

The Oregon bandwagon gets bigger as it rolls



THE HOME STRETCH

ROBBIE McCALLUM

If you live in Eugene very long, you tend to get cut off from the rest of the world. Underneath the clouds and rain, and in between the hills and trees of the Willamette Valley, you get disconnected.

The rest of the world forgets about us, too.

For years, college football ignored the Oregon football team. The perennial underdogs, the ever mediocre, they just didn't get any respect.

Even a breakthrough year in 1994, when the Ducks won the Pacific-10 conference title and made it to the Rose Bowl for the first time since 1958, didn't convince the guru's of college football that Oregon was a worthy team.

Five straight winning seasons and four bowl appearances convinced some, but not the preseason pollsters, who left the Ducks out of their top-25 polls. One publication even picked Oregon to finish sixth in the Pac-10, behind USC, Washington and UCLA.

Being snubbed by the rest of the country has become standard at Oregon. And it is a motivator for Oregon players.

"Not too many people know what we've got going on up here," Sophomore wide receiver Keenan Howry said. "It's sad when you

don't get recognition, but it does motivate us."

Before the Oregon-Wisconsin game Sept. 23, ESPN GameDay's Lee Corso made a snipe at Eugene, stating that "nobody knew where Eugene even was."

Two weeks later, to Corso's surprise, ESPN GameDay made its first trip ever to the northwest for the much-anticipated UCLA-Oregon matchup.

A big Oregon upset over then-No. 6 UCLA put the Ducks in the spotlight in front of a national audience.

The following week's upset over No. 6 Washington was even bigger for the program. Yet another national audience watched as the Ducks used their awesome defense and equally impressive offense to embarrass their Pac-10 rivals. Even

more importantly though, the Ducks cracked the top-10 in the AP polls for the first time since 1995.

The 28-17 win over Southern California Oct. 14 was the kicker. What followed was a media frenzy. Everywhere you looked that week in the college football world, they are talking about the Ducks and their undefeated Pac-10 record.

You might even think that people have heard of Eugene, Oregon (pronounced you•jean ory•gun).

Headlining both the espn.com and cnsi.com college football websites this past week was Oregon's victory over No. 21 Arizona, leaving the Ducks alone in the conference lead.

Said Cnnsi.com before last Saturday's game: "The ferocious atmosphere of Autzen Stadium,

where the host Oregon Ducks have won 18 straight games, has emerged from obscurity to gain national attention this season. The latest to try to conquer Eugene is Arizona, and as if the Wildcats offense won't have it hard enough trying to hear... the Oregon defense is second-to-none in the Pac-10."

USA Today Sports had a crew on hand for the Arizona game, its first trip to Eugene ever.

And whether or not you jumped on the Oregon bandwagon this season, or six years ago, move over because the national media is spreading the news: Oregon is a team to watch out for.

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Runge against new Pac-10 tourney

■ Women's basketball coach said it may muddle season

By Scott Pesznecker
Oregon Daily Emerald

Not everyone involved with Oregon basketball was ecstatic about having a Pacific-10 Conference postseason tournament for the 2000-01 season.

Duck head coach Jody Runge wasn't happy to hear the news, despite all the indications that Oregon would be the leading contender to host the first-ever women's postseason tournament in Pac-10 history.

With the exception of the Ivy League, every NCAA conference has or plans to have a men's postseason conference tournament.

Such is not the case in women's

hoops.

"I was pretty much strong-armed into going along with it," Runge told The Register-Guard. "The Atlantic Coast Conference is the only other league in the country that has a double round-robin schedule and then a league tournament. It backs up the start of league play (into December) and leaves us a very small window to help our RPI rating."

"Then we have almost two weeks off before we go into the [NCAA] tournament, and if you do well in the conference it's very hard to beat another team three times."

Runge advocated keeping the current double round-robin schedule, in which each team plays each other twice, when the planners were discussing the tournament in August.

"I think there are a lot of unan-

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Jody Runge
Basketball coach

swered questions," Runge told the Emerald in an August interview. "Conceptually, yeah, it's easy to jump on the bandwagon and say 'Let's go for it.' But the logistics still need to be worked out."

The women's tournament will feature all 10 Pac-10 teams, unlike the men's tournament, which features the top eight. The women's tournament will be played a week earlier than the men's so both can be televised.



Erin Swanson-Davies Emerald
Oregon head coach Jody Runge can't stand the sight of a Pacific-10 tournament.

Peter DeFazio Democrat for Congress



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—Eugene Weekly, 10/22/98

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—Register-Guard, 10/7/00

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