



Loud 'n' proud Pit Crew gives Mac Court edge



TWO MINUTES FOR CROSSCHECKING

PETER HOCKADAY

Imagine playing basketball inside a jet engine. Daydream, for a moment, that you were out on the blacktop shooting some hoops while a construction worker used a jackhammer three feet away. Think about playing basketball in the front row at a concert, right in front of the 50-foot speakers.

Now stop dreaming. That's what it's like to play basketball at Oregon's McArthur Court.

"It's a great crowd at Mac Court," freshman forward Luke Jackson said. "It gives us an extra boost."

Since Ernie Kent took over as the Oregon men's basketball coach in 1997, he has tried to resurrect one of the great traditions since his days as a Duck player in the '70s: a loud, boisterous crowd that gives Oregon an automatic advantage over any opponent.

Oregon has done that and is 40-15 at home over the past four seasons since Kent's return. That streak has included many memorable games, most recently a 79-67 victory over then-No. 7 Arizona last Thursday.

"This crowd was great," Arizona coach Lute Olson said after that game. "It's always great."

As a result of wins like last Thursday's, The Pit has built a reputation as a fortress of basketball. In a pre-season poll in Sports Illustrated, Mac Court was rated the toughest place to play in the conference and the 12th-toughest home floor in the country.

What makes The Pit so formidable? For one, it has a capacity of 9,087, and all those supporters are close to the court as a result. Second, the building is more than 70 years old, and the floors and walls are primarily wood, making the acoustics as good as a symphony hall.

Third, and most important, is the presence of the students on the floor, the loud and proud Pit Crew.

Anna Weinman, a student and coordinator of the Pit Crew, leads a handful of dedicated fans in organizing the insanity.

"We want the Pit Crew to be synonymous with Oregon basketball," Weinman said.

The Pit Crew emulates great student groups such as Duke's "Cameron Crazies" and Stanford's "6th Man Club."

Weinman said the Oregon faithfuls need to get away from their reputation as nasty, mean fans.

"We're trying to keep it positive," Weinman said.

Positive, such as when the fans chanted "Dad was better" at Arizona's Luke Walton last Thursday, referring to his hall-of-fame father, Bill? Or positive, such as when they chanted that swear word that means "hogwash" after a bad call Sunday against Arizona State?

Weinman just rolls her eyes at those sort of things.

"The Pit Crew is excited and enthusiastic, not bashing," she said.

Weinman and her cohorts are trying to expand the Pit Crew's reach. In the near future, Pit Crew members could get early entrance or priority seating at Mac Court. For now, they hold barbecues and raffles at games, along with handing out T-shirts.

Kent has touted the Pit Crew as an integral part of his team since he's been at Oregon. Now, he says, his

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Women looking for answers



Oregon forward Lindsey Dion still receives daily treatment for her sprained left ankle.

■ The Pac-10 season has been a long, uphill road for the Ducks — and it's not over

By Scott Pesznecker
Oregon Daily Emerald

Something's bothering the Oregon women's basketball team.

Midway through the Pacific-10 Conference season, the Ducks are smack-dab in the middle of the conference — and they're not thrilled about it. Not one bit.

"We're a good basketball team, we're just caught in this weird stage and this weird feeling that none of us have felt before," forward Lindsey Dion said. "We don't lose here at the University of Oregon. We've always found a way to make it work, no matter what it was. We com-

mitted to each other that that's not what we do here. "We did not come here to lose — we always find a way to win."

Oregon has lost three of its last four games, plummeting to fifth place in the Pac-10 after sitting pretty in first place just three weeks ago.

The catalyst of the Ducks' struggles was their game against Washington in Seattle on Jan. 18. Oregon fought off the bruising Huskies for the 67-53 victory, but not before losing forwards Angelina Wolvert and Dion to injuries.

The Ducks lost the following night to Washington State, but the team did not appear rattled by the loss.

But less than a week later, Oregon lost a heartbreaker at McArthur Court to Southern California, 55-53. The Ducks beat UCLA in scrappy fashion two days later, then were swept by the Arizona schools last weekend in two dismal performances.

Dion said the team still feels the sting from the loss to the Trojans.

