



Case of Ducks v. Runge lacks solid answers



PEZ SEZ

SCOTT PESZNECKER

I can envision it almost to perfection — coffee mugs around Eugene dropping in unison, as thousands of local readers saw the front-page headline on the Register-Guard.

Wow.

For those of you who only read the Emerald, but failed to see today's page-one story, here's the deal: On Sunday, eight players from the Oregon women's basketball team met privately with Athletic Director Bill Moos to discuss their head coach, Jody Runge.

The Ducks said that Runge belittled them in public and that she never gave them positive feedback. They said she never listened to them, and she didn't get along with assistant coaches. They said Runge was unfitting of what a Division I head basketball coach should be. They told Moos more than can be fit into a single paragraph.

According to the eight Ducks at the meeting, the entire team hopes that this season is Runge's last as Oregon's coach.

And that, my friends, is what happened.

But here's what I'm concerned about. This is the reason why I did a rare double-take when I picked up the newspaper Monday morning to scan the headlines.

Why, oh why, didn't the Ducks wait another week?

Why approach Moos after a pair of awesome wins against the Arizona schools, which are two tough Pacific-10 Conference foes? Why — after pulling the NCAA Tournament back into their reach — did the Ducks do something that caused so much distraction, with a do-or-die Civil War steadily approaching?

Why?

I don't think anyone, except maybe Moos and the women's basketball players, understand why the Ducks called for a meeting when they did.

But in a Monday night conference call, Moos told reporters that the players didn't intend for news of the meeting to reach the newsstand. The players wanted the meeting kept secret because they were afraid.

Afraid of their coach. *Their coach.*

It almost feels surreal to have watched Oregon play so well last weekend, only to find out two days later how agonizing it must have been for them.

Because the players didn't request the meeting a week ago, after returning from a Los Angeles road swing in which they lost to cellar-dweller UCLA. No, the decision to meet with Moos wasn't made after a frustrating loss, or after a bad practice, or following another injury.

What's most disturbing is that the players contacted Moos on Sunday morning — after, not before, winning their weekend home games.

The players were still basking in victory when they decided to condemn their coach.

So there has to be a reason for all this madness, but I don't think those reasons will be revealed until after the season. Since Sunday's bomb was dropped, trying to find someone close to the team to comment on the issue is about as easy as finding Elvis. No, the real Elvis.

But rest assured. The truth is out there, and soon, all will be known.

The players would rather be playing basketball than sitting on the bench against Oregon State this Saturday, which is why they aren't talking about Runge right now. If the Ducks beat the Beavs and earn an eighth-straight invitation to the Big Dance, don't expect any comment for another week or so.

But the senior players will talk again once they're out from under Runge's wing.

Heck, when this season ends, there's a good chance that any of the Ducks will talk about it.

Moos also told reporters on Monday's conference call that the Athletic Department would evaluate Runge's future as Oregon's head coach. He said the AD would talk with players

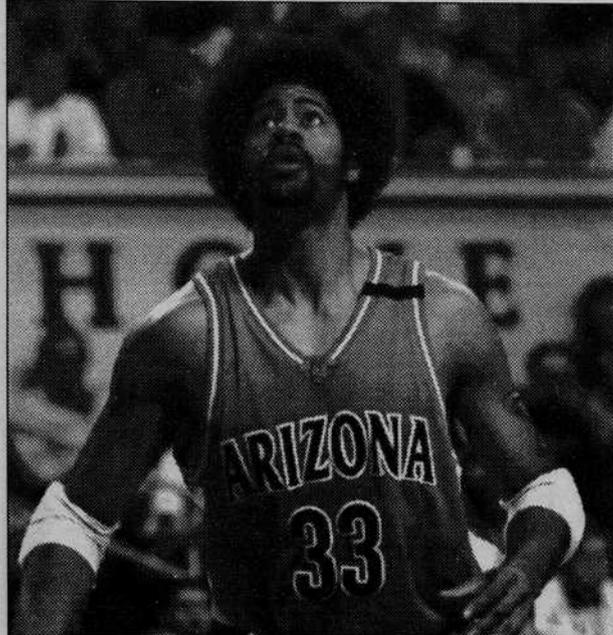
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Adam Amato Emerald

Oregon players met with Athletic Director Bill Moos Sunday to discuss their concerns regarding Jody Runge's tactics.

Two of Pac-10's best go head-to-head in final week



Adam Amato Emerald

Arizona senior Eugene Edgeron and the Wildcats have been looking up at No. 1 Stanford all season in the Pacific-10 Conference standings.

■ Arizona is out for revenge against Stanford, as both teams try to propel themselves into the NCAA Tournament with momentum

By Jeff Smith
Oregon Daily Emerald

Stanford may have clinched a share of the Pacific-10 Conference title with its win over UCLA Saturday, but the Cardinal still need one more victory to capture the championship outright.

And the No. 9 Arizona Wildcats will do everything they can not to give them that win on Thursday.

Top-ranked Stanford (27-1 overall, 15-1 Pac-10) and Arizona (21-7, 13-3) headline this week's Pac-10 schedule, as the two prepare for a Thursday night showdown in Palo Alto, Calif., that will be nationally televised at 7:30 p.m. by Fox Sports Net.

"We are definitely a very different team than when we played Stanford [in January]," said Arizona junior Richard Jefferson after his team's victory against Oregon Saturday. "They are the number one team in the country. It's going to take a lot to go up there and beat them."

The previous meeting that Jefferson was referring to was an 85-76 Stanford victory on Jan. 6 in Tucson that came at an emotionally trying time for Arizona. The Wildcats were playing their third consecutive game without head coach Lute Olson, who was taking a leave of absence following the death of his wife, Bobbi.

The loss was Arizona's fourth in seven games, but after the game, Wildcat players knew there was plenty of time to turn their season around.

"Right now, they are a better team than we are, but that's just today," Arizona center Loren Woods said back then. "That's why the NCAA Tournament is in March. This is a tough loss, but I think you still might see the Pac-10 race come down to these two teams."

Since that day, Arizona has won 13 of 15 games and still has a shot at a piece of the Pac-10 title if it wins its final two games and Stanford loses both. But realistically, Arizona knows that it is one loss behind where it needed to be in order to make a run at Stanford — and views its loss to Oregon on Feb. 4 as the game it should have won.

So it was not surprising to see the Wildcats play with fire and emotion in their 104-65 victory against the Ducks Saturday.

"We owed them one," Arizona senior forward



“We are definitely a very different team than when we played Stanford.”

Richard Jefferson
Junior
Arizona