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# Oregon Daily Emerald

# SPORTS

**Best Bet**  
**NCAA Basketball:**  
Kentucky at Florida, 6 p.m., ESPN



Tuesday, January 29, 2002

## Mens' teams fight for last tourney spot

■ Washington, Washington State and Oregon State all hope to finish eighth and snag a tournament spot

By Jeff Smith  
Oregon Daily Emerald

At the halfway mark of the Pacific-10 Conference schedule, three men's basketball teams are vying for one coveted spot. From here on out, the intensity grows, the urgency mounts and the room for error shrinks.

Just three games separate these three teams in the standings, with the winner in the end being rewarded with an extension of their season.

What's at stake is a spot in the Pac-10 Men's Basketball Tournament from March 7-9 at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. At the end of the conference schedule, only the top eight teams get to participate and compete for an automatic invitation to the NCAA Tournament.

So the race for No. 8 is on, and the three contenders are the three Northwest schools besides Oregon.

Oregon State (3-6) is currently in eighth place after sweeping the Washington schools last weekend, while the Huskies (2-8) are two games ahead of the last place Cougars (0-10).

For the Beavers, it was a weekend where they gained some much-needed confidence after losing their last five league games heading into the road trip. They almost lost to Washington State on Thursday, but some lucky breaks led to the 74-72 win.

And on Saturday, they dominated Washington, 68-53, just two days after the Huskies upended the Ducks.

So Oregon State is believing and is hoping to keep rolling this week against the Los Angeles schools.

"It's a different Oregon State program," guard Jimmie Hayward told the Corvallis Gazette-Times. "We came together as a team, and we decided that we ain't gonna be losing no more."

"We want to win and make it to the Pac-Tournament — and the NCAA Tournament."

While the Big Dance is indeed a long shot, playing in the Staples Center is certainly not.

"It feels like we're in the right direction," said junior center Philip Ricci, who was voted Pac-10 Player of the Week. "We're setting all our goals right now. Unfortunately, we'd like to have that at the beginning of the season, but that's the way it's going."

"But definitely we're starting on the right track again."

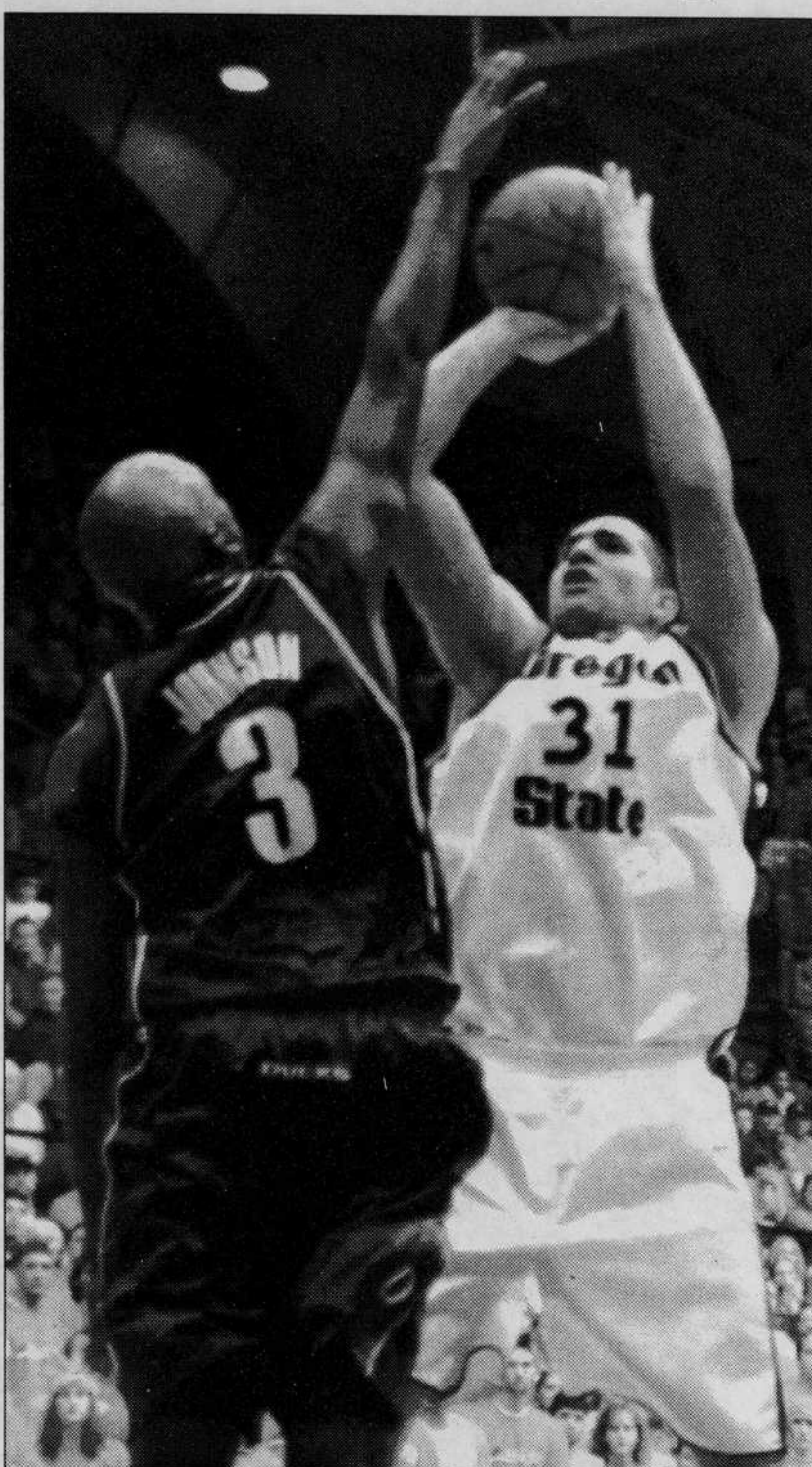
Still, the Beavers will have to keep this newfound swagger with them throughout the season because the Huskies will be breathing down their necks.

