

Freddie

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outstretched arms of a defender. More often than not, that pass is heading to Freddie, who usually receives the ball at about the Ducks' three-point line.

Somehow managing to catch the ball and remain in stride, Freddie heads toward the hoop.

By this time a defender is in the key and is setting himself to take the charge, for with the athletic ability that Freddie has, going for the block would be ludicrous.

As Freddie begins to drive toward the hoop, the opponent is deciding how to defend a line-backer in shorts.

That defender is thinking only one thing:

Freddie Jones is coming.

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By his own admission, Freddie could have gone to more than a few schools around the country, but he says he felt Oregon had as good a chance of winning as anyone, so he chose to stay in-state, much to the delight of Duck fans.

And win the Ducks did, throughout the preseason schedule. Oregon began the season 8-1 heading into its Pacific-10 Conference opener at California on Jan. 2.

As much as any game, that was Freddie's coming out party. He scored in double figures in each of the previous two games and managed 10 on that night, none more important than the final two.

With the game tied at 69-69, the Ducks missed a jumper for the lead. Scales and Freddie both went up for the tip, with the freshman eventually being credited with the game-winner.

"I don't think it was just the tip — the best part of it was after the game when everybody was in the locker room, and how excited we were," Freddie says. "Every person on our team was just glowing, had a smile on their face, and we were looking forward to the season."

"We just knew that we were going to be one of the teams to beat."

If only Freddie knew the frustration that lay ahead.

The Ducks faced nationally ranked Arizona at home five games after the Cal game. Freddie was in double figures for four of those games, including his 23-point effort in the triple-overtime Washington State game, the Ducks' only other Pac-10 win at that point.

Despite a Herculean 37-point effort from the Wildcats' Jason Terry on Jan. 21, the Ducks found themselves down one at 84-83 with 23 seconds left. Who did head coach Ernie Kent decide to put the ball, and the game, in the hands of?

Freddie, of course. The freshman took the ball into the middle, drew the foul and was suddenly staring at two free throws to win the game.

"I'd always dreamed of being in that situation, and when I went to the line, I wasn't nervous or anything," Freddie says. "I was going to go up and hit the shots and it was going to be over."

Then, the unthinkable: two misses, and a Duck loss.

Things just haven't been the same since.

Freddie has scored in double figures just twice since, owing as

much to the improved play of Terik Brown and the "wall" that all freshman hit as to his own troubles. But it took him a while to shake the demons from the Arizona game, he says.

Even considering his recent difficulties, Freddie continues to impress his teammates.

"Anytime you get in that situation — especially for a young kid, but any of us — it's going to bother us," Smith says. "To me, he's not a freshman. He doesn't do many things like freshman do. He doesn't go out there and throw the ball away, he doesn't take bad shots and he's really improved defensively, so you wouldn't consider him a liability."

"He's not a freshman to me."

Now, with just three games left, as well as a possible postseason tournament bid, the inevitable is happening. With the return of all but two Ducks and the addition of redshirt David Jackson and recruit Anthony Norwood, everyone has half an eye cocked toward next season.

"The program "is on the up-and-up, definitely," Freddie says. "We're going to be real tough next year, but we're just trying to do the best we can for the remainder of this season."

And what a season it's been.

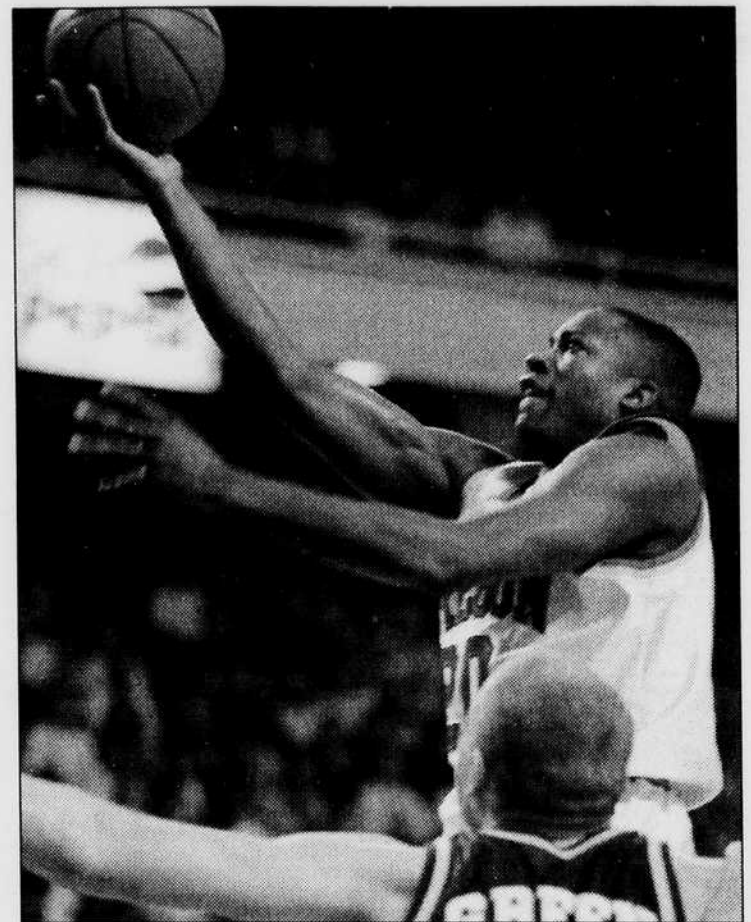
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The prettiest move seen from an Oregon player this season is beginning to take shape.

Freddie streaks toward the basket, where a defender stands with his arms stretched to the ceiling of the arena, waiting to take the foul.

And then it happens.

Freddie jumps, angling his body



Nick Medley/Emerald

Jones and junior-college transfer Alex Scales (not pictured) team up to give Oregon a combination of athleticism and skill nearly unmatched in the history of Ducks basketball.

around the defender and sailing past the basket, then switches the ball to his left hand and throws up a high toss that banks gently off the top of the backboard and drops through the hoop.

A perfect reverse layin.

The crowd lets out a sudden yell, as much in recognition of the defender's embarrassment as in envy of Freddie's moves.

The other Ducks might let out a

chuckle, and the opposing coach may just shrug his shoulders in admission of greatness, while Kent turns and walks toward the other end of the Oregon bench to set the defense.

But while some may play it off, everyone associated with the Oregon basketball team — fans, coaches, players, even opponents — is thinking only one thing:

Freddie Jones has arrived.

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