

## SPORTS

**Sports Editor:**  
Adam Jude  
adamjude@dailymerald.com  
**Assistant Sports Editor:**  
Jeff Smith  
jeffsmith@dailymerald.com

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## Ducks' NCAA hopes in jeopardy

■ After eight straight appearances at the NCAA Tournament, Oregon is close to having a March vacation

By Hank Hager  
Oregon Daily Emerald

It has been nine years since the Oregon women's basketball team has not made an appearance in the NCAA Tournament.

For eight straight seasons, the team has been a force in the Pacific-10 Conference, winning or sharing conference crowns in 1999 and 2000. Two 10-8 seasons are the worst the squad has performed since the Ducks went 3-15 in the 1992-93 season.

This year's team, at 7-6 in Pac-10 play (12-10 overall), could be the first to miss the postseason since Elwin Heiny roamed the sidelines at McArthur Court.

However, this is not the first time Oregon has been on the bubble.

"I think (last year) we were in a better position because Stanford had losses, and we kind of expected other people to beat them," senior forward Alyssa Fredrick said. "Now, everyone has to beat them."

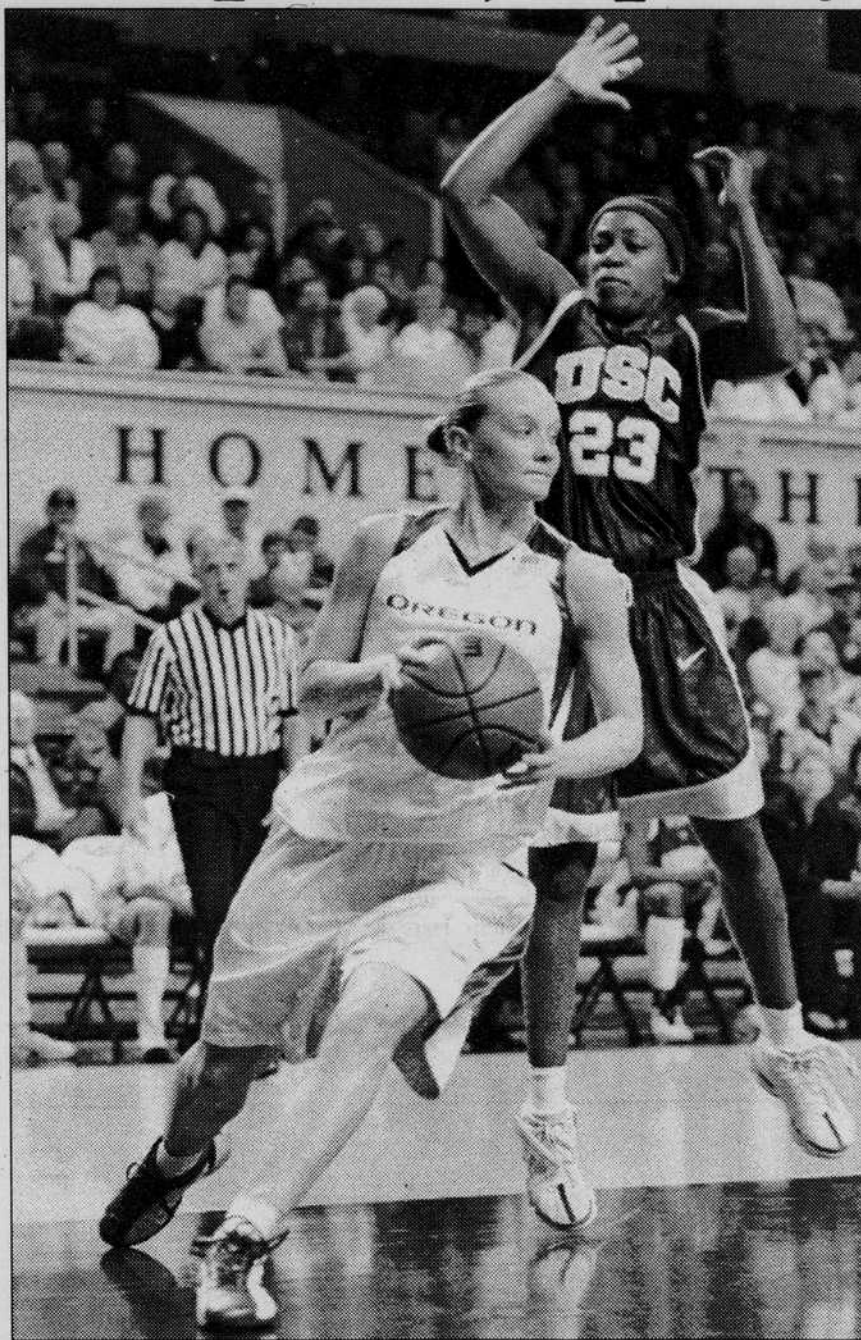
With five games remaining last season, the Ducks were 6-7 in conference play, and the team was embroiled in turmoil due to the issues surrounding former coach Jody Runge.