"I think we've seen moments of that game lingering within each of us individually at different times," she said. "As a whole, I think we're getting past it and putting it behind us."

Now, for Oregon to keep its Pac-10 title hopes alive, the women must do something they haven't done since 1987 — beat Stanford at Maples Pavilion.

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UO points no fingers, looks ahead

■ The Ducks have no answers for their weekend blunder, but try to stay positive toward the remainder of the season

By Jeff Smith
Oregon Daily Emerald

There were no excuses being made Tuesday afternoon as the Oregon men's basketball team attempted to move on from its debacle against Arizona State.

The Ducks had Monday off, but returned to McArthur Court Tuesday for practice, and faced the inevitable questions about their shocking 99-72 loss to the Sun Devils.

"It was an embarrassment," freshman point guard Luke Ridnour said. "It shouldn't have happened, especially at home. It was unbelievable for us to play so well against Arizona and then come out and play so terrible against

Arizona State. We got out-played in every aspect of the game.

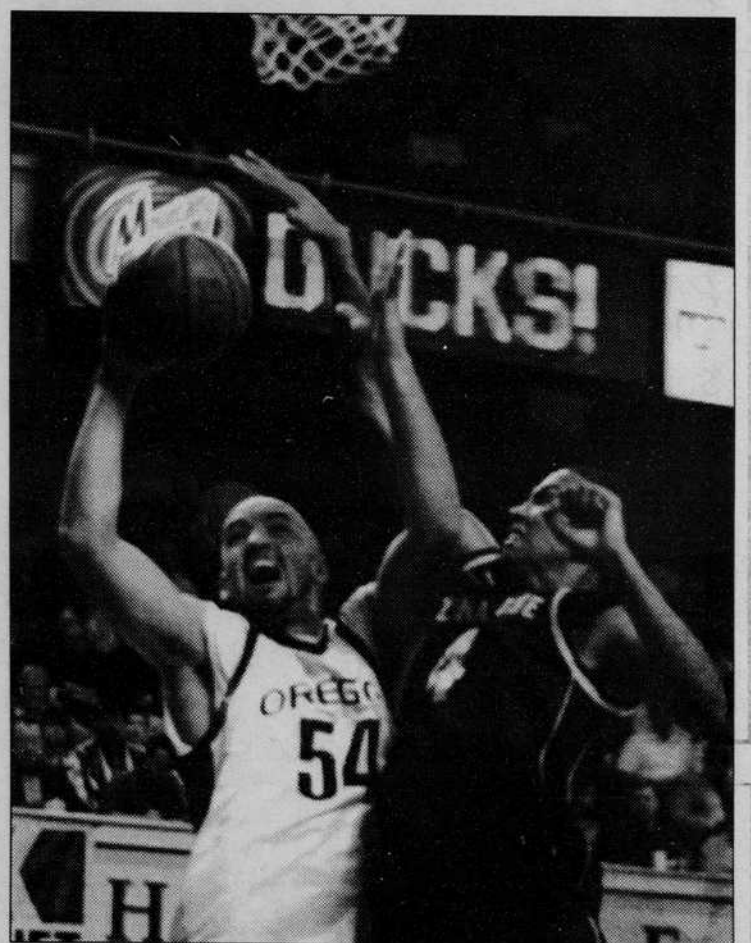
"Now, we just have to try to forget about it."

The game film of Sunday's ASU loss might as well be thrown out, as it contained the type of footage that no Oregon player should have to live through again.

But the tape of last Thursday's 79-67 victory against then-No. 7 Arizona should be kept and preserved. In that game, the Ducks played about as well as they could have and won it with heads-up defense and togetherness.

"It was the extremes of basketball," said junior center Chris Christoffersen, who is expected to return to full-time duty this week after missing most of Sunday's game with a jammed right thumb. "Going from beating the number seven team in the country to losing to one of the worst teams in the Pac-10 by 30. It was crazy."

Senior center Flo Hartenstein added, "It's frustrating



Laura Smit Emerald

Oregon senior center Flo Hartenstein was one of the many frustrated Ducks in their loss to Arizona State Sunday. Hartenstein is optimistic that his team can rebound and finish the season strongly.

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