Washington played its best game of the season against Oregon in a 97-92 victory last Thursday. But the Huskies were a completely different team in their loss to the Beavers, leaving the Washington players shaking their heads when trying to comprehend the difference between the two games.

"That is obviously unexplainable," point guard Curtis Allen told the Seattle Times. "I don't know what to say about that."

As for those Cougars, their last win came on Dec. 7, in a 70-67

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Thomas Patterson Emerald  
Oregon State's Philip Ricci, shooting against Oregon's Robert Johnson, was the Pac-10 Player of the Week after scoring a combined 37 points in the two OSU wins in Washington.

## Just a few random thoughts

Nobody asked me, but... Pitchers and catchers report for spring training in 17 days...

In his weekly show on KEZI, Oregon men's basketball head coach Ernie Kent vowed to buy donuts and coffee for students who camped out for Thursday's game against UCLA, leaving many to wonder: How many cream-filled treats can Pit Crew President Nate Jolly eat? (By the way, thanks for the T-shirt, Nate)...

A March 29 exhibition game between the Seattle Mariners and the San Diego Padres at PGE Park in Portland sold out in less than two hours Saturday. By the way, Montreal still has a baseball team...

After much deliberation, Joey Harrington chose David Dunn as his agent earlier this month. Since then, Joey has been seen driving a new white Lexus around town...

The Oregon football team is still searching for an offensive coordinator... Former Oregon State head coach Mike Riley is unemployed...

Football recruits can officially sign Feb. 6...

Oregon men's basketball assistant coach Fred Litztenberger, a defensive guru and former women's assistant under Jody Runge, has been credited with the Ducks' success this season. Oregon was last in scoring defense last year, but has jumped to fourth in the Pac-10 this season.

"Technically, they're doing things we were doing," Runge told the Seattle Times last week. "Not big things, just little things that work consistently and give kids confidence that when they're not as fast or quick, they can defend just about anybody."

Regarding women's sensitivity compared to men's, Runge told the Times: "I don't buy into that whole mess. If you want to be a great player, you take coaching and

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Adam Jude  
Out in left field

## Competition increases support of Pac-10 women's basketball



Oregon's Jamie Craighead and USC's Aisha Hollans scramble for a loose ball in a game last season at Mac Court. The Ducks and Trojans are among five teams with four losses in conference play this year.

Adam Amato Emerald

■ Attendance figures are up as the Pac-10 race begins to get interesting

By Hank Hager  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Second place in the Pacific-10 Conference is quite simply up for grabs.

Four squads — Oregon, Oregon State, Arizona State and USC — are tied and looking for a high seed in the inaugural conference tournament, to be held at McArthur Court beginning March 1.

And the fans are beginning to pay attention.

Only two teams — California and Washington State — draw less than 1,000 people per game. Oregon is tops in the conference with 4,574 fans per game, drawing a little more than half the capacity of Mac Court.

In fact, the support the Ducks receive hasn't gone unnoticed. Many teams have called the Pit one of the toughest places they've ever played, and UCLA head coach Kathy Olivier was impressed on

her most recent visit.

"The Pit — it's a tough place to play," she said. "The fans get behind Oregon, almost like a sixth player. They are vocal, and they are loud."

"This is great for women's basketball." Across the board, attendance figures are strong for the Pac-10 women's teams.

Stanford, which is leading the conference by more than three games, is a distant second in the conference at 3,663 spectators per game. The Cardinal play at Maples Pavilion, but the storied gym seats barely more than 7,000.

Seattle, which may be one of the biggest hotbeds for women's basketball on the West Coast, houses Husky basketball, and their fans come out in droves.

Washington draws 3,341 per game and has ridden that to a 6-4 conference record.

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