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# Lakers flying high into postseason

■ Shaquille O'Neal leads the Lakers toward what could be their first championship in 12 years

By John Nadel  
 The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The points kept coming, faster and more furious as the Los Angeles Lakers looked again and again for their big man.

A monster dunk here, a short bank shot there, and even 13 foul shots, a seldom-reached total for Shaquille O'Neal.

In a coming-of-age game for

one of the league's superstars, O'Neal finished with a career-high 61 points and 23 rebounds on his 28th birthday last month to lead the Lakers to yet another victory.

Yes, it was against the lowly Clippers. But so what? Nobody has been able to stop Shaq's attack this season.

Opponents will try again during the playoffs, starting Sunday with the Sacramento Kings. But if the regular season is any indication, the Lakers might as well already get sized up for rings for their first championship in 12 years.

"We've won the regular-season title, that's what you work for when you open the season," first-year Lakers coach Phil Jackson said. "And then you put it behind you and you go into a play-off situation where there's a

whole different level of intensity. You bring it up another notch."

The Lakers have failed in the postseason in recent years. They lost twice to Utah and once to San Antonio, earning a reputation as underachievers.

"We've always been the team to beat, believe it or not," said O'Neal, in his fourth year with Los Angeles. "We just have to do what we've been doing, and get sharp on certain things. We'll be all right."

The hiring of Jackson and his staff undoubtedly had a lot to do with the Lakers' 67 regular-season wins, second-best in franchise history and better than any of the Magic Johnson-led Showtime teams of the 1980s.

There are other factors, like the improved health and play of O'Neal, the maturation and de-

velopment of Kobe Bryant, and the addition of veteran role players Ron Harper, A.C. Green and Brian Shaw.

O'Neal and Bryant have at times been as dominant as Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen when Jackson coached the Chicago Bulls to six championships in the '90s. In addition, the Lakers' defense has been stifling when necessary, and the supporting cast has done its job.

That said, there's nothing to celebrate yet. The Lakers will be the first to admit it.

"Potential doesn't mean anything," said Harper, who joined the Lakers this season after winning three rings in Chicago. "This team had it for the last four or five years, right? We have to go show folks. We have something to prove, I think."

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## Women's

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SAC relays last weekend.

This Saturday, she'll double in the 800 and then the 1,500.

"I was just going to run the 1,500, but I might as well double so we can get the win," Crabb said. "The whole team feels that way. They're going for it, gonna do all they can to scrape together as many points as they can. We want to win on our own turf."

Particularly against Washington, which has beaten the Ducks two times in a row, unheard of un-

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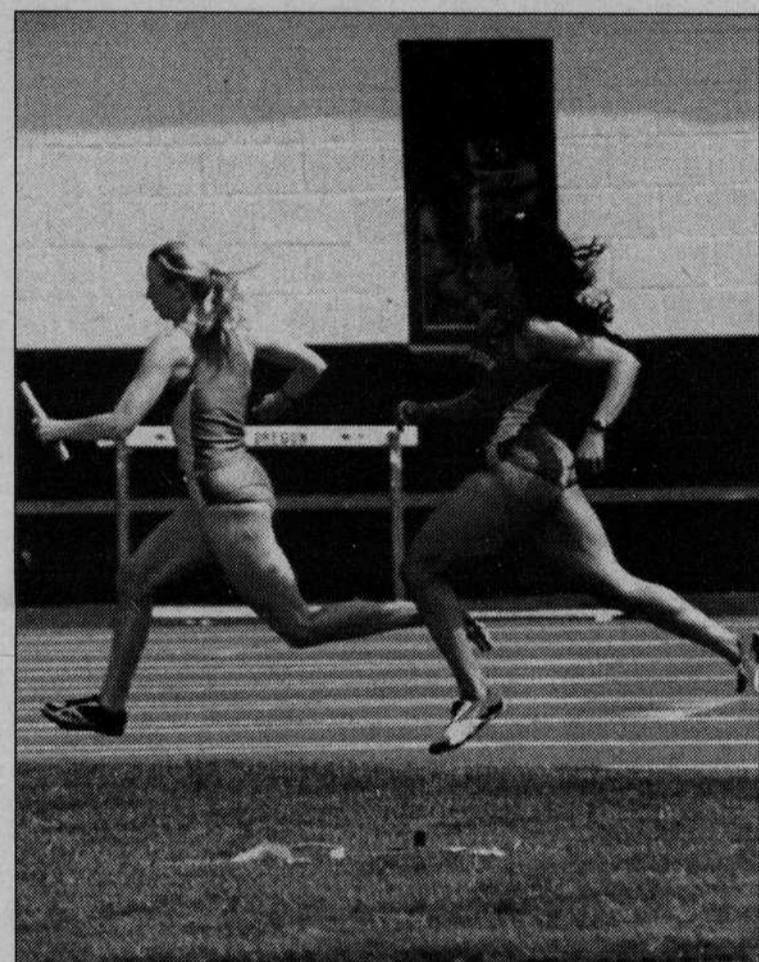
**Katie Crabb**  
 middle distance runner

til lately. Despite recent results, Oregon has a 17-6 advantage. And the last time the Huskies beat the Ducks at home was the first time the two women's teams met in 1977.

Redshirt freshman Lucretia Larkin has never competed in a collegiate dual meet before. Nevertheless, the hurdler who made her first appearance last weekend with positive efforts at the Pomona Pitzer Invitational and at Mt. SAC after being sidelined by injury early last season, fully appreciates the significance of Saturday's meet.

"I want to win," said Larkin, one of the Ducks' eight Washingtonians. "I want to win the 100 meter hurdles. I want our relay to win. And I think we can win the team competition period. Especially because a lot of the girls I competed against [in high school] are on that team, so it's kind of like 'I want to show you how good I am now.'"

Larkin is one of Oregon's several young athletes making increasingly effective contributions, evidenced by the progress of the



Azle Malinao-Alvarez Emerald  
 Hilary Holly and Endia Abrante are a part of an improving 4x100 relay team.

4x100 relay team, which consists of Larkin, sophomore Endia Abrante, senior Hilary Holly and freshman Heather Murtaugh. At Mt. SAC, the quartet finished third in their heat, with a personal best of 46.95.

"We're PR-ing and PR-ing and PR-ing," Larkin said. "It's nice."

Despite the continued improvement, that specific relay squad won't have an easy time of it against Washington's 4x100 team whose best time is six seconds faster than Oregon's.

In fact, their team needs some events to swing in their direction if it wants to avoid losing three straight to the Dawgs.

"We've got our work cut out for us," Heinonen said. "We have to get some point swings and see if that will be enough."

Beside the 4x100 relay, Holly is scheduled to compete in five events, including her specialty, the long jump.

In the throws, the Ducks' could use a third-straight good weekend from senior Maureen Morrison. Oregon's pole vaulting crew, led

by sophomore Niki Reed whose best jump this season is NCAA provisional 12-5.5, figure to have the advantage Saturday.

Washington's top performers include distance star Anna Aoki, who is one of the best distance runners in the nation, having already secured her third-straight NCAA Championships berth in the 10,000. Along with some of her distance counterparts, Aoki will be competing in more than one event against the Ducks.

"I went through and looked at the form chart and said 'What's likely to happen?'" Heinonen said. "Well, what's likely to happen is Washington will beat us 85-69."

"And then I said, 'What's the best thing that can happen?' The best possible thing is we win by 16, 85-69. My likely score is probably too negative — that's just me. And there's no way that every possible thing goes your way, but if we get half of that, then we win."

"We can win the meet, but we have to have a lot of things go really well."

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