

# Stop the Pac-sanity: Tournament will hurt Pac-10



**TWO MINUTES FOR CROSSCHECKING**

**PETER HOCKADAY**

**M**onday, the presidents of the Pacific-10 Conference schools voted to institute a postseason basketball tournament for the second time in conference history. Uh-oh.

So, let's imagine a scenario here. It's the 2001-02 season. The Ducks are on the cusp of making the NCAA Tournament, fourth or fifth in the conference, one of the fabled "bubble" teams. Washington State, meanwhile, is dead last in the Pac-10. The teams travel to the "Pac-10 Tournament," and the Cougars win it all, beating top-ranked Arizona in overtime. They get the automatic

bid that comes with the tournament victory, while Oregon is pushed out of the bubble and watches the Big Dance from home.

This has happened. This happens. This will happen.

It happened at last year's Conference USA Tournament. You may have heard about St. Louis' miracle run, beating Cincinnati and Kenyon Martin on the way to the C-USA tournament win and an automatic NCAA Tournament bid. What you didn't hear is that as a result, Tulane, with a 20-11 overall record, went to the National Invitation Tournament instead of the NCAA tournament. Four C-USA teams got bids for March Madness last year. One of them was 19-14 St. Louis.

They say they want the tournament so the Pac-10 will be in the national spotlight for the week between the end of the regular season and the start of the NCAA Tournament.

Did you know the MAC (that's the Mid-American Conference for

all you non-athletic directors out there) has a postseason tournament? Do you know who won it last year? Neither do I. For \$50,000, tell me who won the Mountain West Conference tournament last year. I bet most people can't even remember the champions of the bigger conferences. Name for me the 2000 Big East Tournament champion (it was St. John's), or the Southeastern Conference Tournament champion (Arkansas).

My point is, every conference and its mother is having a postseason tournament, so why would a Pac-10 tournament suddenly thrust the conference into the national spotlight? The answer is: it won't. In fact, the only conference left without a tournament is the Ivy League.

Call me old-fashioned, but I tend to think there's nothing wrong with being different.

Stanford coach Mike Montgomery agrees.

"So, what, we just do what every-

one else does?" Montgomery said Monday. "Is that the rule of thumb?"

They say the tournament will add excitement to the end of the year. They say that no longer will we have meaningless end-of-the-season games, when the Pac-10 Tournament will be just around the corner.

You know, I didn't find last year's Arizona-Oregon game, with possible NCAA berths on the line, very exciting.

Or last year's second-to-last game of the season, Stanford at Arizona, with the Wildcats needing a win to share the Pac-10 title and pulling it out, 86-81, at home? Booo-rring.

Think UCLA at Stanford on the same weekend as Arizona-Oregon. Bruins pull it out by one point in overtime and make it to the NCAA Tournament on the weight of that win, even though they had the same record as Arizona State. Please, I'm falling asleep here.

But now, thanks to the wonder-

ful Pac-10 Tournament, those games will mean next to diddly squat. Arizona will go into that Stanford game with less intensity. Ah, they figure, we'll just get them in the tournament. On the flip side, Stanford will play with less intensity in the tournament, because they'll already have a trip to the NCAAs wrapped up, and most likely its seeding in the tournament will be the same as well.

Last year, St. Louis ended up as a nine seed in the Big Dance despite the C-USA title, and Cincinnati ended up a two seed, despite going out in the first round of the C-USA tournament.

In the end, the Pac-10 Tournament is about conformity. But why not be different? If all the other conferences jumped off a 60-foot bridge, would you? The Pac-10's answer is a resounding, "Heck, yes!"

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## Basketball

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will take place every year at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. The women's tournament will include all 10 teams and will be hosted by a Pac-10 school on a rotating basis.

With the women doing so well in attendance, McArthur Court would be an obvious choice to be one of the first schools to host.

"Obviously, this could be a great reward for the women and how much success they've had here," Oregon athletic director Bill Moos said.

Not everyone is as pleased. Arizona men's head coach Lute Olson and Stanford head coach Mike Montgomery have been two of the most vocal opponents. Montgomery didn't hide his feelings Monday when addressing the issue.

"Gee it's great — can't wait," Montgomery said. "Really, what do I want to say? I'm disappointed. There's just a lot of things that I have trouble with."

When asked if there was any specific conditions that would have led him to sway his viewpoint, Montgomery replied: "I don't know what they would be."

The Oregon basketball players seemed to be pretty pleased with the news after Monday's practice at McArthur Court.

"It's exciting because anyone can

win it and go to the tournament," said freshman point guard Luke Ridnour, who mentioned how he grew up watching the Atlantic Coast Conference tournaments on television.

Some Ducks hadn't even heard about the possibility of the games.

"It was a shock to me," junior guard Anthony Norwood said. "Freddie [Jones] came up to me during practice and was like, 'Hey, we're having a Pac-10 tourney.' And I was like, 'For what? Volleyball?'"

Senior David Jackson was pleased with the news because he remembers the importance of the league games back when he played on Utah's Final Four team in 1998.

"It gives you big game experience, which is helpful as you go through the Big Dance," Jackson said.

Also Monday, the league passed the right to have a year-long training table, enabling athletes from all sports to have one free meal per day. The Pac-10 was one of the few conferences not to have it year-round and Kent admitted that many schools used that to their advantage during recruiting battles.

"Both decisions were huge [tournament and training table] because we've been hurting and football has been hurting with recruits because of no training tables," Kent said.

Said Ridnour, when hearing the news of free food: "That's awesome."



Women's basketball fans get their first look at transfer guard Edneisha Curry (right), guarded by starting point guard Kourtney Shreve. Erin Swanson-Davies Emerald

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