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# Milwaukee holds off Celtics

**By Mike Szostak**  
The Providence Journal

BOSTON (KRT) — If the Celtics are going to break their six-year playoff drought this season, they have to defend the parquet and beat teams like the Milwaukee Bucks.

They did neither last night and suffered a 95-92 defeat. Their first home game in three weeks turned out to be their third consecutive loss.

"We compete well and give ourselves a chance to win, but we have to win the close games, the games that are three points or less," Paul Pierce said.

And they have to win those games at the Fleet Center.

"We have to win big games, and that's something we haven't been doing at home. Teams feel like they can come in here and get a win," he added.

Teams like Milwaukee. The Bucks were a great test of how prepared the Celtics are for their stretch run. The Bucks are 33-23 and second in the Eastern Conference, the Celtics 31-26 and fourth. Both teams rely on perimeter shooting. The Bucks are the best in the NBA with their 46.1 shooting percentage.

A year or two ago, the Celtics couldn't play with teams like Milwaukee. Now they can play, but they just can't beat them with consistency.

"When the game was on the line, they made tough shots," said guard Kenny Anderson. "The shot clock

was running down, and Ray Allen makes a big shot. They got second chances. That's a veteran team. We got to find a way to beat them."

Even though the Celtics lost, here's how close this game was and these teams are. Each made 37 field goals. Boston had eight three-pointers, Milwaukee seven. Boston had 43 rebounds, Milwaukee 42; Boston 21 assists, Milwaukee 18; Boston 14 turnovers, Milwaukee 13; Boston seven blocked shots, Milwaukee seven; Boston an 11-point lead, Milwaukee a 10-point lead.

So what was the difference? Milwaukee's 14 free throws to Boston's 10, two each by Glenn Robinson and Sam Cassell in the last 10 seconds. And Milwaukee's 48.7 shooting percentage. Boston shot 41.6 percent.

"They're a very good team led by three very good players. They're tough to guard, especially when they shoot the basketball when they're challenged, and the ball goes in," Celtics coach Jim O'Brien said. "We competed very well and came up short."

Cassell, the feisty guard, scored 26 points on an assortment of jump shots and five free throws. Allen, who can score from anywhere on the court, it seems, and Robinson, who drains 15-footers with ease, each scored 22. Michael Redd, another shooter, provided a spark off the bench by scoring 10 points.

The Celtics responded, predictably,

with Antoine Walker and Pierce. Walker finished with 30 points on 13-for-27 shooting. Pierce had 21. Anderson was the only other Celtic in double figures with 10 points.

Newcomer Tony Delk struggled mightily in his Fleet Center debut as a Celtics guard. He was 1-for-8 from the floor and scored only four points. Rodney Rogers, the other half of the Feb. 20 trade that sent three Celtic reserves and a draft choice to Phoenix, played well. He logged 16 minutes, scored nine points and grabbed a couple of rebounds.

The Celtics, cheered by a crowd of 15,598 that included Tebucky Jones of the Patriots and Hall of Famer Bill Russell, each of whom received a standing ovation, refused to go down quietly. They trailed by five with 15 seconds left, but Walker drained a trey making it 91-89.

After Robinson's free throws, Erick Strickland buried a three-pointer from the right corner, making it 93-92. Cassell's free throws put Milwaukee ahead by three with 5.5 seconds left, and Walker's off-balance three-point attempt at the buzzer grazed the rim.

"I don't think we defended them at crucial parts of the game," Pierce said. "We're killing ourselves. ... That's when we should be more focused."

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## Men's

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championship. Oregon's last victory in the NCAA Tournament came in 1960. Since then, the Ducks have lost in the first round in 1961, 1995 and 2000.

With a Pac-10 championship, this year's Ducks would help their chances of getting a favorable seed in the Big Dance and playing in a much closer location than their trip to Buffalo, N.Y., two years ago.

First things first, though, and that's the tough USC Trojans (19-7, 11-5), who are a game behind Oregon in a three-way tie for second place with California and Arizona. The Ducks outlasted the Trojans in a hard-fought 73-69 victory on Feb. 2.

