

Men's

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first frame.

The only reason the Ducks led 34-26 at halftime was because of their free-throw shooting. Oregon went to the line 18 times, compared to Montana's five trips, and the Ducks made 10 of those charity shots.

"They were more funny than getting in my head," Johnson said.

Johnson shook the pesky chants and ended the game with a career-high 15 points.

In the second half, Oregon picked up the pace and simultaneously widened the score. In con-

trast to the first half, the Ducks opened the second frame with a layin by Johnson and a thundering dunk from Christoffersen. The Ducks improved their shooting to 53.8 percent in the second half and once again dominated the free-throw line, taking 22 charity shots to Montana's 10.

For the Ducks, the key to winning was in the defense.

"We might not have played as sharp as we could have offensively, but we were still playing well on defense," Jackson said.

Afterwards, the Ducks said they were simply happy to advance to the second round, instead of suffer-

ing the same fate of favorites like Gonzaga, Marquette, USC and Oklahoma State.

"We didn't come out and get in the flow like we should have," Ridnour said. "We know we have to play better on Saturday, but the important thing is that we get to play on Saturday."

Jackson echoed Ridnour's sentiments.

"The important thing is that we got the win," Jackson said.

Oregon will play Wake Forest in the Round of 32 on Saturday.

E-mail sports reporter Peter Hockaday at peterhockaday@dailyemerald.com.

Today's crossword solution

M	A	S	O	N	K	A	R	L	L	A	S	H		
O	U	T	G	O	I	D	E	A	E	M	M	A		
S	T	A	R	S	A	N	D	S	T	R	I	P	E	S
S	O	B	E	I	T	S	A	V	E	L	A	P		
	S	N	O	W	W	I	N	T	E	R	S			
E	T	A	G	N	A	T	A	D	E					
N	A	S	A	E	X	A	M	E	A	V	E	S		
D	R	E	S	S	R	E	H	E	A	R	S	A	L	S
S	P	A	C	E	N	O	T	E	E	M	I	T		
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U	T	O	P	I	A	S	L	A	O	S				
N	U	T	O	W	N	S	T	U	T	O	R	S		
I	N	T	E	R	N	A	L	R	E	V	E	N	U	E
T	E	E	D	E	R	I	E	E	V	E	N	T		
E	R	R	S	D	E	P	P	R	E	S	T	S		



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Softball

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The 2002 team is marching into its first Pacific-10 Conference game of the season Saturday with disturbing memories, but a bright outlook. Some of last year's wounds still sting. But players — former and current — believe they have learned from a season marred by infighting and a disappointing 1-20 conference record.

Promising season soured

Player and coach relationships deteriorated in mid-April 2001 as the team amassed a 23-24 overall, 1-5 Pacific-10 Conference record. Members took a week off from practice beginning April 12, 2001, and attended two meetings, one with an Athletic Department administrator and the team coaches.

Several players said the meetings were productive and mended some rifts. It was not to last.

Citing personal reasons, senior catcher Kelly Planche quit the team just minutes before the start of an April 20 game against Washington. Gamez supported her decision and her reasons, Planche told The Register-Guard at the time. She was unavailable for comment on this story.

Walker said the assistant coaches had gradually divided players into cliques that a team meeting couldn't bridge, and "that's why everyone quit." She said Planche was a prime target and was "singled out" by the assistant coaches and some players because of her vocal criticisms of team policies and some players' work ethic. And in one of the meetings, some players berated Planche for her style.

"She's upfront, and they had a problem with that," Walker said. "Kelly was a great leader, in my opinion. Some didn't think she was or didn't admit it."

Walker, too, said she was unhappy with the treatment she received from certain players and the assistant coaches. She said some suggested the only reason she was the team's starting shortstop was because she and Gamez were Mormon.

"We had a great relationship based on our background," Walker said. "I did a lot of church things with him and his family. And there were issues of my getting more playing time because of that."

Gamez said he has stayed in touch with Walker but refused to comment further for this story when reached at his Eugene home.

Former assistant coach Tom Royder said he is now a career counselor and assistant softball coach for Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, La., because his Oregon coaching contract wasn't renewed at the end of the 2001 season. He said Walker's accusations are news to him.

"I'm not aware of anything like that," he said in a phone interview. "I don't believe that type of situation was a factor."

