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ASU jumps into second place

■ With three weeks remaining, Arizona State moves out of the pack and into the second spot in the Pacific-10 Conference

By Hank Hager
 Oregon Daily Emerald

The Pacific-10 Conference women's basketball season has been interesting, but now it begins to heat up.

The Pac-10 race for first has belonged to one team — Stanford. However, the battle for second is still up for grabs.

Two weeks ago, the battle consisted of four teams

— Arizona State, Oregon, Oregon State and USC.

Now, those battle lines need to be redrawn.

For the first time in a while, one team is holding the second spot, and, with some luck, looks to hold it until the inaugural conference tournament comes calling.

Arizona State (18-6 overall, 9-4 Pac-10) holds a half game lead over Washington (13-8, 8-4) after knocking off Oregon State Saturday in Tempe, Ariz. The Beavers (11-11, 8-5) drop to tie for fourth with USC.

In a season that has seen so many twists and turns, every loss could be the back-breaker for a particular squad. Case in point: Oregon (12-10, 7-6), which only two weeks ago was one of the conference's crown jewels, is now a game behind Oregon State and falling fast.

The squad they fell to, however, is looking to the top of the conference with hope in their hearts.

Arizona is tied for sixth with Oregon. But the Wildcats will play conference punching bags UCLA and Washington State in the next couple of weeks. With five games left, Arizona is hoping to just make it high enough in the race to contend in the Pac-10 Tournament.

"Every game is important, and I was proud of our effort and the way we came back from the loss the other night (against Oregon State)," Arizona head coach Joan Bonvicini said after her team's victory over Oregon. "The bottom line is to win our games. There is a lot of things happen this season, but it is a matter of how you handle it and how you respond to adversity."

Wildcats strong from the line

Speaking of the Wildcats, Saturday's game against Oregon may have provided the boost they need for the rest of the season.

Certainly shooting 33-of-43 from the charity stripe will help any team, especially when 17 of those shots come in the final four minutes.

In fact, Arizona senior Elizabeth Pickney was better from the line than from the field against Oregon Saturday. She was only 2-of-13 from the field, but was on fire from the line, going 15-of-16.

"We are a good free throw shooting team, and our free throws were very important in our victory," Arizona freshman Dee-Dee Wheeler said.

Pickney's 15 successful free throws were two more than Oregon attempted the entire game.

Arizona visits Washington on Thursday and will get a breather on Saturday when they visit the Palouse and Washington State in Pullman.

The Wildcats are 2-0 against the Washington schools this season.

To make matters worse for the rest of the conference, the Wildcats are 9-4 this season when scoring more than 70 points in a game.

Arizona is showing signs of improvement at the right time and are looking to be a force down the stretch.

The Wildcats are 4-1 against their five remaining opponents, with their only loss to in-state rival Arizona State.

"Our post players really are coming together," Bonvicini said. "Dee-Dee Wheeler continues to amaze me as a freshman. We need our guards to play defense and rebound, and Amy Grzyb did a great job getting eight rebounds."

Movin' on up

There's a new No. 2 in women's basketball.

Stanford, which has previously held the third spot in the Associated Press poll, moved to No. 2, 73 points behind unanimous No. 1 Connecticut.

The Cardinal, who just swept a weekend series from California, were last ranked that high when the squad was No. 1 in the country for the first six weeks of the 1996-97 season.

That year's squad finished the season ranked No. 3 in the AP poll with a record of 34-2, losing in the semifinals of the NCAA Tournament to Old Dominion.

No other Pac-10 team is ranked this week, although Arizona State received 73 votes.

E-mail reporter Hank Hager at hankhager@dailyemerald.com.

Sports briefs

Golfers tied for 10th place

The Oregon men's golf team is tied for 10th place after one round at the Ping Arizona Intercollegiate at The Raven golf course in Tucson, Ariz. — a par 71, 6,776-yard facility.

The second round was suspended due to darkness Monday evening, with two-thirds of the field still needing to finish the round. Play will resume this morning, with the final round beginning afterward.

Of the 20 teams, the Ducks shot a six-over 290 to share 10th place with Washington, Fresno State and UC-Irvine. No. 7 Southern California (three-under 281) has a one-stroke lead over New Mexico.

Aaron Byers led the Ducks in the first round as he shot a one-under 70 to tie for 11th individually. Chris Heniff finished second among the Ducks with a 72 in round one.

— from staff and wire reports

Softball begins season with three wins

After losing to Oregon in its season opener at the B&G Properties Tournament on Friday, the Texas Tech Red Raiders made up for it on Sunday morning. Behind a strong pitching effort by Kristina Blair, Texas Tech defeated the Ducks 9-1 to improve to 3-2 on the season. The Ducks are 3-2 after defeating Texas A&M Corpus Christi and No. 19 Southwest Texas on Saturday.

"I thought we just had some defensive let downs that we weren't able to overcome," Oregon head coach Brent Rincon said. "But the girls never stopped playing hard, and that was good to see."

Oregon, which had 26 hits in its two games Saturday, managed just four hits against the Red Raiders on Sunday, who scored nine runs on eight hits. Texas Tech scored three runs in the first inning, added two in the second and four in the third, and Oregon's one run came in the bottom of the first inning. Junior Lynsey Haij scored on an RBI single by catcher Jenn Poore to get the Ducks on the board.

Senior Connie McMurren pitched 2 2/3 innings to take the loss for the Ducks. Freshman Lindsey Kontra relieved McMurren in the third inning.

Offensively, Andrea Vidlund, Poore, Ashley Richards and Kristi Hall each produced a hit for the Ducks, who return to tournament action at the UNLV Tournament on Friday.

— from staff and wire reports



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