



Best Bet
Major League Baseball
Chicago vs. Seattle
7 p.m., FoxSports Northwest

SPORTS

Ems suffer another defeat in Portland

Despite a strong pitching performance from Ben Christensen, Eugene loses its sixth straight

By Jeff Smith
for the Emerald

PORTLAND — Amid the dark clouds that currently hang over the Eugene Emeralds, Ben Christensen became a rare bright spot for a team in desperate need of a quick turn-around.

The Ems (19-29) controlled the game for the first four innings before falling face-first and losing 9-2 to the Portland Rockies in front of 2,974 at Civic Stadium.

Emeralds reliever Ben Shaffer (2-5) took the loss and Rockies hurler Julio De Paula (4-4) had the Ems' bats confused all night, going eight innings for the win.

Christensen, heading into the game with an unimpressive 0-2 record and 7.16 earned-run average, showed the club why he is so highly touted by retiring the first 12 batters and leaving the game after five innings of one-hit ball. He left with six strikeouts and only two walks.

"This was the Ben Christensen that we were all waiting to see," Ems manager Danny Sheaffer said. "I could tell from his previous outings that he was getting his groove back."

"It was very unfortunate that the relievers couldn't keep it going for him."

With Christensen in the game, the Emeralds got some optimism as well as some hits.



The game was scoreless until the fifth inning when unlikely run-producer Morey Aldrup, hitting .103 before the game, knocked in the first run by ripping a fastball to right field.

"It was a fastball away, and I put it right where I wanted it to," Aldrup said. "At the time it was a really big run for our team so it felt great to be able to contribute like that."

The game fell apart for the Ems as soon as Christensen exited.

Shaffer started the sixth inning off by giving up two hits, and both baserunners scored on a RBI groundout by Justin Hemme and an RBI double by Dan Phillips.

Following the three-run sixth, Shaffer surrendered three more runs in the seventh to give the Rockies a 7-1 cushion.

"We are playing bad baseball," Sheaffer said. "It looks as if we are just showing up every day at the park and waiting for bad things to happen."

"We are just scuffling along, and if things don't change in a hurry, it's going to be pretty easy to weed out the players who don't deserve to go up to the next level."

Players are not throwing in the towel just yet.

"Lately, we haven't been playing the ball that we know we are capable, and the frustration is getting to a lot of people," Gsell said. "As players, we cannot make any excuses for ourselves. The effort that we choose to give as individuals will have a direct result on whether we come around as a team."

"Coach is trying to keep us motivated, but that's not his job," Aldrup said. "We are professional athletes and it is our job to get ourselves ready and have him simply help lead us into battle."

Despite their losing streak and last-place standing, the Ems have not given up.

"Tomorrow is a whole new day, and with that hope we still think we can make the playoffs," Gsell said.

OFFSEASON REPORT

Kent, Ducks confident in capabilities

Head coach Ernie Kent vows to add one more player to his roster by the Nov. 12 opener

By Troy Foster
for the Emerald

With the year the Oregon men's basketball team had last season — an up-and-down affair that concluded with losses in the National Invitation Tournament semifinals and third-place game — it would have been fitting for the team and coaching staff to take some time off.

Not so. "It's been a very, very busy summer," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said last week. "Extremely busy."

First, Kent and company hosted a slew of summer camps in June. Then, came the NCAA-regulated evaluation period in July, when the coaching staff hit the road, traveling throughout the country in search of recruits perfect for Oregon's system.

"And now we're taking the month of August to really work the telephones," Kent said.

