



Laura Smit Emerald

Oregon forward Bryan Bracey (42) had nine points and six defensive rebounds against Portland at Mac Court Tuesday night.

Basketball

continued from page 7

a good job of fighting, clawing."

The Ducks then rattled off seven straight points, capped by a Jones steal and a thunderous one-handed slam with 7:48 remaining that woke the dormant crowd.

But Portland wouldn't quit. The Pilots traded baskets in the foul-plagued final minutes and closed to 60-57 at the 1:37 mark. Neither team would score in the ensuing minute, and Portland was forced to foul Ridnour with 36 seconds left.

The freshman from Blaine, Wash., dropped in both free throws for the five-point lead. Then, after Portland's Jones converted a three-point play, Ridnour downed two

more from the charity stripe to give Oregon the 64-60 advantage with only 21 ticks of the clock left. The

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Ernie Kent
Oregon
head coach

Ducks' defense held strong and forced Portland to throw up two hurried shots, and after freshman

Luke Jackson made two free throws, the ballgame belonged to Oregon.

"We found a way to win, but mentally we're not making the right plays," Ridnour said.

Coach Ernie Kent admitted that his team is "not there yet," but said just the fact that his team is 4-0 is a great sign.

"It's too early for us to get disappointed," Kent said. "I don't need to criticize this team. They're tough enough on themselves. They needed to be disappointed."

Kent will give his players today off and then go "back to the drawing board" on Thursday to prepare for Saturday's Papé Jam game at the Rose Garden against Massachusetts, a higher profile opponent.

"We need to act like we're playing Arizona every night," Kent said.

Pac-10

continued from page 7

"It's exciting," he said. "One of our goals is always to play in a bowl game, and our seniors will have been in three bowl games."

Then there was Sun Devil coach Bruce Snyder, who was fired before his team's intrastate matchup. Arizona State beat the Wildcats, 30-17, and Arizona head coach Dick Tomey made up his mind to resign before that game was even done.

While the coaching demise of Snyder and Tomey was more uncertain, Hackett's downfall was not. The Trojan coach led the Pac-10's arguably most talented team to a tie for last place in the conference standings.

Before the start of the season, USC was picked to win the Pac-10 title.

"For someone who has given three years of his life and for the last six months hasn't slept or eaten, I'm very disappointed," Hackett told reporters Monday. "I'm disappointed we don't get a chance to continue this and complete this. I felt things were headed in the right direction."

Perhaps the Trojans' last-place finish urged them to reportedly pursue Erickson to replace Hackett. After all, Erickson did complete the Beavers' dramatic turnaround from a Pac-10 doormat to a nationally ranked team.

But maybe Hackett's firing was enough to keep the Oregon State coach out of California. And if Erickson is interested in the Arizona State coaching job, maybe it's because Snyder coached there for nine years, while Hackett only lasted at USC for four-and-a-half years.

Oregon State athletic director Mitch Barnhart will complete a new contract, which he hopes will keep Erickson in Corvallis for years to come.

"We have no intention of giving up on what I think is an outstanding coach and coaching staff," Barnhart said.

So what else could happen to

make this Pac-10 season any crazier?

How about this: The Holiday Bowl selection committee chooses Oregon instead of Oregon State.

Although it probably would never happen, it would seem a fitting way to end such a unique season in Pac-10 football history.

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