

## SPORTS

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**Best Bet**  
NCAA basketball:  
Oregon at Washington  
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## Refreshing

■ This year's freshmen class has given the women's basketball team a much-needed boost — both on and off the court

By Adam Jude  
Oregon Daily Emerald

If Amy Taylor had her way, she'd be home right now, in Seattle, practicing with the Washington Huskies women's basketball team, preparing for a game against rival Washington State this weekend.

Then, after the game, she would make the 10-minute trip north to her suburban home in Shoreline and have a nice home-cooked meal.

Instead, Taylor will throw on her white Oregon uniform tonight for a 7 p.m. bout with Southern California at McArthur Court, and, if things go well, dress for a late-night dessert at the University Inn.

"Growing up in Seattle, yeah, I wanted to go to UW," said Taylor, one of six freshmen to join the Oregon women's team this year, "but I'm glad I'm here now."



DAVIS

Freshmen guard Kedzie Gunderson, of Bellevue, Wash., was in a similar situation in high school. Oregon was not even an option for her in the beginning.

"I wasn't even looking at Oregon, and they weren't heavily recruiting me," Gunderson said. "I was always like 'I want to get out of the Northwest, I don't want to be in another Seattle.' But I made the recruiting trip (to Eugene) and gave it a chance. Once I visited, I loved it."

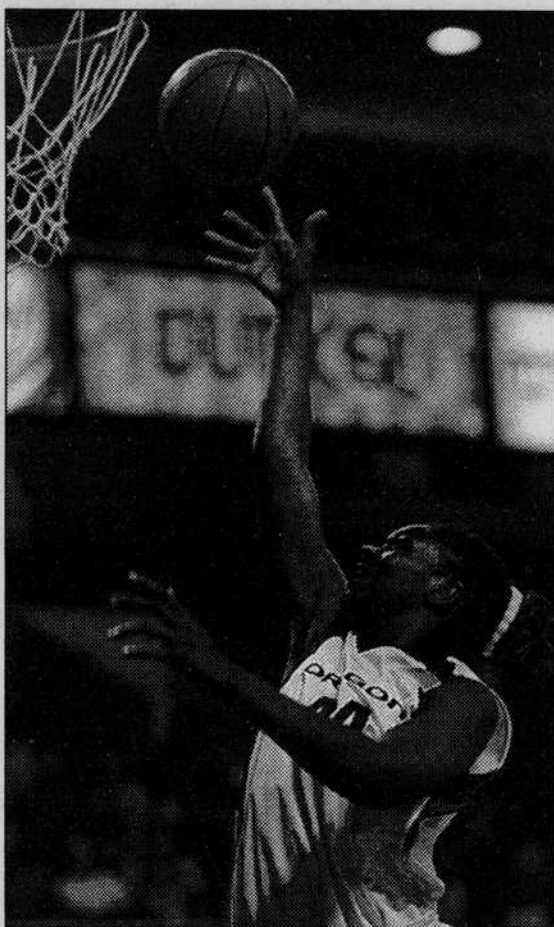
And the program is loving its freshmen, which was ranked by All-Star Girls Report as the 17th-best recruiting class in the country.

The Ducks' four other recruits — Andrea Bills, Brandi Davis, Amy Parrish and Catherria Turner — also came from beyond the Oregon state borders, but have, with the exception of one, found a common bond — the team.

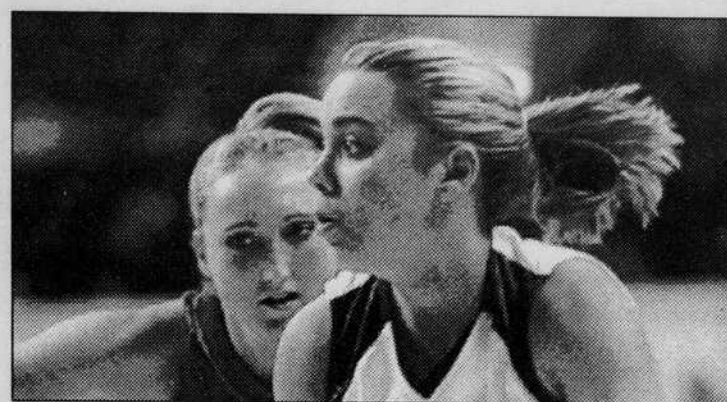
With rave reviews, the freshmen have brought an ailing team together. With the departure of four starters from last year's team plus the addition of a new coach, Bev Smith, the face of Oregon women's basketball suddenly shifted 180 degrees.

"Before the recruiting process began, we knew that we were going to lose a lot of points and a lot of rebounds, but we lost a lot of kids that defined the Oregon program," said assistant coach Dan Muscatell, the recruiting coordinator and the sole survivor from former coach Jody Runge's staff. "(The freshmen) were recruited with the idea of replacing some of that — and they've done a great job. They not only represent a fine group of players, but a fine group of people."

The evidence is everywhere, perhaps most notably in the panache of the upperclassmen. Every so often, veteran guard Shaquala Williams flashes a smile — a rarity in her first three years in the program.