"They think they owe us one," Oregon point guard Luke Ridnour said. "This is a must-win for us, and if we're going to win on the road we have to do it this week."

Kent says his team has gone through "tremendous growth" because of their two heartbreaking overtime losses in the Bay Area earlier this month. The players

say they've learned from those experiences and remain confident in their ability to win away from McArthur Court.

But the fact remains that Oregon hasn't had much success on the road.

"This is it," center Chris Christoffersen said. "This is the time to prove to people that we're a team that is worth winning the Pac-10 title. You can't really play for much more than that."

Christoffersen, who is healthy after being sick last week, could be a big factor in tonight's game, as the Ducks try to contain USC's Sam Clancy and David Bluthenthal. Clancy scored 25 points in the Trojans' loss at Eugene this season.

USC will be without junior center Kostas Charissis, who recently suffered a fractured left ankle.

"Now that Charissis is out, Chris could become more of a factor because of his size," Kent said. "If Chris plays to his ability, he could become the unknown ingredient in the game."

In USC head coach Henry Bibb's eyes, there are many ingredi-

ents to watch out for when dealing with the Ducks.

"You always know Freddie Jones is tough, and Luke Ridnour is tough," Bibby said. "Can't forget about (Luke) Jackson, and you can't forget about the guys coming off the bench like (James) Davis and Lever."

"There are a lot of people we have to be conscious of."

Tonight's game will be televised by Fox Sports Net, and Saturday's game will be broadcast across the nation on CBS. With six Pac-10 teams separated by just two games in the standings, there will be many things to watch for as the league contenders close out the regular season.

But since the Ducks are alone atop the standings, all they have to worry about is themselves.

"All of us are so excited to be in a position to win a championship," Jones said. "I know I've never won a championship in anything so I'm looking forward to it."

"It's going to be a great game."

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## Wrestling

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"Our guys have to cut three to five pounds at the maximum," he said. "We have guys that have gotten bigger, particularly those that have gotten hurt and because of not being able to train have gained a little bit of body weight, but it's not an issue."

Because of the Ducks' ability to maintain their average weight near their maximum competition weight, they have not had to deal with the difficulties of cutting weight.

"Our goal was to come into the season in as good as shape as possible," junior Casey Hunt said. "We're not that far from our wrestling weight, so over the course of the season it has gotten easier and easier. We're down to where, after practice, a lot of us are only a pound or two off, which can easily be eliminated by half an hour of working out."

Kearney has appreciated the extra effort his team can put into prac-

tices because there has been little issue with weight.

"It makes it easier for them to get the good hard training in, and it makes it easier to concentrate on getting better and developing skills as opposed to 'How much do I weigh?'" he said.

The NCAA's newer regulations follow another set of strict rules on how collegiate wrestlers are allowed to cut weight. In 1998, the NCAA prohibited the use of many techniques, including laxatives, saunas and steam rooms, as well as practices like self-induced vomiting and excessive food and fluid restriction.

Startling methods, such as wrestlers wearing vapor-impermeable rubber suits to bed or while working out, or athletes spitting into cups to lose weight, are now outlawed.

Oregon's 149-pounder, Hunt, said that with the new NCAA regulations there is little need for wrestlers now to use extreme measures to cut weight.

"They would make it easier to lose weight, but (with the new regulations) you just don't have to cut that much weight."

Hunt was also one of the Ducks who jumped up a weight class this year moving from the 141-pound class. He is pleased that he and the majority of the Ducks have not had to deal with the problems associated with cutting.

"Cutting weight makes it hard to study for some people," Hunt said. "When you start taking water out of your system and you are a little dehydrated, all you can think about is water. You are beyond getting hungry, you just need some water."

Oregon is hungry for its first league championship in 20 years as the team heads to Corvallis for the Pacific-10 Conference tournament this weekend. The top four wrestlers in each weight class from the conference tournament continue on to the national tournament in Albany, N.Y.

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