The other former assistant coach, Lana Ross, whose contract was also not renewed after the 2001 season, said Tuesday she preferred to answer questions through her Portland, Ore., lawyer. Ross said, "as much as I would like to respond, I cannot on the advice of my lawyer."

Royder elaborated on his interpretation of the events leading to the team meetings and Planche's abrupt departure.

"Oftentimes there are differences in playing and coaching philosophy," he said. "That all happened to hit at one point in one season."

Internal drama continued to haunt the team in May.

Former Oregon football punter Kurtis Doerr, who was dating designated hitter and catcher Missy Coe, shouted obscenities at Gamez at the

conclusion of the team's May 12 season-ending loss to Stanford. He also yelled, "Way to get your team to play for you, coach."

Coe was one of the three players who quit the team in the offseason.

Pitcher and outfielder Lisa Wangler also transferred after the 2002 season. The 2001 Oregon MVP is now with the No. 4 Nebraska Cornhuskers. She was in Sacramento for a softball tournament Thursday and was unavailable for comment.

On to new diamonds

This year's softball team plans to rise like a phoenix from the ashes. The Ducks are 14-8 heading into the regular-season opener against No. 14 Oregon State on Saturday.

But the team hasn't forgotten where it came from.

"The departure of those three kids has had a profound impact on who we thought might be in our starting lineup," interim head softball coach Brent Rincon said of the departure of Walker, Wangler and Coe.

But players said they have learned from the tumultuous season that claimed four players, two assistant coaches and a five-year head coach.

"I don't know exactly why it is so much better this year," pitcher Connie McMurren said. "We have some new people, but I can't really explain it. We play together on the field and we communicate on and off the field, which is essential."

Walker said she is now living at home in Sandy, Utah, with her new husband and is the starting shortstop for the BYU Cougars.

"I regret what happened," she said. "But I would venture to say that those of us who were involved have moved on."

Emerald staff members Adam Jude and Chris Cabot contributed to this report. E-mail reporter Eric Martin at ericmartin@dailyemerald.com.

Preview

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terson, who is now starting at shortstop for Brigham Young; Kelly Planche, a standout catcher; and Missy Coe, who finished second on the team with 30 RBI. Rincon said that the departure of the players changed the expected lineup of the Ducks, but many very capable replacements have stepped in to fill the void.

Lakeesha Eversley, a junior transfer from Arizona Western Junior College, has started in 19 of the Ducks' 22 games in the outfield. Batting .321 with three home runs and a team high of five stolen bases, Eversley is an all-around threat for Oregon.

"Lakeesha is a unique combination of speed and power," Rincon said. "She has driven in some big runs for us and just excelled defensively and also gives us a base stealing threat."

Stepping into the catching chores for Oregon this season has

been Jennifer Poore, a sophomore transfer from Mississippi. Poore has stepped up to be a leader on the field both offensively and defensively driving in 12 runs and catching a pitching staff that has a combined earned run average of 2.75.

Because of a shoulder injury that has kept junior Andrea Vidlund from taking the circle, Oregon's pitching staff is limited to three hurlers. This has not slowed them down.

In addition to senior Connie McMurren, who has highlighted the Oregon pitching staff since her freshman year, and sophomore Anissa Meashintubby, who leads the team with a 2.20 ERA and 42 strikeouts, the Ducks have welcomed the addition of freshman Lindsey Kontra. After 11 appearances, Kontra is 5-3 with a 2.76 ERA. She has 26 strikeouts to go with 10 walks.

"I feel like we have three pitchers who are capable of beating anybody in the country right now on

any given day," Rincon said.

Although she has yet to pitch for Oregon this season, Vidlund is contributing in other ways. With a team-best .418 batting average, she is having an "ungodly" year, according to Rincon. Her 26 RBI, six home runs, .731 slugging percentage and 49 total bases leads the team.

Heading into the game against Oregon State, Rincon knows that his team has some ground that it needs to cover before reaching the status the Beavers and other Pac-10 opponents have reached.

"I'm extremely confident that if we can do the things that we do well, which is good pitching, and play good defense and get timely hitting, that we're on the brink of accomplishing the things that (the Beavers) are accomplishing as well," he said. "Overall I'm real pleased with where we are as a team, physically and emotionally."

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