

Women

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Eugene, with 17 seconds to go in overtime, sophomore Jamie Craighead found the courage to take — and make — the three-pointer that put her team ahead one, 79-78, against Alabama Birmingham (21-13). A shot that momentarily seemed to secure a second-round berth for the Ducks. A shot that sparked, for a split-second, a preview of the ecstatic delirium that was mere moments away if the Ducks could just hold on.

Craighead, her teammates and the 7,672 fans at McArthur Court let out a curt, collective hoorah as the shot dropped before regrouping and tried to bear down defensively.

By then the Blazers were on the attack. Senior Lisa Jackson pushed the ball ahead, as she had all game, but with even more abandon.

But she ran smack into a thicket of Oregon defenders, lost the ball and it seemed, for an instant, that the Ducks had escaped the upset.

But then UAB's Shaq, Shaqueta Rhodes, suddenly had the loose ball, and rose up over everyone, silencing the crowd with an uncontested layup with three seconds left — much like Holloway's score earlier that day.

Oregon's Shaquala Williams took the inbound pass and drove as far as she could in the remaining three seconds before launching a shot from a few steps past half-court. It hit the front of the iron.

The Oregon women's season, like the men's, was done, 80-79.

"Disappointing," junior forward Angelina Wolvert said.

Especially so because with Williams' errant heave went the Ducks' plans of winning one more game at the Pit and advancing to the Sweet 16 for the first time, and their hopes of going even further, because their next two games would've been in Portland where the Western Regionals are.

And while no road to the Final Four is easy, the trip in front of the Ducks this season was as compliant as any they'll ever get, especially considering that the NCAA could use neutral sights as early as next season for the opening rounds of the women's tournament.

"We won the Pac-10, we put ourselves in a position to have a home berth," Williams said. "We always talked about the reason it was tough for us to advance is because we were never at home."

"We may look back at this and say, 'Man, we blew a huge opportunity.' But on the other hand, no matter where you play, you still have to play. That's the great thing about basketball, no matter who you are or where you're playing, someone is gonna have to win or lose. We just got the tough end of that."

On that given night there were 12 lead changes. Eleven ties. Bodies flew. Words were exchanged. Oregon played more intensely than it had all season. And the Lady Blazers matched it, to the end.

"They won it," said Jody Runge, the Ducks' dejected head coach. "We made some big plays offensively, but we didn't do what we



Scott Barnett for the Emerald

UAB's tenacious sophomore Deanna Jackson (No. 23) exploited the Ducks' defense, finishing 25 points and 10 rebounds.

typically do defensively as far as getting stops, and we rely on that.

"When you traditionally have a good defensive team, it's frustrating to have a loss end your season because you didn't defend well."

Oregon certainly missed the right-place, right-time defensive presence of junior forward Lindsey Dion, who aggravated an injured left knee in Friday's shoot-around and was unavailable to play.

"Whether she could have made the difference in the game ... any one possession could have made

the difference," Runge said.

With Dion starting, the Oregon went 19-4. Without her, 4-4.

But even missing a major contributor, the Ducks took turns stepping up — and stepping up huge.

Wolvert, a 6-foot-3 junior forward, had 12 points and a career-high five blocks. Junior Brianne Meharry gave her team a tremendous surge off the bench, with 19.

Williams fed the ball in to her post players, who converted or got fouled much of the time. Shaq ended the season with 17 points

and five assists in 43 minutes.

Craighead buried three crucial three-pointers. And in her final game as a Duck, Nicole Strange shot four of seven, and wound up with 10 points and three assists.

But UAB players stepped up too. Namely Deanna Jackson, who played all 45 minutes, went 12 of 23 and pulled down 10 boards.

Mia Thrash of the Lady Blazers came up with 19 points and two vital steals in 35 minutes.

"Our kids played hard," Runge said. "We just didn't get it done."

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