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# 'Dream season' among best in Oregon's history

■ The Ducks' banner season has earned Oregon its first NCAA Tournament appearance in five years

By Brett Williams  
Oregon Daily Emerald

One sentence sums up Oregon's 1999-2000 season: They're going to the Dance.

After improving by leaps and bounds last year and advancing to the final four of the National Invitational Tournament, the Ducks made a commitment this season to take it one step further and earn a bid into the NCAA Tournament.

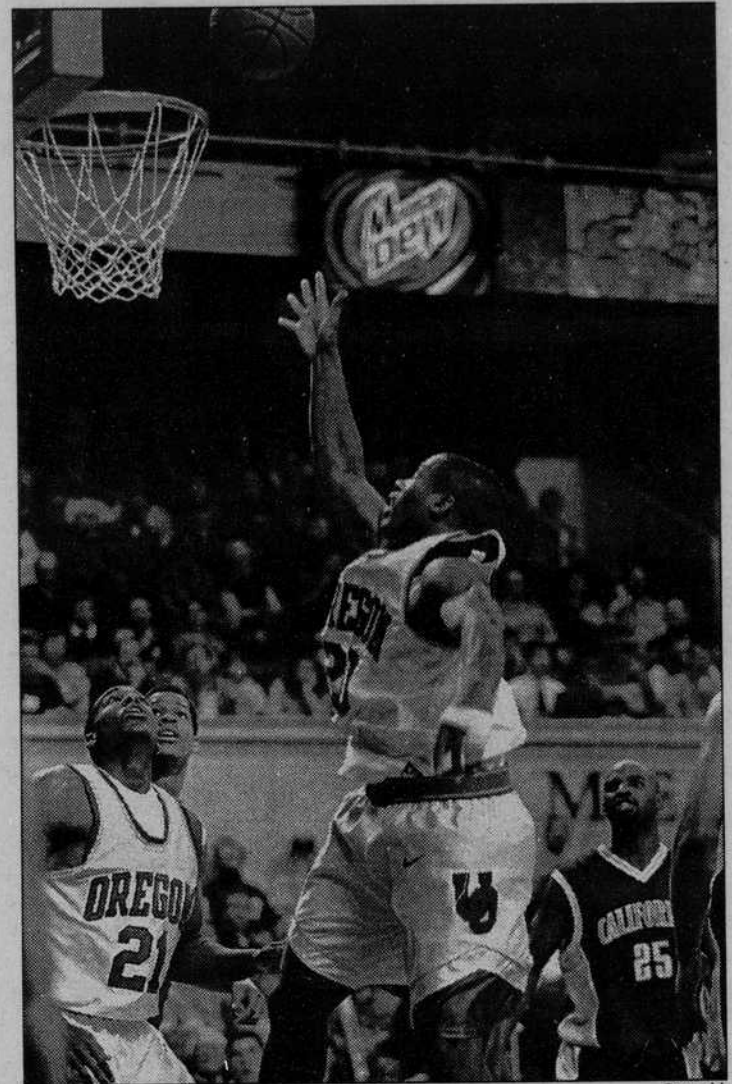
Their goal is a now a reality, as Oregon (22-7, 13-5 Pacific-10 Conference) prepares for its first round matchup Friday in Buffalo, N.Y., with Seton Hall.

The Ducks have come a long way since the tumultuous preseason they experienced.

With new role players coming off the bench, including Bryan Bracey, Anthony Norwood, Ben Lindquist and David Jackson, it was clear that Oregon had talent, but it was unclear when the team would gel.

After forward A.D. Smith helped the Ducks hold off Illinois-Chicago with some key free throws down the stretch and Oregon beat Portland at McArthur Court, the Ducks showed a glimpse of their potential, with three players scoring 20 or more points for the first time in ten years in a 91-87 win at Portland State.

That's when a former Oregon player made his return to Mac Court and left victorious. Andre Larry — who left the Ducks after the 1996-97 season for academic reasons — hit some key baskets as Cal State-Northridge upset



Emerald  
(above) The ball has been bouncing Freddie Jones' way lately, and the Ducks will need Jones to continue to produce. (below) First-team All Pac-10 member Alex Scales is excited to close out his spectacular collegiate career in the NCAA Tournament.

Oregon, 79-77.

It was a wake-up call for the Ducks, who used a total team effort against Minnesota at the Rose Garden, winning the Portland Jam 82-75. For the first time in school history, seven different players scored in double figures, including Alex Scales' who had a game-high 15 points.

The win against the Gophers and a decisive 91-54 victory against Northern Arizona put Oregon in good position for the Outrigger Hotels Rainbow Classic in Honolulu.

First, Oregon upset then No. 19 Wake Forest 67-66 on Scales' jumper with five seconds left.

The Ducks pulled off another upset in the second round, beating Gonzaga 70-64 after falling behind by as many as 10 points in the first half.

But Hawaii refused to lose on its home floor, knocking off the Ducks 66-63 in the championship game, despite Smith's 29-point, nine-rebound effort.

After a tough preseason, Oregon had confidence they could be successful in conference play.

"As we came down the stretch, we had been through so much," Kent said. "Beating Wake Forest in a tough environment on the road, and beating Gonzaga, when both

those teams were in the top 25. Losing to Hawaii and letting that game get away from us was a learning experience. When we got into conference play, we felt we could beat anyone."

Oregon knocked off every Pac-10 foe at least once with the exception of Stanford. The Ducks started the season with a win at home against California before the Cardinal stole a win at McArthur Court.

The next road stretch was one that could have easily sent the Ducks into a tailspin, but it instead gave them momentum. Oregon had to rely on some late baskets to get its first road sweep of the Washington schools in six years, first in overtime at Washington 76-74 and then in overtime again to Washington State, 81-80.

Oregon's much-anticipated return to Mac Court was a success. The Ducks moved into a tie for first place with a win against USC and topped that with in a 73-58 blowout victory over slumping UCLA.

The transition to the second half of the conference schedule began mixed results. Oregon played Arizona tough at the McKale Center, but Loren Woods blocked 14 of their shots in the Wildcats' 77-71 victory before the Ducks slowed Eddie House and the Sun Devils 86-73 in Tempe.

The start of the second half took place at the Maples Pavilion in Palo Alto, Calif. The Cardinal once again topped the Ducks, but Oregon rebounded with a win at California, courtesy of a late three-pointer by Scales.

Kent said he knew before the season the importance of those midseason games.

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