



## Point MAN

*Darius Wright leads Oregon in assists, but his aid to his teammates extends off the court*

By Rob Moseley  
Oregon Daily Emerald

It should be the easiest part of Darius Wright's job.

After 40 minutes on the court against some of the best teams and players in the country, after games that consummate a grueling week of practice, Wright goes home and picks up the phone.

The calls to his teammates for the most part remain casual, but in light of the Ducks' four-game home losing streak and 2-6 record in the Pacific-10 Conference, the Ducks might be a little less talkative.

"Everybody seems to be OK," says Wright, a 6-foot, 175-pound junior from Sacramento, Calif. "They tell me they're OK, and I just try to see by their actions on the court. They're all here to get better and work hard, and that's what it seems like they're doing."

Regardless of how the losing streak affects their performance, all the Ducks, even the veterans, respect Wright's ability to make the team a cohesive unit.

"Not a lot of new guys would be like that," junior A.D. Smith says of Wright, a transfer from West Valley Junior College. "He does a good job of connecting with every part of the team."

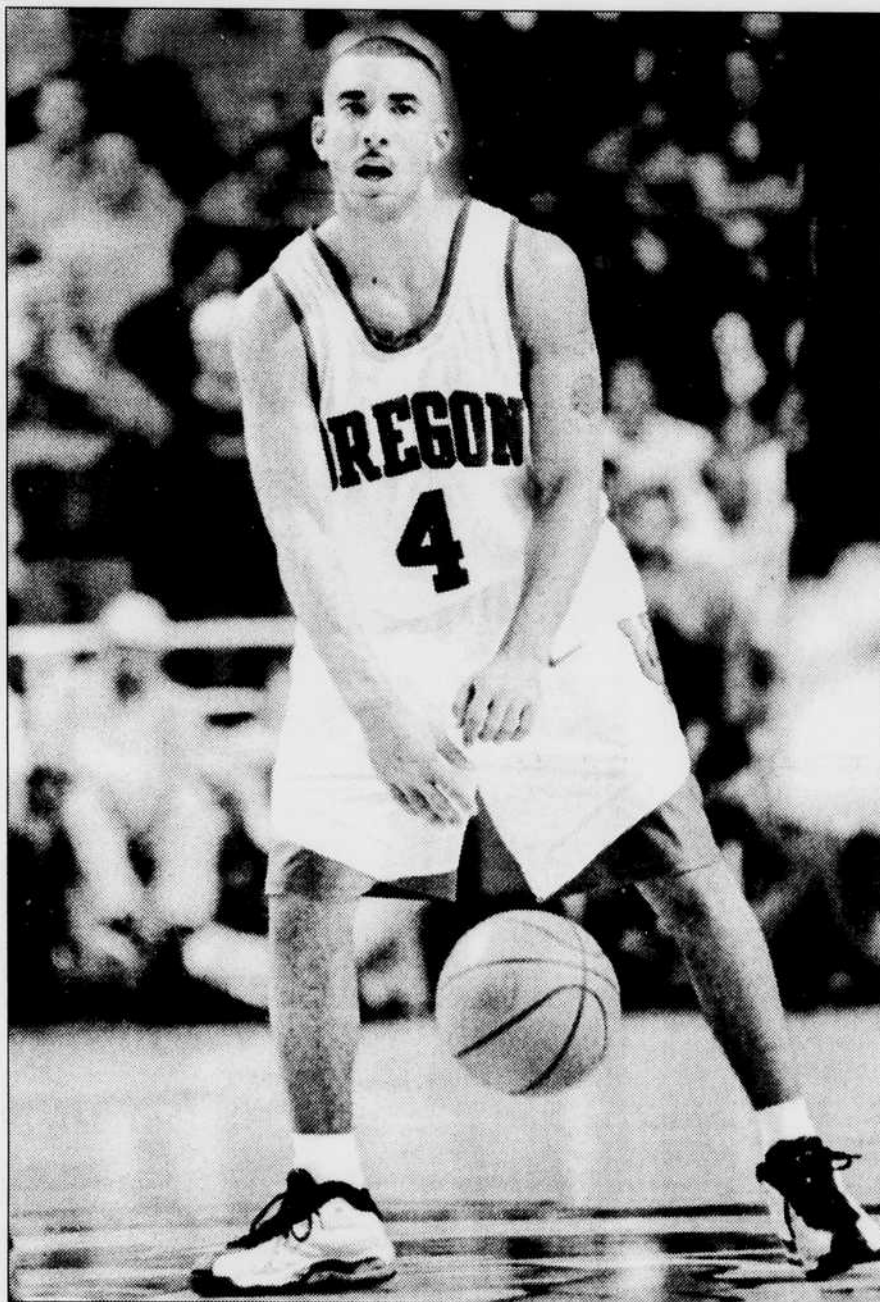
Wright has been connecting with his teammates on and off the court this season. He entered the season one-half of the Ducks' point-guard platoon with junior Mike McShane, but after an ankle injury forced McShane to the bench in the preseason, Wright took control on his own.