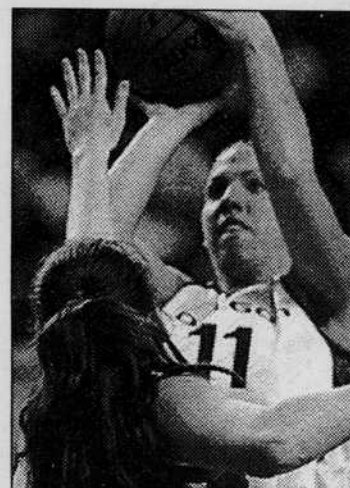
Andrea Bills



Amy Taylor



Kedzie Gunderson



Amy Parrish

"This team is so funny and so outgoing that it would be impossible to sit in a room and not get involved in a conversation," Williams said. "They just draw you in and open you up and make you feel comfortable."

"Their personality is far different from any we've had here before. We never used to laugh in practice before; everything was always so serious."

Turner is the lone exception to the freshmen fairy tale. The 5-foot-6 guard from Tucson, Ariz., who averaged a triple-double in high school, requested and was granted her release from the team on Jan. 9, after playing in just six games.

On a team with five returning guards, playing time has been tough to come by for the freshmen guards. As Taylor said, "You come from high school where you are the star of the team," to become one of the last people off the bench.

It's not an easy transition for anyone. Turner will finish the academic year at Oregon and will likely transfer after that, Parrish said. The five remaining Ducks are contributing as best they can now, while anticipating the future.

### Bills

Of all the freshmen, the 6-foot-3 post from Moreno Valley, Calif., has made the most progress this year — mainly because she's had to.

The only true center on the team, Bills has become a key reserve in the paint, averaging nearly 20 minutes per game since Pac-10 play started. She is also averaging 8.6 points per

game during conference play (third-best on the team) and 5.4 rebounds.

"She can be one of the most powerful forces Oregon's ever had," Taylor said of Bills. "She's not as big as (former Oregon center) Jenny Mowe, but she can pound people. I really admire her."

Bills' Kryptonite?

"I'm working on my free throws," said Bills, who is shooting just 40 percent from the charity stripe this season.

### Davis

"You never know what you've got until it's gone," said the 6-foot guard of sitting out this season for academic reasons.

Davis is a "partial qualifier" this season, meaning she can only participate in practices. She will be eligible to play next year as a sophomore and can play a fourth year if she gets her degree in four years.

"I have to earn it back, which is what I'm doing," the Sonoma, Calif., native said. "Academics have been great for me. I did better than I thought I would do. I'm not satisfied, but I know what I can do now."

Oregon fans won't see Davis on the court until next year, which can't come soon enough for her.

"I cannot wait to play with all of them," Davis said of her freshmen counterparts. "I am so excited just to watch us grow as a team."

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## Ducks look to end skid against Trojans

■ The second-half of Pac-10 play opens for the Ducks tonight with USC coming to the Pit

By Hank Hager  
Oregon Daily Emerald

The Oregon women's basketball team entered the 2001-02 season expecting a big change from last year.

For the most part, they were right. The players are different and so are the coaches, but when it comes right down to it, this year mirrors the 2000-01 season more than meets the eye.

At the end of the first half in the 2000-01 campaign, the Ducks were 5-4, having come off two straight losses to Arizona and Arizona State. This season, Oregon is again 5-4 in the Pac-10, again having lost two straight games. This time, the culprits are Stanford and Oregon State.

The 2001 Ducks were able to pull off a late season run,

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## Ridnour returns home with fan support

■ Oregon guard Luke Ridnour and the Ducks head to Washington to face the Huskies and Cougars

By Peter Hockaday  
Oregon Daily Emerald

The city of Blaine, Wash., nestled next to the Canadian border, has a population of about 3,500. The Washington basketball team's Bank of America Pavilion could hold the entire population of Blaine nearly three times over.

Tonight, they'll try. Blaine's favorite son, Luke Ridnour, is returning to his home state for the second time this weekend as an Oregon star. For the sophomore point guard, that means a chance to see family and a heck of a lot of friends.

"I'm just excited to get back home," Ridnour said.

And with the Huskies sliding, Oregon fans just might outnumber the Washington supporters.

"Maybe not," Ridnour said with a smile Wednesday. "But there'll be a fair share of Oregon fans there."

Ridnour and the 19th-ranked Ducks (14-4 overall, 6-1 Pacific-10 Conference) will head to Washington with the goal of staying atop the Pac-10 standings, where they have been perched since last weekend's conference games. With Southern California — the team co-leading the Pac-10 with Oregon — facing Bay Area foes Stanford and California, the Ducks could very well be playing for sole possession of the conference's top spot.

On the surface, Washington seems like a team ill-suited to knock Oregon off its horse. The Huskies have lost nine of their last 10 games, and hold a 7-11 overall record, 1-7 in the Pac-10.

Washington State, Oregon's opponent on Saturday, is worse. The Cougars are a dismal 4-12 overall and haven't won a conference contest in eight tries this season. Dating back to last year, Washington State has dropped 12 of 13 Pac-10 games, with their only win coming against — surprise — Washington.

But beneath the surface lay two teams still capable of surprising an unwary conference foe, and the Ducks are preparing accordingly.

"Every game in the Pac-10 is big," sophomore forward Luke Jackson said. "We need to go up there and take care of business."

Jackson had a triple-double against Washington last season at the Bank of America Pavilion and was the Pac-10's reigning triple-double holder until Arizona's Luke Walton got one against USC on Jan. 17.

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