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Ducks travel to City of Angels

With four matches remaining, Oregon volleyball looks for its first win in the Pac-10

By Hank Hager
 Oregon Daily Emerald

It's the beginning of the end for the Oregon volleyball team.

Tonight's match in Los Angeles against UCLA will be the 15th Pacific-10 Conference match for the Ducks, but more importantly, it is the last weekend of Pac-10 play for the team.

It is not, however, the last matches Oregon (9-17 overall, 0-14 Pacific-10 Conference) will play this season, with USC and UCLA visiting McArthur Court next week.

This weekend puts into motion the beginning of the end for the Ducks and magnifies their need to win a Pac-10 match, something that has slipped out of their hands so far.



"It's tough," senior Monique Tobbagi said. "When I came here as a freshman, we knocked off the No. 16 (Arizona) team in the nation. UCLA and USC are both ranked teams and any given day, it can happen. We're going to go in there tough and hopefully capture a win before the season ends."

Tobbagi is referring to No. 12 UCLA, a team the Ducks will take on for the first time this season at Pauley Pavilion tonight. The Bruins are tied for fourth in the Pac-10 with a 9-5 (15-7 overall) record in conference play.

"UCLA, you really know who their primary people are and who is going to get the ball," head coach Carl Ferreira said.

For the Ducks to be successful, the "big three" of Tobbagi and juniors Lindsay Closs and Stephanie Martin will need to lead the offensive attack, but the team's role players, such as sophomore Heather Gilmore and freshman Lauren Westendorf, will need to play well.

"We need our primary people getting attack kills to score points, but we also need our role players to get

attack kills and score points," Ferreira said. "It's how many points you can score, that's the bottom line."

Ferreira cited the importance of minimizing unforced errors, creating defensive blocks as well as improving the team's serving as keys to the match against the Bruins.

With four matches left, the Ducks have little time to gain their first Pac-10 win, but spirits are high. The team played an impromptu scrimmage at practice earlier this week, with Ferreira and assistants Jared Slinger and Anna Reznicek taking the court.

"Together, as a collective group, we all have a good attitude," Tobbagi said. "You can't really dwell on the past because you can't change it, so you can only look forward."

Added Closs about the team's winless situation: "We just use it as motivation to keep working hard."

First serve is slated for 7 p.m.

Hank Hager is a sports reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald. He can be reached at hankhager@dailyemerald.com.

Pac-10

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(7-2, 5-2 Pac-10) and the No. 9 Cougars (9-1, 6-1) aren't thinking about the Ducks this week. They're fired up for their annual rivalry game, which this season, unlike many previous encounters, pits two bowl-bound teams.

"It promises to be an electric atmosphere given that Washington State is having such a wonderful season," Washington head coach Rick Neuheisel said. "They have not only been good, they have been very, very opportunistic and are a team that just finds ways to win."

A big reason that the Cougars have found those wins is quarterback Jason Gesser, who suffered a concussion in last week's win over

Arizona State. His status was unclear earlier in the week, but on Wednesday, Cougar head coach Mike Price said that he expects "every player to be ready."

The list of probable Cougar players for Saturday, including Gesser, also contains running back Dave Minnich (knee surgery on Oct. 10), linebacker James Price (knee and ankle surgery) and running back John Tippins (shoulder injury against ASU).

"There is something magical about how players recover from injuries when the Apple Cup is the next game," Price said.

In this season of wild Pac-10 contests where the league favorite has seemed to change by the week, Washington State has easily been the biggest surprise. After all, in the

preseason Pac-10 poll, the media picked the Cougars to finish last, behind Arizona and California.

"It shows what the writers know," Neuheisel said.

Foster probably out

UCLA tailback DeShaun Foster will most likely not play this Saturday against USC because the Bruins, as of Tuesday, have yet to submit their report regarding Foster's "extra benefit" to the NCAA. Foster, who hasn't practiced this week, didn't play against Oregon after being penalized for driving around a 2002 Ford Expedition that belonged to actor-director Eric LaNeuville.

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