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Huskies back into tournament consideration

Head coaches in the Pacific-10 Conference may not agree on much. But one thing they do agree on is that the NCAA selection committee will definitely select four Pac-10 teams for the tournament in two weeks.

But can a fifth team sneak in?

Washington appears to be the only Pac-10 team still on the bubble for an NCAA Tournament berth. The case for the Huskies is a pretty strong one, especially after beating Pac-10 frontrunner UCLA in Seattle last weekend. Washington is now 10-7 in the conference and 14-12 overall, which is probably good enough to get them into the Big Dance.

The announcement won't officially be made until Sunday, but here are some things that are working in Washington's favor:

The Huskies faced the fifth toughest schedule in the conference and 23rd toughest nationally.

The Pac-10 was to have had five teams in the NCAA Tournament in each of the last two seasons. The real key is finishing the conference schedule with a winning record. Washington wrapped that up last weekend with its victory over the Bruins.

The four Pac-10 teams already locked into this year's tournament are Arizona (16-9 overall, 11-5 in the Pac-10), Stanford (16-11, 12-4), UCLA (21-7, 13-3) and Oregon (23-4, 14-2). The Ducks need to win their two remaining games to capture the first Pac-10 title in school history.

Redd rover, Redd rover ...

A new name was added this week to the list of players vying for the Pac-10 player of the year honor at the end of the season. Washington senior Jaime Redd, who became the Huskies' all-time leader in points scored earlier this season, was named the conference's player of the week on Monday.

Redd averaged just more than 22 points, seven rebounds and four steals a game in Washington's home sweep over Southern California and No. 12 UCLA last weekend.

The Pac-10's third-leading scorer (15.8 points per game) and seventh leading rebounder (6.8 rpg), Redd now has six double-doubles this season. She ranks eighth on the Pac-10 career scoring charts and needs just 36 points to become the seventh player in Pac-10 history to hit the 2,000-point plateau.

March Madness

The announcement of the 64-team NCAA Division I-A Women's Basketball NCAA Tournament field will be made Sunday. The selection show can be seen on ESPN from 2:15 to 3 p.m. Selections for the 32-team Women's National Invitational

Tournament will also be made Sunday, after the NCAA announces its selections.

In preparation for its sixth consecutive NCAA Tournament appearance under head

coach Jody Runge, Oregon will play host to its own selection show party Sunday at 1 p.m. at McArthur Court. Admission is free and the show will be broadcast live on a big-screen television.

To determine the Pac-10's automatic qualifier into the NCAA Tournament should Oregon and UCLA tie for the championship, the first tie breaker is head-to-head competition. In that case, the then-No. 7 Bruins beat Oregon 76-72 at Pauley Pavilion on Jan. 10. And an unranked Ducks beat then-No. 8 UCLA 106-79 at McArthur Court six weeks later.

The second tie breaker is each team's record against the next highest place team in the conference, which is why Oregon's game against Stanford on Thursday is so important. UCLA split with the Cardinal this season, and a victory by the Ducks would give them their first sweep of Stanford in school history.

Women's Pac-10 Notes



Joel Hood

Baker shows all-star form

By Rob Gloster

The Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Vin Baker, stuck in the biggest slump of his career, sat in his hotel room and kept telling himself he was ready to break out of it. A few hours later, he was getting hugged as a hero by teammates.

The sense of relief was clear on the face of Baker, a four-time all-star whose poor shooting left him in tears last week.

"This was definitely my best game of the year," Baker said after going 15-for-19 from the field and scoring 31 points in the Seattle SuperSonics' 105-102 win Monday night over the Sacramento Kings. "This was important to me."

It also was important to the Sonics, who have been stumbling recently after starting the season with six straight wins.

"He's been coming along," Seattle coach Paul Westphal said. "It was inevitable he was going to have a game like this in which he broke out, and we needed every point of his

tonight."

Baker, who has averaged 18.5 points per game in a career that included four seasons in Milwaukee and last year in Seattle, was averaging just 11.3 points a game this season heading into the contest against the Kings.

He sat alone in his hotel room Monday afternoon and tried to bolster his confidence by saying, "This has got to be the game for me — quit thinking about it and just go out and play." Then he did just that.

The Kings focused on point guard Gary Payton, who drew attention inside by trying to post up. That gave Payton the chance to swing the ball outside to Baker, a 6-foot-11 forward.

"It was obvious they weren't going to rotate to me. After a while you would think they might adjust, but they didn't," Baker said. "I've prayed and worked more than anybody in the league. I'm just glad it is starting to pay off."

Now Baker just has to hope that carries over to the foul line, where he continues to struggle.

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