

Pitino brings new winning attitude to Louisville

■ Oregon will face the Cardinals — and their new coach Rick Pitino — at the Papé Jam

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

Last season, the Oregon men's basketball team traveled to Kentucky and beat up the Louisville Cardinals, 88-65.

This year, though, it's a whole new ball game.

Rick Pitino, the legendary college coach with a national title and five Final Four appearances under his belt,

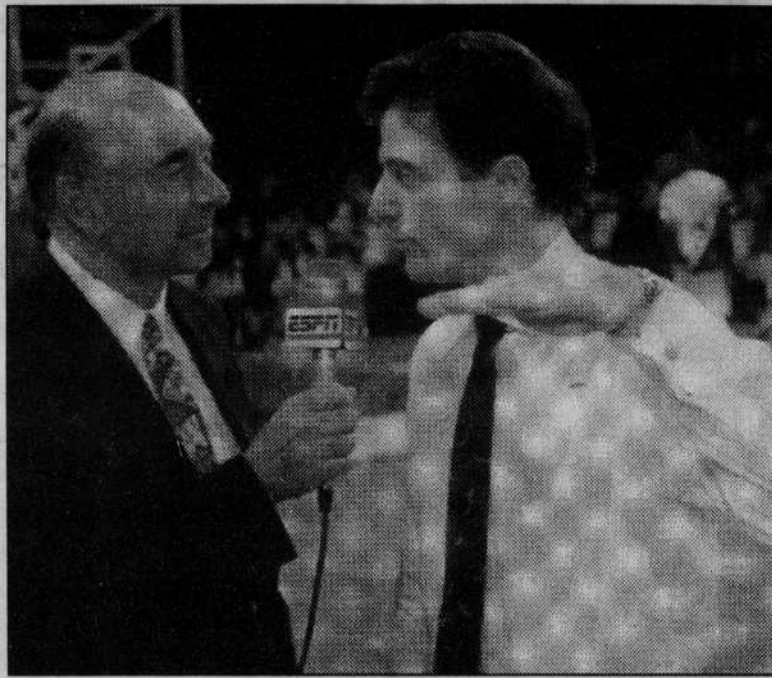
is now roaming the Louisville sideline, and his coaching style could turn around a formerly tepid Cardinals' team. Pitino will lead the Cardinals into the Papé Jam on Saturday at the

Rose Garden in Portland, where Oregon and Louisville will square off at 7:30 p.m.

Whether Pitino has made an impact on the Louisville players will be clear after Saturday's game.

"(The players) don't know how to win yet, but they want to win," Pitino said of his young crew. "They're not heralded high-school All-Americans. They're just all nice, good guys and I enjoy working with them."

If Pitino is going to turn the program around at Louisville just as he



Louisville Media Services

ESPN's Dick Vitale (left) interviews first-year Louisville coach Rick Pitino, who has won one national championship and been to four Final Fours as a college coach.

turned around the college programs at Boston University, Providence and Kentucky, it will turn when the players tune into his rigid coaching style. Pitino is noted for his physically fit, run-and-gun teams that use a pressing defense to key an up-tempo offense.

Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said that he can see the change in Louisville even after one game. The

Cardinals beat South Alabama 92-38 on Saturday.

"There's no question that there's a big difference in that team this year," Kent said. "Their energy and chemistry are a lot higher, and they're in attack mode."

Still, the Oregon players say they will not be awed by playing Pitino. "We're facing Louisville, not Rick

Pitino," Oregon forward Robert Johnson said. "We're playing a team, and that team can make mistakes."

The Ducks will match guards Luke Ridnour, Freddie Jones and Luke Jackson against Louisville's Reece Gaines, who scored a game-high 18 points against South Alabama, and Erik Brown, who added 15 points. Pitino said the game will be "exciting" to watch because of the promise of a fast-paced contest.

Oregon's players said they are confident in facing Pitino's full-court press, even after losing at UCLA last year when the Bruins' press fatigued the Ducks and caused 23 turnovers. Key second-half turnovers by Oregon allowed UCLA come back to win that game.