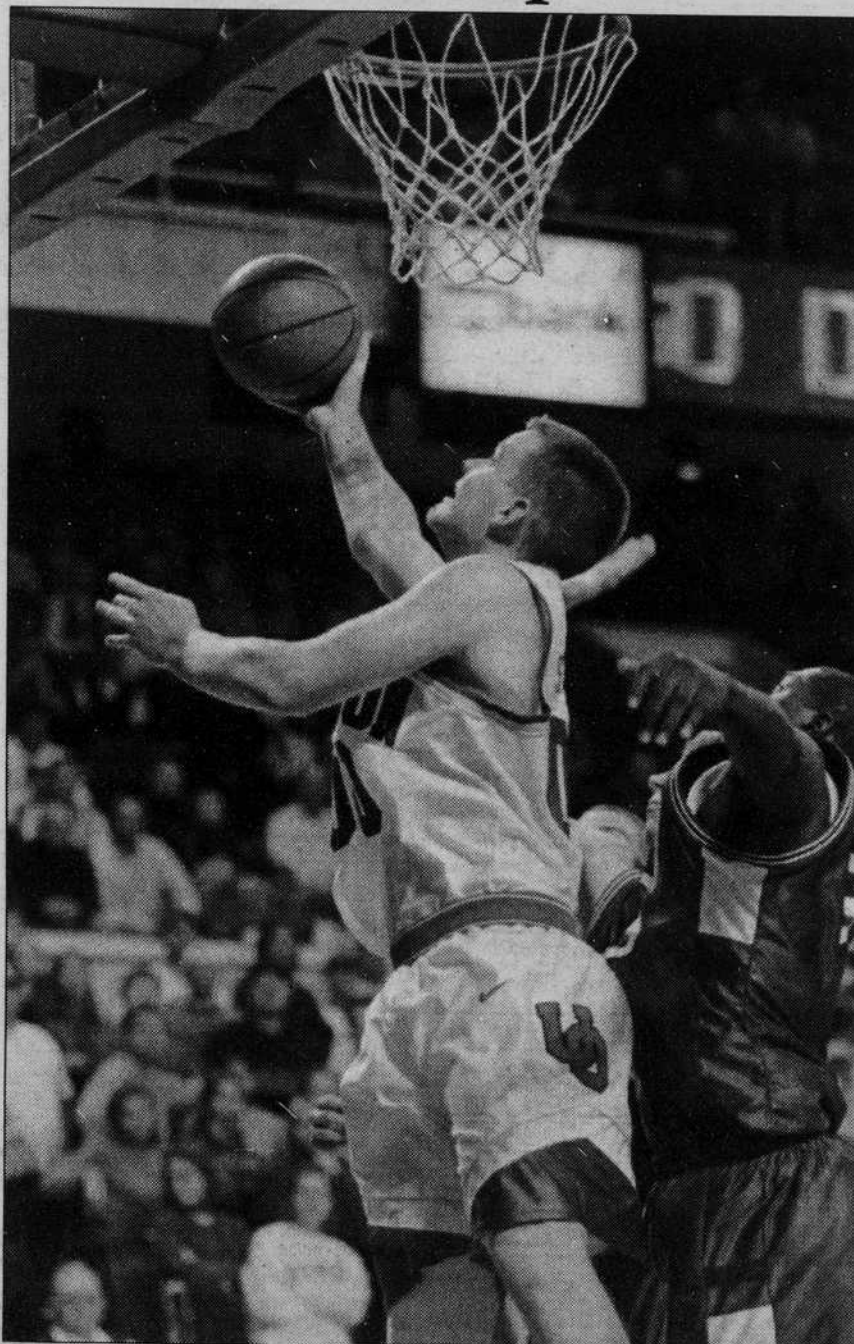
With only six players returning from the 1998-99 squad that finished the year 19-13 overall (8-10 Pacific-10 Conference) and four incoming transfers, Oregon has six scholarships to play with — three available this year and three for the next.

Kent would like to sign three players in the November signing period, but in the meantime he assured there will be at least one new face yet to sign suiting up for the Nov. 12 exhibition opener at McArthur Court.

"We're going to be adding one for sure and maybe two more players to our team this year," he said. "We'll know more about that in the next 30 days."

Not only has the Oregon coaching staff been hard at work during the summer but the commitment the players are making in preparation for the next season is also noteworthy.

All six of the returning players have remained in Eugene during the summer, engaging in strenuous weight-lifting programs and pick-up games, all the while getting ahead in school by taking sum-



A.D. Smith, Oregon's leading rebounder last season, hopes to help the Ducks reverse prior inconsistencies.

Losses, frustration mounting

After six straight losses, the Ems are left searching for answers — and an elusive victory

By Scott Pesznecker
for the Emerald

PORTLAND — Unlike the first game of the Eugene Emeralds' three-game road trip against the Portland Rockies, this one was a blowout.

Seeing the lopsided score of 9-2 on the final scoreboard made it hard to believe that until the eighth inning, the Ems led the Rockies in hitting. It made it difficult to understand that all of Portland's nine runs came in the final five innings.

It made it even tougher for the Ems to stomach the fact that they lost by such a wide margin, despite not having committed any errors.

But it all happened, and the Ems have now suffered six consecutive losses.

"We've been struggling," manager Danny Sheaffer said. "We've just got to find out what guys are made of. This is the level where you find out how many guys want to play this game, and that's what we're trying to find out right now."

Sitting in a small desk in the visitors' locker room, Sheaffer stared into his laptop computer as he tried to search for an answer as to why his team can't pull out a win.

"Lately, it's been a combination of all things," he said. "We haven't played very well in the field, we haven't hit the ball well and we haven't pitched very good at all. I probably haven't even coached very well."

"We're out here to develop players, and sometimes winning and losing is overrated here at this level. But everyone likes to win."

One of those who wants to win is first baseman Pete Zoccolillo. In the top of the fourth, Zoccolillo recorded back-to-back unassisted plays at first, highlighting what was a solid defensive effort all night long.

"People are still getting up for the game," Zoccolillo said. "We're not quitting. Everyone's trying. Nobody's hanging our heads."