Despite the Ducks' troubles during the past few weeks, they notice the fruits of Wright's leadership even in a losing cause.

"He's probably the purest point guard we've had since I've been here," says

*"He's been a very, very pleasant surprise this year, in terms of how good he really is and what he's contributed to this team in his first year with this program."*

Ernie Kent  
UO head coach



Darius Wright directs Oregon's offense in the Ducks' loss to Arizona on Jan. 21. The junior point guard has become a quiet leader for head coach Ernie Kent despite this being Wright's first year in an Oregon uniform.

Nick Medley/Emerald

Turn to **WRIGHT**, Page 9

## Remainder of mat season looks tough

Hopefully the Oregon wrestling team did not have too much trouble with their opponents through the first half of its season, because from this point out, it only gets worse.

The Ducks hit the road to face No. 5 Oklahoma on Friday night, followed by No. 1 Oklahoma State on Saturday. Oregon then returns home to launch a four-meet home stand which includes three ranked opponents.

"Wrestling in Mac Court, fans know how to appreciate good wrestling," head coach Chuck Kearney said. "It's going to be more fun."

Action at MacArthur Court will start with No. 8 Arizona State on Feb. 5. The Ducks will get a short break when they wrestle Boise State on Feb. 6, the only unranked team remaining on the schedule.

The second Civil War meet of the season will take place Feb. 12 at McArthur Court. The Ducks will try to avenge their one-point heartbreak loss to the No. 17 Beavers on Jan. 16 at Gill Coliseum. The season concludes on Feb. 13 against No. 24 Brigham Young.

When Oregon walks into Mac Court to take on Arizona State, it will be the Ducks' first home meet since the team beat UC Davis on Dec. 12.

### Will default mean defeat?

It is still unclear whether the Ducks will be forfeiting six points or 12 points when they face off against their weekend opponents.

Kenny Cox did not wrestle against Nebraska or Portland State last Friday at the Oregon Classic, giving each opponent 6 points by forfeit. According to Kearney, Cox had not yet made a decision about wrestling in Oklahoma, but he expected to hear an answer early today.

### Wrestling Notes



Scott  
Pesznecker

Turn to **WRESTLING**, Page 8

## Playing should be fun again after men burn Beavers to end skid

### Opinion



Tim  
Pyle

Sports are not always fun.

Ask players on the Oregon men's basketball team if they are enjoying themselves right now.

My opinion, formed by covering the team, is that they would answer no.

The Ducks know better than anybody else that nine points and one overtime period are the difference between last place in the Pacific-10 Conference at 2-6 and unabashed talk of the NCAA Tournament, not to mention a possible conference title at 7-1. All five of those excruciatingly painful, frustratingly close losses are assuredly taking their toll.

To fiercely competitive people, which athletes at the Division I-A level undoubtedly are, losing hurts. But losing in the manner Oregon has been, when it knows and believes it should be winning, kills.

It butchers the psyche, it can hamper motivation, and, if one is not careful, it can assassinate confidence.

I am not a Division I-A athlete, but I think, in my caffeine-charged state, that I have experienced something akin to what the Ducks are suffering through right now.

To explain, I'll have to flash back to fall of my senior year of high school. Let's see here ... daily soccer, Friday night football, 6 a.m. wakeups for 7 a.m. classes, the first symptoms of senioritis ... all right, I'm there.

All hallucinations aside, the soccer season of that last year of innocence and home cooking, which may be related, is when I was tormented by the torture that sports can emit.

My team was an overwhelming favorite to win the conference crown and do well in the state tournament, and we were exceedingly confident that all those expectations and more would be met. Comparably, Oregon was stock full of confidence and high hopes after a 9-1 start to this season.

But, like the Ducks' recent struggles, something happened along our predetermined path to glory.

Game after game, week after week, we would outplay our opponent, sometimes to the point of domination, but end up either tied or behind at the match's conclusion.

We didn't know what to do, so our team degenerated into a collection of bickering players eager to try to change the tide individually.

That didn't work.

The most nightmarish of matches occurred about halfway through the season. We completely manhandled the other team at its home field to the point where the ball basically never crossed into our defensive half.

But we couldn't score.

Then the inevitable happened. With only a few minutes remaining in the game, the opposition scored after a free kick was launched into our penalty box and a mad scramble concluded with the ball somehow in the back of our net.

The goal scorer was not Adam Spanich, but he celebrated just as wildly as Spanich did after ripping out the Ducks' hearts in Southern California's miraculous 85-84 win over Oregon on Jan. 7.

The game ended, and we were left speechless — much like the Ducks after the Trojans loss. To top off a wonderful evening, our bus broke down and we were left to lament our shortcomings for an hour or two in that other high school's parking lot after the game.

Turn to **PYLE**, Page 9