

Seniors

continued from page 11A
game."

Ever since the addition of Scales and Wright last season, the Ducks have taken their game to a whole new level. Last season, the trio led Oregon to the National Invitation Tournament Final Four, and this season they have led the Ducks to the NCAA Tournament, where they will face Seton Hall (20-9 overall, 11-7 Big East Conference) in the first round on Friday.

Kent said the three seniors have given Oregon basketball national respectability.

"This year we became a very good basketball team because of those guys," Kent said. "But more importantly, we need to get to the point where we are a very good basketball program. That's where UCLA, Arizona and Stanford are with the continuity year in and year out.

"They've laid the foundation for us to be a good basketball program down the road. That development is still in the process right now. They did a tremendous job of creating our identity as who the University of Oregon is."

Not only did the trio lay the

foundation for future success, but they also have set a standard for future Oregon leaders.

"Those three guys raised the bar of accountability, when you talk about captains and those things, because they were so focused off the floor—they were focused in the off-season with their weight lifting and conditioning, and they're going to force the next group of leaders to really come up a notch."

Wright said emotions were both high and low during his time on the floor against the Beavers.

"I had mixed emotions," said Wright, who finished with 10 points, four rebounds and three assists in 38 minutes. "I was happy at the same time I was sad."

Smith said he appreciates the fan support he's had during his career at Oregon, and he will miss donning green-and-yellow in Mac Court.

"The fans have been real good to me my entire career here, especially the last week and a half," said Smith, who returned from a broken cheekbone last Saturday. "It was a lot of fun, and to have my parents come out, that was great. I'm going to miss this place and how good the fans were to me."

Men's hoops

continued from page 11A

game in which the Ducks and Beavers would battle it out for something larger than just state supremacy.

But things don't always go as planned.

As the sold-out McArthur Court crowd of 9,087 celebrated their team's banner season and upcoming tournament appearance following the win, the Beavers walked off the court for the final time this season. No postseason to look forward to. No winning season for the 10th straight year.

"Any time you lose it's disappointing," Oregon State head coach Eddie Payne said. "But our kids worked and competed hard. Oregon is just a very good team. They are a capable of winning a number of games in the tournament."

Focus this week will certainly be on Oregon's first NCAA appearance since 1995, its second since 1961 and only its sixth ever. But on Saturday night, all eyes were centered around the Ducks three seniors.

A.D. Smith, Alex Scales and Darius Wright were all honored before the game with their parents by their side. And the three didn't disappoint in the ensuing two hours, combining for 46 of Oregon's points.

"The most important part of your team is your senior leadership," Payne said. "And Oregon has terrific seniors. Those guys make it happen for them."

In the opening minutes, however, the seniors seemed to be trying too hard to make it happen. Scales threw the ball out of bounds. Smith was long on a three-point try. And Wright couldn't get the offense in any groove whatsoever.

The Ducks first points didn't come until sophomore guard Freddie Jones drilled a three-pointer at the 15:33 mark.

But Oregon's flat start was somewhat nullified as the Beavers couldn't take advantage of the Duck's miscues.

The teams went back and forth and battled to a 25-25 tie. When Smith hit one of two free throws to give the Ducks the 26-25 advantage with five minutes to play in

the first half, it gave Oregon a lead it would never relinquish.

Immediately after Smith's free throw came the play of the game that seemed to shift momentum in the Ducks direction for good.

Jones recorded one of his three steals when he picked off a Josh Steinthal pass. He then kicked it into overdrive when he ran hard to the hoop on the fast-break with Oregon State's Josiah Lake guarding him. Jones elevated high into the air and proceeded to give Lake a facial when he one-handed stuffed the ball over Lake and drew the foul.

The Beavers still hung around and were only down 38-32 at intermission. But in the opening minutes of the second half, Jones took control. He drilled a three-pointer to open the half and completed another fast break one-handed jam nearly two minutes later.

And when Jones zip-passed the ball underneath the hoop to Scales, who completed the layin, the Ducks had stormed out to a 48-34 lead.

Flo Hartenstein then hit one of two free throws with 15:48 to play to up the lead to 15 and complete the 11-2 Duck run. The Beavers would never close to single-digits for the rest of the game.

Jones — who celebrated his 21st birthday on Saturday — had his second straight complete game, finishing with 18 points, six assists, three steals and two blocks.

"I think he's taken the responsibility upon himself that he has to get established because of the leadership that we're losing," said head coach Ernie Kent, who has guided the Ducks to their most wins in one season since 1945. "I know he's one of those guys that wants to take on that responsibility upon himself, and hopefully he will do that."

Jones was one of five Ducks that scored in double figures for Oregon. Smith led the team with 21, Wright contributed 10, while Scales added 15 despite missing on all six three-point attempts. The surprise of the game was sophomore guard Anthony Norwood's 11 points that came by way of perfect 3 for 3 from three-point land.

"We're peaking at the right time with the tournament just around the corner," Kent said. "They certainly deserve the rewards of postseason play."

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