

Oregon getting what matters most: preseason wins



TWO MINUTES FOR CROSSCHECKING

PETER HOCKADAY

PORTLAND — They're anything but beautiful. They don't have a consistent go-to guy. They haven't had consistent offense, defense or rebounding yet this season.

They are the Ducks, and they're 5-0.

Somehow, the Oregon men's basketball team is off to its second-best start in 23 years, despite its inconsistencies.

The Ducks passed their first real test Saturday night when they beat Massachusetts 91-76 at the Rose Garden in Portland. Now, Oregon's games against Auburn on Dec. 16 and Louisville

on Dec. 30 are the only things keeping the Ducks from an undefeated preseason, barring a major mishap against Illinois-Chicago, Northern Arizona or South Carolina State.

How do they do it?

Oregon followed a familiar pattern Saturday night at the Papé Jam, grinding out a win against a more physical basketball team. The Minutemen sent the Ducks to the free-throw line 46 times in Saturday's game, and Oregon scored more than a third of its points from the charity stripe. Conversely, the Ducks committed 25 fouls, but Massachusetts converted only 22 free throws.

"That was a physical basketball team," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said. "They forced us to play physical basketball."

But UMass was not the first physical, ugly basketball game for Oregon this season. The Ducks committed 23 fouls against Portland last Tuesday night, 27

against Portland State the previous Saturday and 25 in their home opener against Mississippi Valley State.

"It's not going to look good every night, but as long as we get the 'W,' we're happy," Ducks forward Freddie Jones said.

That's exactly what Oregon has done — secured the win. While adjusting to stricter officiating, the Ducks have won with the things they've touted since the beginning of the season: A deep bench that will pick up the slack if the stars don't perform, team chemistry that allows the team to bounce back from adversity, and talented freshmen.

On Saturday, the bench and the chemistry won the game for Oregon.

"It was the effort of everyone on this team — we helped each other out, we were unselfish with the basketball, and we just played our hearts out," senior forward Bryan Bracey said. "That's what we have

to do every night."

Bracey had a career-high 24 points against UMass, and Jones added 23 of his own, but the bench came through for 23 key points that sealed the win for the Ducks.

That's why Kent wasn't too upset when freshman standout Luke Ridnour put up dismal numbers Saturday night after getting into foul trouble.

"That's the beauty of our team," Kent said. "Don't put too much into 'that guy played this much the other game, and only played a little bit this game.' Another guy is going to step up and have his big game."

"Nights when we're all on the same page, that's going to be something to see."

Kent will take a lot of positives from his pre-finals week test against UMass. Anthony Norwood, quietly averaging almost 14 points a game, has stepped comfortably into his starting role.

Freshman guard Luke Jackson has been turning in impressive statistics, from points to assists. Bracey, Jones and senior center Julius "Juice" Hickshave combined to take charge of the team.

Kent sees his team learning and growing with each game, taking those small steps toward the big NCAA Tournament prize.

"We still have an enormous amount of growth potential, and that's very encouraging," Kent said. "If there's a negative with this team, it's just that we need to continue to develop."

The fans see ugly play and fouls abounding, but Kent sees an infant of a team putting on years with each game.

At least there's one thing everybody sees: The Ducks are 5-0, and that's what matters.

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Horoscope by Linda C. Black

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (Dec. 4). Last year's struggles should start to show results. You've got the basics, now do the fine-tuning. Acknowledge what you've learned in December. You're not the same person you once were, so ask for what you're worth in January. Continue to follow your fantasies in February, through more education. Change your home for the better in March. Use an older co-worker's advice in May. Bring some reality to a partnership in June. Be the practical shopper in July. Schedule your trip for August or October, or both.

To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) — Today is a 6 — Don't launch into a new project now. There's too much old business to finish first. Tomorrow and Wednesday will be better for starting new projects and delegating responsibilities. Today, gather data, do homework and make plans.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) — Today is a 7 — Friends can help you make a distant connection. They might even set you up with a new friendship that will last. Don't spend much money, however. If fees are required to get what you want, you're probably not in the right place. The best things in life will be free.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) — Today is a 6 — You like to have the last word, but that's not a great idea today. Instead, listen and take notes. Your mate should have some great ideas, and a teacher's right on target, too. Instead of arguing, which might be your first instinct, soak it all up.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) — Today is a 7 — Ditch a few responsibilities and a partner may help you glide through a wily co-worker's radar. Meet your informant at a favorite place, across town. Quiet time with a good confidant will do you both good.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) — Today is a 7 — A recent setback could provide the spark of inspiration you've been seeking. You're immensely talented, so instead of buying something you can't afford, why not create it? You might wind up with something better than you could have bought.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) — Today is a 6 — The past few days have been hectic but the worst is over. You may be glad to get back to work, just for its familiar routine. Love will prevail, especially if you're hanging on to an old relationship. Forget past hurts and join forces.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) — Today is a 7 — You've been neat and tidy long enough. Find a place where you can make a mess, and do so. This is all part of the learning experience. You may not start out perfect, but you can get there. Your first assignment is to relish being imperfect.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) — Today is a 7 — Magical moments sometimes happen all by themselves. They happen more often with a bit of help. Don't leave an important interlude with a special person to chance. Set things up so everything goes according to your plans.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) — Today is a 7 — You're not the same person you were this time last year. So why expect something that worked for you then to work now? It doesn't, as you've noticed, but that's okay. An update is a justifiable expense.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) — Today is a 6 — You're very smart, and that's good. Somebody's leaning on you pretty hard to produce results. Problem is, you don't know how to do that! By the time the big test comes, though, you'll be ready. Keep crammin'.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) — Today is 7 — Don't get involved in a risky proposition. Let a friend try it out first, and watch what happens. Pay off a debt instead. Once that obligation's been fulfilled, new doors will open. And that may lead to something important you've been seeking.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) — Today is a 7 — Your opinions are important, so don't keep them to yourself. Some decisions have already been made, but there's still room for your input. Let your elders know how you want to fit into the greater scheme of things so they don't put you in the wrong place.

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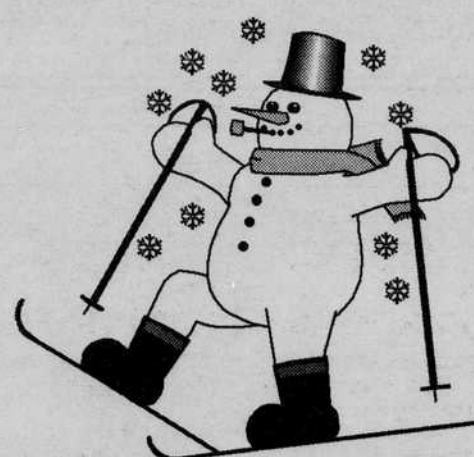
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