

# The Wild Pac

■ Stanford still tops the Pac-10, but after a third of the season, it is still a wide-open race

By Hank Hager  
Oregon Daily Emerald

The Pacific-10 Conference will hold a tournament this year for the first time in conference history.

As a result, the first week of March may prove to be an exciting time of the season for conference teams, but for most, the early part of the season is the most important.

Pac-10 play is underway, with all but Stanford and California having completed close to one-third of the season. The Cardinal and Washington have already proved to be the front-runners for the No. 1 seed in the tourney, with Cal and Washington State looking more and more like the cellar-dwellers they usually are.

## 1. No. 5 Stanford Cardinal (14-1 overall, 4-0 Pac-10)

Head Coach: Tara VanDerveer, 23rd year

Player to watch: Nicole Powell, F

After having a so-so 2001 season, at least by their standards, the Cardinal have rebounded to fifth in the nation and the cream of the crop in the conference. Powell has already been named the Pac-10's player of the week twice this season and is showing no signs of letting up.



However, with the exception of a win over USC, Stanford has not played a tough conference schedule as of yet. Oregon visits Maples Pavilion Sunday and Stanford visits Washington the next week. If they can survive these two tough games, the Cardinal will be on the fast track to keep the top position.

## 2. Oregon Ducks (9-6, 4-2)

Head Coach: Bev Smith, 1st year  
Player to watch: Cathrine Kraayeveld, F

After an off year that saw the Ducks embroiled in turmoil, Oregon looks to return and capture its third Pac-10 title in four seasons. Shaquala Williams, the Ducks' leader and 2000 Pac-10 Player of the Year, returns after sitting out last season with an injury, and will provide a big lift to a young squad.



However, this is a young team, and unless the Ducks can grow up fast, they could be resigned to the middle of the pack. Bets are, though, from early play, that the team will gel and grow up quickly. They'll have to against Stanford this weekend.

## 3. USC Trojans (8-7, 4-2)

Head Coach: Chris Gobrecht, 23rd year  
Player to watch: Aisha Hollans, G

The most balanced team in the conference will put up a fight to come out on top. They've already shown that resiliency against Stanford and Washington, barely losing to both teams. If Hollans and center Ebony Hoffman stay healthy, USC could be a dark horse to take the conference tournament this season. But the Trojans may be a lock to make



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## 4. Washington Huskies (9-5, 4-1)

Head Coach: June Daugherty, 13th year

Player to watch: Loree Payne, G

One of three conference champs last year (with Stanford and Arizona State), Washington has proven to be one of the most successful teams against their Pac-10 foes. Besides a loss at Oregon in recent weeks, the Huskies defeated USC by one and dominated Washington State and Oregon State. The Huskies look to remain atop the standings with games against Arizona State and Stanford in the next two weeks.

## 5. Oregon State (8-7, 4-2)

Head Coach: Judy Spolstra, 13th year

Player to watch: Felicia Ragland, G

Ragland looks to lead the Beavers to their first NCAA Tournament appearance since the 1996. She is the reigning Pac-10 Player of the Year and currently leads the conference in scoring with 20.3 points per game. Without Ragland, though, the Beavers are not as well-rounded as the rest of the conference, with only one other player, Hollye Chapman, placing in the top 20 in scoring.

## 6. Arizona State (12-4, 3-2)

Head Coach: Charli Turner Thorne, 9th year

Player to watch: Amanda Levens, G

The Sun Devils are 11-2 when Levens leads them in scoring, so stopping her is the key to stopping the Arizona State offense. At 20.2 points per game, not many teams have been able to do so. With solid background players in guard Betsy Boardman and center Melody Johnson, the Sun Devils have an excellent chance to run the gambit during the conference tournament. If they can't, they may be resigned to the National Invitation Tournament, but could squeak into the NCAAs if six Pac-10 squads are chosen.

## 7. Arizona Wildcats (5-8, 1-4)

Head Coach: Joan Bonvicini, 23rd year

Player to watch: Elizabeth Pickney, F

This is where the conference begins to drop off, as last year's middle of the pack team begins to drop to the bottom. The 'Cats are ninth in the Pac-10 in scoring defense, allowing 74.4 points per game. They've already given up 83 three-pointers in 13 games, while only Pickney and guard Dee-Dee Wheeler are providing the offense. This should be a down year for Arizona.

## 8. UCLA Bruins (5-9, 2-4)

Head Coach: Kathy Olivier, 9th year

Player to watch: Malika Leatham, C

Internal problems will plague the Bruins this season with two

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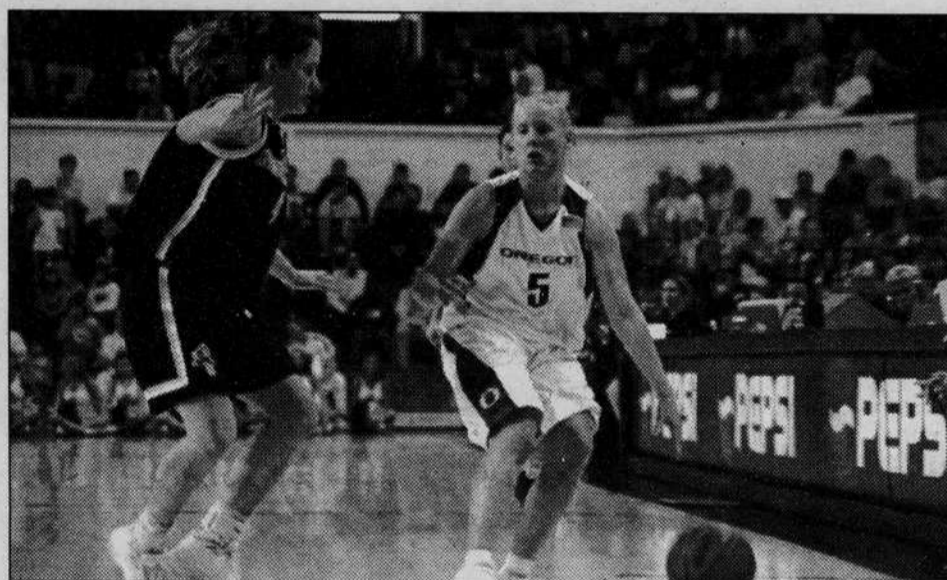
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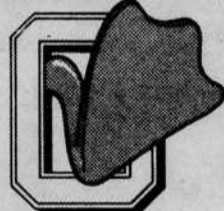


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Washington twins Gioconda (31) and Giuliana (13) Mendiola look to lead the Huskies to the top of the Pac-10 again this year.

Arizona State guard Amanda Levens, seen guarding Oregon's Kourtney Shreve (5), is among the conference leaders in scoring.

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