenth of a point behind freshman Brianne Meharry.

But her performances have been up and down to say the least.

She had 30 points against Western Kentucky in a 92-90 loss early in the season and scored 29 against Washington State in a tournament in Hawaii in December, but she hasn't matched either of those performances since.

She hit just two of her 11 shots against Kansas on Dec. 29 for four points, a very un-Hughes like showing.

Against California in the conference season opener, she was just two for seven from the field for four points.

And against Stanford, she missed 10 of 16 attempts from the field.

After the Ducks split the games against California and Stanford in the Bay Area, Runge let Hughes and starting shooting guard Lisa

Bowyer know that they weren't playing up to the high expectations she holds for them.

"I think obviously Natalie needs to play more consistently," Runge said in the week following the split of the Bay Area games. "She's had huge games where she's played very, very well. Then I thought she had a very average game against Kansas, and I think she is a senior on this team and she needs to be a consistent performer for us."

Hughes clearly wasn't thankful for the extra pressure Runge had thrust on them to lead a team with seven freshmen.

"It's not a good feeling either," Hughes said in the week following the games in the Bay Area. "If you're pressured to play well, it's harder than just going out and playing."

Hughes improved against Southern California, scoring 18 points while hitting five of 13 attempts from the field.

But her play fell off again against UCLA with a five-for-15 showing from the field.

During that stretch, Hughes has been non-existent in the crucial final minutes of games, including the five-point loss to UCLA.

But that spell of sub-par play seems to be out of Hughes' system.

The senior scored 12 points at Washington, but hit two three-pointers on back-to-back Oregon possessions that basically sealed the win.

Against Washington State, she tallied 19 points and three three-pointers.

"I'm focusing a little better, I guess," Hughes said. "It's a slump — nothing big."

Whatever it was that Hughes was missing, Runge is more than happy that Hughes is back to playing the way she started the season.

"She is very capable of playing that way," Runge said. "That's the kind of performance we expect from her on a consistent basis, and I think still yet she can play better than she is playing."

Free-throw show

The Ducks free-throw performance in the final minute of their last two games has, surprisingly, been what helped them win both games in Washington.

In the final 50 seconds of the two games last week, Oregon hit 10 of 13 (76.9 percent) attempts from the free-throw line.

While their free-throw shooting has improved of late, one thing that has been consistent all season has been the Ducks' dominance of free-throw attempts.

In their 14 games, the Ducks have attempted 402 free throws, compared to just 270 for their opponents.

The large difference in attempts almost makes up for Oregon's 63.2-percent shooting from the line.

Odds and ends

■ All five Oregon starters scored in double-figures in its win at Washington last Thursday. It was the first time this season that has happened.

■ The Ducks held Washington and Washington State to less than 60 points and 38-percent shooting from the field.

■ Balance has been big with the Ducks, as four different players have led the team in scoring and seven different players have led the team in rebounding, including ties. Brianne Meharry has led in scoring six times, Hughes five, Angelina Wolvert three, and Bowyer once.

Meharry has also led in rebounds five times; Nicole Strange three; Mendy Benson, Bowyer, Jenny Mowe twice; and Sonja Curtis, Lindsey Dion and Angelina Wolvert once.

Tennis teams have strong openers

The men began the season with three victories in Hawaii

By Tim Pyle
Freelance Sports Reporter

The Oregon tennis teams enjoyed winning road trips over the weekend.

The men began their team season with three victories in Hawaii. Meanwhile, the women advanced one player to the semifinals in singles and claimed a consolation singles championship with another at the Pacific-10 Conference Indoor Championships in Seattle.

The men defeated Hawaii-Hilo, BYU-Hawaii and Hawaii, before having their final match against BYU-Provo canceled on Saturday because of rain. The Ducks are 3-0 heading into Pac-10 play beginning on Jan. 30 at No. 1 Stanford.

Oregon defeated BYU-Hawaii, 5-2, on Thursday in a match that head coach Chris Russell said was the toughest of the three his team completed.

"We beat a good team that day," Russell said. "We had to earn it to come out ahead."

On Friday, the Ducks swept Hawaii, 7-0, by not losing a singles or doubles match. Erwan Kergroach, Guillermo Carter, Carlos Navarro, Joaquin Hamdan, Miguel Arriaga and Jeff Thomsen all won their singles matches. Kergroach-Carter, Thomsen-Arriaga and Hamdan-Navarro were all victorious in doubles matches.

Oregon could well be 4-0 at this point if not for the intervention of a factor beyond its control — namely

rain. The Ducks split the only two completed singles matches against BYU-Provo, but led in three out of four other singles matches when the match was canceled.

"I think the guys that really stood out were Miguel Arriaga and Carlos Navarro," Russell said. "In both singles and doubles, those guys played very solidly."

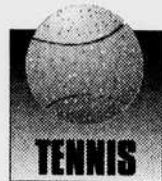
For the women, Sarah Colistro won the Flight 2 consolation championship in singles on Monday. In the consolation title match, Colistro defeated Arizona's Monique Allegrè in straight sets. Colistro lost in the first round to Jenny Svanfeldt of Washington, but rebounded by winning three consecutive matches to claim her title.

The Ducks' Alina Wygonowska lost to Annica Cooper of UCLA in the Top Flight semifinals on Sunday. Wygonowska won two matches on Saturday against Erica Perkins of Washington State and Reka Cseresnyes of Arizona State, respectively, to advance to the semifinals.

Oregon's Alison Sosnow defeated Patricia Gajdzik of Washington State in her first match on Saturday, but then lost in the quarterfinals to Kelly Rudolph of UCLA.

Andrea Petrovic, Jaime Martin and Shanelle Kaneshiro all lost their first-round singles matches. All three Ducks' doubles teams — Kaneshiro-Sosnow, Petrovic-Wygonowska and Colistro-Martin — lost their first-round doubles matches.

The Oregon women begin Pac-10 play on Jan. 30 when they face Stanford at home.



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