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Bluder rights Iowa's ship

■ First-year coach Lisa Bluder led Iowa past Purdue to win the Big Ten championship

By Scott Pesznecker
Oregon Daily Emerald

Oregon head coach Jody Runge is from Iowa.

Last season, her name was even mentioned as a possible candidate for the Hawkeyes' vacant coaching position.

But as of a Sunday afternoon press conference, Runge claimed to know little about Iowa's players. However, she said she was well aware of Lisa Bluder, the

No. 16 Hawkeyes' first-year coach who led her team to the Big Ten Tournament Championship with a 75-70 upset of No. 9 Purdue.

"She's a great coach," Runge said. "She's taken up some time adjusting to a new system, and now they're playing their best basketball. They won their conference tournament and are doing a tremendous job with the players that they have."



On the flip side, Bluder is not from Oregon.

However, the 1983 Northern Iowa graduate says she remembers Oregon. Bluder, who coached Drake for 10 seasons from 1990 to 2000, took the Bulldogs to McArthur Court to compete at an Oregon tournament in November 1994. Drake won, 76-67.

"It's neat that she's from the state of Iowa, and she's done an exceptional job at Oregon with her team," said Bluder, whose team is a No. 4 seed in the Big Dance. "They're well coached, and they'll be well prepared for the NCAA Tournament."

"And I know Jenny Mowe from U.S.A. basketball tryouts. She used to beat up on my kid Tammy Blackstone from Drake."

Bluder has turned Iowa around since taking over as head coach. Last season, Iowa finished with a dismal 9-18 overall record.

Bluder said her team has a balanced offensive attack but likes to push the ball up the floor. The Hawkeyes are led by three seniors — point guard Cara Consuegra, center Randi Peterson and reserve shooting guard Mary Berdo.

Shooting guard Lindsey Meder

is the team's top scorer, averaging 16.8 points per game. She also shoots 41.1 percent from the field, leads Iowa with 406 field goal attempts (at least 120 more than any of her teammates), and her assist-to-turnover ratio is less than perfect — she's dished 49 assists but has 71 turnovers.

Oregon and Iowa each faced Wisconsin and Utah this season. Utah was victorious in its single games against the Ducks and Hawkeyes, winning 63-48 and 66-42, respectively. Oregon beat Wisconsin 71-57, while Iowa split two games with the Badgers.

Based on Iowa's records of 20-9 overall and 12-2 in the Big 10, the Hawkeyes could first — maybe should have — hosted first- and second-round games. Unfortunately, Iowa is also "the wrestling capital of the world," Bluder said, and wrestling holds its NCAA Championships in Iowa's gym this weekend.

"We're disappointed because we'd love to host, but there's nothing much you can do about it," Bluder said. "We've known all year that we'll never have the opportunity to host, so it's something we're fully prepared for."

Rematch with Utah may occur

■ Oregon's potential second-round opponent is a familiar one, the No. 5 seed Utah Utes

By Robbie McCallum
Oregon Daily Emerald

Sometimes after disappointing losses, you want a second chance to prove yourself. If the Oregon women's basketball team makes it into the second round of the NCAA Tournament, they may get a second chance at Utah.

Flashback to Dec. 16, 2000. The then-No. 14 Ducks make their first trip of the season to Salt Lake City for a non-conference game against Utah.

A well-scouted and road-weary Oregon team never leads and falls to the Utes, 63-48.

"Utah had a great game plan and executed it well," Oregon head coach Jody Runge said. "They're tough to defend and are a great passing team."

The loss was Oregon's third in a row at the time and was considered the first stumble in its shaky season. The up-and-down Ducks went on to win seven straight, then dropped eight of their next 10 Pacific-10 Conference games.

Utah (26-3) went on to dominate the Mountain West Conference, compiling a 14-0 conference record along with a 15-game winning streak.



The Utes are led by junior power forward Lauren Beckman, who leads Utah in four statistical categories. Senior Kristina Andersen adds depth in the front court with 9.7 points per game and a 5.1 rebound average. Each had 12 points in the pre-season win over Oregon.

Flash forward to next Monday. Should the Ducks upset No. 4 seed Iowa in the first round Saturday, and if fifth-seeded Utah defeats Fairfield as expected, Oregon and the Utes will clash for a second time.

Although the Ducks will have little time to prepare for the Utes if they do advance, Oregon already knows what went wrong in Salt Lake City the first time. Oregon's front-line of Brianne Meharry, Angelina Wolvert and Jenny Mowe combined for only seven points and eight rebounds and eight turnovers.

The Ducks will have a secret weapon this time. In the Dec. 16 loss, Wolvert played only eight minutes, going scoreless and grabbing no rebounds. In the past four games, though, Wolvert has been on a tear, averaging 18 points and 8.7 rebounds in four Oregon wins.

Another factor the Ducks will have to overcome if they want a rematch with Utah is playing on the road. Oregon is 6-9 away from McArthur Court.

"[The road] certainly has been our nemesis," Runge said. "But it's not like a new place; it's not a place where our players haven't been. They've played on that floor in the Utah game and they're used to the environment, and that really has to be a positive to us."

Fairfield Stags prance into Dance

■ Fairfield survived the agony of waiting and found itself in the tournament as 12th seed

By Jeff Smith
Oregon Daily Emerald

Fairfield knows that its name won't be mentioned in too many women's NCAA Tournament pools this week.

But 12th-seeded Fairfield doesn't care as it prepares to head to Salt Lake City for the Big Dance.

All the Stags are concerned with is No. 5 seed Utah, who they play at 8:30 p.m. Saturday night following Oregon's game against Iowa. Utah is the host team in this section of the Midwest region.

Fairfield finished 25-5 overall this past season, and an impressive

16-2 in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference. But because of its crushing 70-68 defeat to Siena in the MAAC Tournament Championship game, it was forced to sit on that dreaded do-or-die bubble and await the tournament pairings.

Finally, the ESPN Selection show started Sunday afternoon, and when the name Fairfield popped on that screen 15 minutes into the show...

"We just jumped on each other," senior Allison Thorne said.

The emotion began pouring out as the team, who had been watching it all together, jumped all around and hugged one another in a scene that typifies what March Madness is all about.

"When they started announcing the West region I started to cry," said senior Gail Strumpf, who is the Stags' all-time leading scorer with 1,858 points and who has a career total of 1,100 rebounds. "It was projected that we were going to go

somewhere out [west], so right then and there I knew I was going to cry because I'd be real, real happy, or because I'd be real, real sad.

"It's been torture trying to guess whether or not we were going to go."

This will be Fairfield's fourth trip to the Big Dance, and while a No. 12 seed is viewed as low by some, it is the highest ever placing for the Stags.

"It's just pleasing to see the committee think of this program the way it does by selecting us as a 12 seed," head coach Dianne Nolan said. "And it's really exciting to me that Fairfield was on that [TV] screen."

Fairfield, who became the first MAAC women's team to capture an at-large berth to the tourney since La Salle in 1989, has faced Utah once before. The Utes beat the Stags 78-48 back in the 1987-88 season.

