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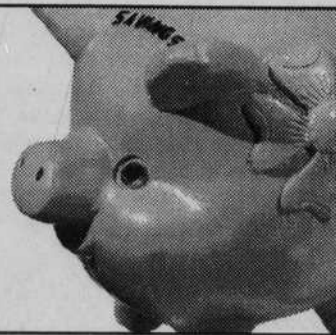
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Oregon Daily Emerald



Coaches would like a reduced schedule

■ Several Pac-10 coaches say they would welcome scheduling changes for next season

By Hank Hager
Oregon Daily Emerald

Ever since the Pacific-10 Conference began sponsoring women's college basketball in 1986, the conference schedule has included an 18-game slate.

In this schedule, each team plays the other nine Pac-10 schools twice — once at home and once on the road.

Now that the inaugural conference tournament is here, many of the conference's coaches would like to see that schedule abbreviated — possibly to as few as 14 games.

"I'm very much in favor of a shorter conference schedule," Arizona State head coach Charli Turner Thorne said. "Much like the Big 12 (Conference) and (Southeastern Conference) where we would have more flexibility in our scheduling."

Only one Pac-10 squad has been continually ranked this season. Stanford, which has been in the top 10 since the season started, has become a rock at No. 2 in the nation.

Some believe that the parity that has made the Pac-10 a competitive league has also hampered its ability to gain national recognition. Often teams such as Arizona State are on the cusp of a national ranking, only to lose that possibility because of a conference loss.

If a 14- or 16-game league season were to be adopted, this would open up time for additional nonconference games, which some believe would enhance the Pac-10's image.

The 18-game schedule "doesn't give you a lot to mess with," USC head coach Chris Gobrecht said.

However, Gobrecht did add that she would rather play a conference

opponent if she had to choose.

Gobrecht said she was a proponent of keeping with the 18-game schedule before the season, but because of the conference's parity and the shortened amount of time to play the games, she may change her mind.

"Having been through the experience this year, I could see going to 16," she said. "It was hard to play Pac-10 teams when we played them."

Turner Thorne agrees with this sentiment.

"When we are ranked and lose in conference, we fall out of the rankings every time," she said. "The biggest way we can help ourselves is to get away from the double round-robin and have more pre-season nonconference games. It would help our national image."

"We'd use them the right way."

There is, however, some dissent among the ranks on the issue of a shortened season.

UCLA head coach Kathy Olivier, who guided the Bruins to a 4-14 record and No. 8 seed in the tournament, said she has wavered on the issue. Whereas at the beginning of the season she would have preferred the shortened season, she now questions that possibility.

"At the beginning, when we were doing all this voting and trying to figure out the best way to have the tournament, I was thinking more of a smaller conference (season) and to not play everyone twice," she said. "When I thought of that, how do you do that? I think that would be difficult. The reality of it is, to be a champion, you need to play everyone twice."

"I'm still trying to find out what the best solution is."

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

Parity reigns in Big Ten women's tournament

By Rick Burchfield
Daily Collegian (Pennsylvania State U.)

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. (U-WIRE) — With the Big Ten women's basketball regular season now over there is still one last chance for teams to impress the NCAA selection committee. That chance started Thursday when the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament began in Indianapolis.

One can usually count on an upset or two in any tournament, but this one could have more than its fair share. The Big Ten has seven teams with at least .500 records in the conference and only one that is below the break-even mark overall. The following are the teams who will be competing in the first half of the conference bracket.

No. 9 Michigan

The Wolverines were picked by many experts to win the conference and in the beginning of the season it looked like that would prove to be true. They won 10 out of their first 11 games and were ranked as high as No. 12 in the nation.

Then came conference play. Michigan fell in six of its first seven Big Ten games and never seemed to fully recover.

No. 8 Illinois

Illinois was one of the rare teams in the conference that got worse as the season went on. Illinois fin-

ished the regular season with three straight losses and went from a contender to a basement dweller in the Big Ten. Still, Illinois is 14-12 overall and could shake things up in the tournament.

No. 5 Indiana

The Hoosiers might be the sentimental pick this year. On Sunday, Indiana head coach Kathi Bennett coached just her first game since the car accident that broke the second vertebra in her neck.

The team has rallied around Bennett and closed the season with three straight wins. Bennett will coach Indiana at noon on Friday in a game against Iowa. She said she has been impressed with her team.

No. 4 Iowa

Iowa comes into the tournament as the conference's second-highest scoring team after Minnesota. The transition game that the Hawkeyes use has given them the edge in some key games, including one each against the top two teams in the conference (Purdue and Penn State).

No. 1 Purdue

Purdue has now won the regular season conference crown in consecutive seasons and has been the most consistent team in the Big Ten this year. However, the Boilermakers lost to Minnesota and defeated Penn State in the last minute, showing that they can be beaten.