"We have a year of experience under our belts now," Jackson said. "We're not going to be as excited, and we're going to be more confident that we can break the press."

"(Pitino's) aggressive style plays right into our hands."

The best a guard can get

Pitino had nothing but admiration for Ridnour, Oregon's point guard. He called the sophomore "as good a point guard as you'll find in all of college basketball."

"He makes a coach smile," Pitino said.

Ridnour was one of the stars of the Ducks' own America's Youth Classic last weekend, averaging 13.3 points and 5.3 assists over the

weekend, and he also went 17-for-18 from the free throw line.

Resting those legs

Oregon took Sunday and Monday off after playing three straight games last weekend. The Ducks will practice through the week, though, in preparation for Saturday's game.

"We just played for the first time Thursday," Kent said when asked if playing three games would give the Ducks an advantage over the Cardinals. "You can look at it as almost playing too much basketball."

Kent said the Ducks took one positive from the tournament, that they now have "a pretty good rhythm going."

Lovin' Louisville

Pitino said he has enjoyed his return to Kentucky since joining the Louisville staff last March. The coach returned to college ball after accumulating a 102-146 record with the NBA's Boston Celtics in three seasons.

Pitino began his college coaching career at Boston University, where he made it to the NCAA Tournament in his fifth season. He then led Providence to the Final Four before spending eight seasons as head coach of the Kentucky Wildcats. He won a national title with the Wildcats, and went to three Final Fours.

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I'm never going to forget this game."

"But then practice picks up for the next game and I forget all about the earlier games as they all just blur together," Schmid said. "It's amazing not necessarily how quickly you forget, but just how quickly the focus shifts. People ask me to recall a favorite moment and it's just overload. You can't really remember everything that's happened since it's been a half a decade."

Certainly it hasn't just been this class that has made the difference between wins and losses over the years. The older players from previous years and the younger players this season have

all done their share in putting the Oregon football team on the national map.

But this 2001 class has been there for it all, making the transition from young players eager to learn to mature veterans willing to teach.

"We've tried to set the example with our work ethic and if you look at us seniors, we're not all superstars, but we all play and accept our parts," Peelle said. "Everybody in this class doesn't care about themselves. They care about the team and what they can do to help out."

One aspect that these Ducks have helped out comes in the area of recruiting. As the winning seasons pass and the program gets more exposure in bowl games, a growing number of talented re-

cruits make their way to Eugene.

"The guys coming in are physically closer to playing than usual," Schmid said. "There's so much talent. Sometimes I feel like the only reason I'm playing is because I know some wily old tricks."

Of course, there's more to success than just being talented. The Oregon seniors have formed a tight bond through the years. They remember hanging out with each other as freshmen and looking up at the older players and wondering if they'll ever be like them someday.

"Boy, was I intimidated," Peelle said.

But soon, they played. And soon, they won. And won, and won.

"Always striving for excellence," senior cornerback Steve Smith said. "It feels good to know that I was a part of the class that sort of laid the foundation of the new Oregon Ducks. We helped hype the Ducks up."

Oh there was hype all right. Harrington graced the side of a building in New York last summer, as well as the covers of Sports Illustrated and ESPN: The Magazine. Bauman could be seen on a billboard along the Bay Bridge entering San Francisco and senior tailback Maurice Morris had his own billboard that was placed along Interstate-405 in Los Angeles.

Now, the hype has subsided and the football, and the wins, have done most of the talking. There are still two

more victories, though, that these seniors desperately want. Last season's Civil War loss that knocked them out of the Rose Bowl is a painful memory that won't escape their minds.

Clearly, to beat the Beavers this season will help a great deal. Not only will it exorcise some of those demons from that November 2000 afternoon in Corvallis, but it will give the seniors one last memorable victory to cherish in front of an Autzen Stadium crowd that has cherished watching them.

"It's going to be really hard walking off this field on Dec. 1," Peelle said.

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