But the team pulled together and finished at 10-8 after four consecutive wins to end the regular season.

This year's team is one game better, but unlike last season, the Pac-10 is a muddled group of teams looking for someone to throw them a bone. One game can make a world of difference, but Oregon will most likely not make the NCAA Tournament with the same record as last season.

"I don't think 10-8 is good enough."

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Senior guard Jamie Craighead, a veteran of three NCAA Tournaments, said the Ducks need to win the Pac-10 Tournament at Mac Court to receive a ninth consecutive bid to March Madness.

Adam Amato Emerald

## Recruits to sign letters of intent beginning today

■ Ducks receive word that a defensive line prospect may have not be signing with BYU

By Adam Jude  
Oregon Daily Emerald

For most college football coaches, today is bigger than Halloween.

Today is Signing Day, the first day that recruits can submit national letters of intent.

But the big question remains: Will it be a trick or a treat for the Ducks this year?

Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti may have landed the best treat Tuesday, when one of the top prospects in the country reportedly made a verbal commitment with the Ducks.

Haloti Ngata — a 6-foot-4, 305-pound defensive tackle from Salt Lake City who is ranked the No. 2 prep prospect in the country by TheInsiders.com — had committed to Brigham Young, but apparently changed his mind and is headed for Eugene.

Haloti is "a true dominating defensive tackle that can wreak havoc from the first second he steps on campus," wrote Chris Fetters of TheInsiders.com. "If Bellotti were to secure Ngata for this class, it would be a coup of unheard proportions."

Bellotti's Ducks are coming off the best season in Oregon football history, highlighted by a 38-16 victory over Colorado in the Fiesta Bowl on Jan. 1. The Ducks finished the season ranked No. 2 in the country, their best-ever ranking.

In the biggest area of concern, Oregon lost both of its starting defensive backs — seniors Rashad Bauman and Steve Smith — and starting tailback Maurice Morris. According to TheInsiders.com, Oregon has made offers to six defensive backs and six running backs this year.

One of the corners who already made a verbal commitment to Oregon is Marques Binns, a 5-foot-11, 160-pound Los Angeles-native who is a good friend of Oregon defensive back Steven Moore.

Running back Hershel Dennis, who led powerhouse Poly Tech High School to three straight state titles in Long Beach, Calif., is also expected to make his decision

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## Oregon ready to take its show on the road

■ All five of the Ducks' losses have come away from Mac Court, and Stanford and California will test them this week in the Bay Area

By Jeff Smith  
Oregon Daily Emerald

They're the 13th-best men's basketball team in the nation after being unranked a week ago.

They're Dick Vitale's "Team of the Week" in his column on ESPN.com.

They're the sole owners of first place in the unpredictable Pacific-10 Conference.

Yet, they feel that some people still doubt them, and they plan on changing that this week.

The Ducks (17-5, 9-2) returned to practice Tuesday after taking two days off to rest their bodies after sweeping the L.A. schools in an energized atmosphere at McArthur Court.

Oregon raised its home record to 13-0, with the list of victims now including

No. 11 Arizona, No. 15 UCLA, No. 20 Stanford and No. 25 USC.

But — and here's the Ducks' mantra for this week — Oregon has yet to prove it can consistently win on the road, where it's just 4-5.

And this week's road trip means a visit to Stanford's Maples Pavilion, where the Ducks have lost 16 straight, and California's Haas Pavilion.

So, let the road talk begin. "We're really looking forward to getting on the road and proving to people that we can win there too," sophomore Luke Ridnour said.

"We have to play twice as hard on the road, and now going on the road is totally different because we're on top," senior Anthony Lever said.

"It's going to be a tough road for us, but we have to come out with victories that'll tell everybody else that we're for real," senior Freddie Jones said. "We know we are. We just have to continue to try and prove ourselves."

These Ducks know what it's like to be in the bottom half of the standings after experiencing last season's dismal 5-13 Pac-10 record and don't plan on going back down there.

Now, Oregon has first place all to itself but is only a game ahead of USC (8-3) and Arizona (8-3).

"I haven't looked at the standings, but I know we're at the top, and that's where we want to stay," Ridnour said.

Of the seven remaining Pac-10 games, three are at the Pit against the league doormats in Oregon State (Feb. 16) and the two Washington schools (Feb. 21-23). The other four games are on the road, which begin with the two Bay Area teams this week and a rematch with the Trojans and the Bruins at the end of the month.

"We just have to bring it every night," Jones said. "We have a target on us now, and that's what good teams want. They relish the situation."

Should the Ducks beat the Cardinal on the road Thursday for the first time since Jan. 13, 1986, they will no doubt continue to receive more national attention as the Pac-10 leader.

Clearly, though, some big-time personalities need to do more homework on the Ducks. While ESPN's Dick Vitale did give Oregon respect, he misspelled

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Adam Amato Emerald

Senior Anthony Lever and the Ducks know the importance of winning on the road as they head south to California for two games this week.