

SPORTS BRIEFS

Ducks look for best start in school history

The Oregon softball team will have a chance to post one of the best starts in school history Saturday when it opens play in the Santa Clara Tournament against host Santa Clara. Later in the day, the Ducks will match up against St. Mary's and Northwestern in a round-robin format. The tournament championship and consolation matches will be played on Sunday.

The Ducks' 12-5 start this season is their best since Oregon got off to a 15-1 start in 1989.

Women host pairing party in Pittman Room

The Oregon women's basketball team will host its fifth annual NCAA Tournament pairing party Sunday at 3:30 p.m. in the Pittman Room of the Casanova Center.

The 64 teams selected to participate in the 1998 NCAA Tournament will be announced live on ESPN (34) beginning at 4:30 p.m. Doors to the Pittman Room will open at 3:30 p.m. for all fans who wish to watch the selection show with the Oregon players and coaches.

UO looks to improve NCAA hopes

A win over last-place California Saturday should secure the women a trip to the NCAA Tournament

By Alex Pond
Sports Reporter

The task at hand is simple for the Oregon women.

Get a win over California and the Ducks will most likely have a fifth-straight trip to the NCAA Tournament locked up.

Oregon (16-9 overall, 12-5 Pacific-10 Conference), following its 79-71 loss to No. 5 Stanford on Thursday, faces the Bears in a 7 p.m. matchup Saturday at McArthur Court.

The game is the last home contest of the season for Oregon and will be the home-court finales of seniors Natalie Hughes, Kirsten

McKnight and Mendy Benson.

All indications are that Oregon, which resides in fourth place in the Pac-10 standings, will receive a bid to the tournament with one more win.

"We all know we have to beat Cal Saturday if we want to go to the tournament," Natasha O'Brien said. "We're all pumped up to do that."

The Bears come to Eugene with a 6-21 overall record and are 2-15 in the Pac-10 following their 73-69 loss Thursday at Oregon State.

Despite Cal's struggles this season — the Bears lost 13 straight at one point before beating Arizona State last Saturday — the Ducks cannot take Cal lightly, Oregon

head coach Jody Runge said.

"I think that Cal is playing much, much better than when we first saw them play," Runge said earlier this week in reference to Oregon's 71-54 win over the Bears in Berkeley on Jan. 2. "Their inside kids have been playing well and their perimeter players are defending better and getting better offensively."

Freshman Masa Radovic leads the Bears in scoring with 11.1 points a game, while 6-foot-3 center Jennie Leander paces them on the boards, grabbing 7.1 rebounds a game.

Despite the Bears' lowly record and the fact they share ninth place in the conference standings with the Beavers, head coach Marianne Stanley said she isn't ready to write off the season just yet.



Oregon closes regular season at Cal

NIT requires a .500 or better record for consideration, which the Ducks can achieve with a win in Oakland

By Rob Moseley
Sports Reporter

It all comes down to this.

The Oregon men's basketball team closes its regular season in Oakland, Calif., on Saturday against California in a game that could decide the Ducks' post-season fate.

Oregon (13-13 overall, 8-9 Pacific-10 Conference) needs a win over the Bears to secure an above-.500 record, the minimum criteria for a birth in the post-season National Invitation Tournament. The Ducks missed a chance to secure a winning record on Thursday by losing to Stanford, 95-67.

"There's still a ballgame left, and maybe one after that, so we need to get geared up for one final battle," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said. "It's a learning

process [the Ducks] are going to have to deal with, to come back and put together a good ballgame."

Cal (11-15 overall, 7-10 Pac-10) lost to Oregon State on Thursday, 46-43. Thomas Kilgore and Sean Marks led the Bears with 10 points each, with Marks adding eight rebounds in the losing effort.

"There's no pressure at all because we've had so much success already," Kent said. "But we've said all season that the season doesn't end until [we play in] Oakland."

The Bears began the season with four straight losses, including a 71-47 embarrassment at the hands of then-No. 4 North Carolina, but they won the next four games before beginning the conference season with a loss at Oregon on Jan. 3.

Geno Carlisle was the only Golden Bear to score in double figures that night, tallying 28 points in his fourth appearance after transferring from Northwestern.



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