

Hager

continued from page 9

hold this year's tournament. The other — Stanford's Mike Montgomery — has been quiet of late.

That, however, does not matter, as eight schools — the required amount to consent to play in the tournament — decided it was time to extend the season.

Of course, if the men's side hadn't agreed to the tournament, then the women's version would have never happened. And what a shame that would have been, especially after witnessing the great play of last weekend.

Not only did the Ducks supplant themselves as a possibility of having an NCAA Tournament bid thrown their way — even after a so-so season — Oregon State, Stanford and Arizona State all laid foundations for a strong postseason experience.

For the Ducks and Beavers, those experiences may come in the form of the Women's National Invitation Tournament, but that's still a good representation for the conference.

And Stanford, which many believed was unbeatable, received a wake up call from Arizona State in the women's championship game Monday. But it's probably the best thing that could have happened to Stanford. After sweeping through the Pac-10, the Cardinal are blood thirsty once again and should go into the Big Dance with a new sense of life.

The trick now will be sustaining the tournaments in the coming seasons. The men's version will become

synonymous with Los Angeles, at least until the 2006 season. The conference agreed to a contract with the Staples Center to become partners for the tournament, and a gut feeling tells me that contract will be extended to the seasons after that.

The folks that ran the women's tournament at McArthur Court should be commended for hosting a great set of games, but the decision to play next season in San Jose, Calif., could not have been any more right on.

Compaq Center at San Jose is a grand facility, emblazoned with marble everywhere the eye can see, and the entrance to the building is breathtaking. But what is more important regards the fact that it is a modern, 21st century arena, and is one of the finest on the West Coast.

Unlike Mac Court, which had a problem fitting 10 teams and personnel into its space, the San Jose building has that taken care of. It was built with tournaments like the Pac-10 in mind, and will be a boon to the future of the women's basketball in the conference.

With Fox Sports Net most likely in tow for the next few years, women's basketball will be put on the map, and schools like Arizona State and Washington — and perhaps even the Ducks — will become household names.

When it comes right down to it, the Pac-10 Tournaments are more about promoting the game and its players than making money. At least that's the way it should be.

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

Basketball

continued from page 9

people's minds that the Ducks are a worthy Pac-10 champion.

Oregon was back to running its style of play, once scoring nine straight points off four straight steals and fast break baskets. The Ducks were also playing a much more aggressive defense than they had been in the first half.

"We just played the way we did all year in the second half," Kent said.

For the Huskies (11-18, 5-13), it was a second half funk that ended their downtrodden season, but they did feel encouraged with the way they played against Oregon in the first half.

"This team didn't quit on any-

thing, we kept fighting and gave ourselves another chance to play, which unfortunately does now end," Washington head coach Bob Bender said.

The Huskies entered the game with a lot of confidence after splitting the regular season with Oregon. They had been telling the media all week how excited they were to play the Ducks, which, in turn, gave Oregon extra motivation.

"We knew they wanted to play us," Jones said. "We wanted to play them too. We haven't shown them our best game and wanted to show them what kind of team we are."

"We all read what they said in the paper," Jackson said. "I feel that they're not going to talk as much now."

But there will still be comments

in today's newspapers to take notice of and, this time, it's coming from USC's direction. After the Trojans dismantled the Cardinal Thursday, Pac-10 Player of the Year Sam Clancy made a strong statement about his team's desire to beat Oregon tonight.

"They stole two from us," Clancy said of Oregon's two victories over USC this season. "They stole two. And we're coming to get one back."

Consider the Ducks up for the challenge, with the winner advancing on to Saturday afternoon's Pac-10 Tournament title game at 3 p.m. on CBS.

"We like the match-up with SC," Kent said. "We understand the way they play."

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Pac-10

continued from page 9

scoring just two points. But in the second half, he was back to being his usual self and wowing the Staples Center with one-handed block shots and a thundering breakaway dunk.

"Freddie's a catalyst of this team and even though he is sick, he came out and played hard, still making unbelievable plays," point guard Luke Ridnour said.

'Quotable'

Luke Jackson on his dunk in

the second half that ended with him falling hard on his back: "I think my pride is hurting a little bit more than my back."

Mark Michaelis on his long-range three-pointer that banked in from the top of the key, prompting Michaelis to run down the floor in laughter: "I'd rather be lucky than good."

Jones on his reaction to not being named Pac-10 Player of the Year: "My reaction is I got a Pac-10 championship. I'm happy."

Washington sophomore Doug Wrenn on whether or not he'll be returning to the Huskies or leav-

ing early for the NBA: "A lot of people say I could come out early and be a solid pick. But I could probably come out early next year and be a lottery pick."

USC's Brandon Granville, after his Trojans crushed Stanford, on the conference tourney: "It's one game elimination. We're trying to win the Pac-10 Tournament since we didn't win the regular season championship."

USC plays regular season champ Oregon at 6 p.m. today.

E-mail assistant sports editor Jeff Smith at jeffsmith@dailymerald.com.


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NCAA Basketball Tournament
Preview
on stands **Thursday, March 14**

Horoscope by Linda C. Black

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (March 8). Disgusted with the way things are? Ready for a change? Well, what are you waiting for? Take action! A difficult situation may be a blessing in disguise. It could finally get you to do something you've been thinking about for years.

To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) - Today is a 7 - Do you have the feeling that the boss, your teacher or your Mom is watching your every move? That's probably true, but a talent scout is watching, too. Put on a great performance.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) - Today is an 8 - An issue you've been worried about is finally resolved. Regardless of the outcome, you're just relieved that the wait is over. Even if you decided not to do something you wanted to do, celebrate.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) - Today is a 6 - You have a lot now, but that may not always be the case. Better stash some more away for the future. It's not about you not having enough - you will. It's about abundance.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) - Today is a 7 - It's wise to get help from a person with a lot of experience. That'll be much easier than doing an unfamiliar job all by yourself. Be smart, especially if somebody important is watching.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) - Today is a 6 - There's no slack - you're working from morning to night. It's about time. You've let things stack up. Hit it hard so that you can do what your mate wants on Saturday night.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) - Today is an 8 - A few final touches, and you can relax. Take a break. You've had to be a stern taskmaster to keep everyone on schedule. Now, be a gracious host or hostess.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) - Today is a 6 - Don't be discouraged, even when something you try doesn't work. It's part of the learning process. A loved one will help you come up with a better idea. Talk it over.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) - Today is an 8 - You're getting inspired and determined. The first thing you try may not work, but the second or third thing will. Keep at it!

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) - Today is a 6 - This day isn't much fun, but it could be quite productive. You could benefit from your participation, so hustle!

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) - Today is a 7 - Allocate less time for work and more time for family. Somebody who'd never ask will benefit enormously.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) - Today is a 6 - Easy does it. Your finances don't stretch quite far enough to fulfill all your fantasies yet. Does that mean you should abandon your dreams? You can! Take on more work, instead.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) - Today is a 7 - Continue to be pleasant, even if someone gets hostile. It's a very effective defense. Also listen, just in case there's a lesson to be learned. You'll win this one.

090 BIRTHDAYS

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Love, Arkadi

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