

Jackson-Ridnour-Jones trio leads Oregon into Sweet 16

■ Three players score 88 percent of Oregon's points in the Ducks' nail-biting win over Wake Forest on Saturday

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — LL Cool J had a great performance at Arco Arena on Saturday afternoon.

No, not the rapper. The trio. Luke Jackson, Luke Ridnour and Freddie Jones — jokingly dubbed "LL Cool J" by a major media outlet — carried the Oregon team to victory over Wake Forest in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Jackson tied a career high with 29 points in Saturday's game. Ridnour shattered his career high with 28 points on the strength of a career-high seven three-pointers. Jones chipped in 24 points.

The three players scored 88 percent of Oregon's final point total.

With 13:45 left in the first half, Chris Christoffersen made a dunk on a fast break to tie the game at 18.

From then until Robert Johnson's free throw with 17 seconds left in the second half — a span of 33 minutes and 28 seconds of game time — the trio scored every one of Oregon's points.

It was a 71-point run by Jackson, Ridnour and Jones.

Jackson explained it simply. "Ridnour started to take over a little bit," Jackson said. "Then there were stretches in the game when Freddie stepped up. And when I needed to knock down shots, when it was my turn, I stepped up and did that."

"We're all so competitive, and Wake Forest played such a great game, it was important for us tonight to give everything we had, and I felt like we did that."

Had it not been for Johnson's free throw and two freebies from Anthony Lever at the end of the game, the "LL Cool J" trio would have scored all of the Ducks' points in the final 33:45 of game time.

"We would have hoped to get more production out of the bench," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said.

"But we felt there was just such a great rhythm to the game."

The threesome had 81 total points. Their previous high was 71 points in an overtime loss at Stanford in February.

The rest of the team took only 12 field goals to the trio's 49, and perhaps the "supporting cast" deserves credit for letting the three hot players take over the game.

"It's not just us three. The whole team wants to win so bad," Ridnour said.

On the other side of the ball, the Wake Forest coaches were impressed by Oregon's terrific trio.

"They could have played for the Kings, never mind Duke," said Wake Forest head coach Skip Prosser, referring to Sacramento's NBA team.

Now the trio will be singing "Mama Said Knock You Out" on the way to Madison, Wisc., where the Ducks will face Texas in the Sweet 16 on Friday.

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led the Deacons with 20 points despite his injury — was missed as the Ducks went on a 16-9 run and won the game.

"He's a great player, and he does a lot for his team," Jones said. "Once he came off the floor, it took a lot out of them."

Over the game's final minutes, Oregon was tough on defense and eye-popping on offense. Jones had two dunks, one on a rebound off a Jackson miss that made the crowd "ooh." Then it was showed on the replay screen three times, and the crowd went "ooh" louder each time.

"Coach has been preaching to me to hit the offensive boards all year, and that was a time of the game when I thought it would be important to crash the offensive boards," Jones said of his dunk. "It got the crowd into the game, and when you can hear that crowd, it just gives that little extra push to do well."

But despite the high-flying of-

fense, the Ducks stressed that their defense kept them in the game.

"Even though it was high-scoring, we got key stops at key times of the game," Kent said.

"We needed some stops, and in the second half we got those stops," Jackson said.

After Dawson went out, Wake Forest went five straight possessions without a point. Jones' rebound dunk tied the game for the first time since the 18:15 mark of the second half.

In the first half, the teams started slow but soon set the blistering pace that would describe the rest of the game. Three minutes into the contest, Dawson hit a long three-pointer to make the score 7-4, and the two teams traded baskets on the next six possessions. By the end of the first half there had been seven ties and three lead changes.

Wake Forest "shot the lights out," in the words of Jackson, in the first half. The Demon Deacons shot 55.9 percent from the floor and went 6-for-9 from three-point range.

"Our defense was slacking a little

bit in the first half," forward Robert Johnson said. "But we got it together in the second half."

In the first half, the Ducks shot 47.1 percent and hit only five of the 14 treys they took.

Jackson tied his career high with 29 points to lead Oregon in scoring, while Ridnour had a career-high 28 points. Anthony Lever hit two free throws at the end of the game for the Ducks' only two points from the bench.

The win propels Oregon into the Sweet 16, a place it hasn't been since 1960. That season, the Ducks lost to California after beating New Mexico State and Utah. Oregon hasn't been to the Elite Eight since 1939, when the Elite Eight wasn't called that because it was actually the first round of the tournament. The Ducks won the inaugural NCAA Tournament that year. Their first-round victory was over Texas, by a final score of 56-41.

Oregon will face Texas at the Kohl Center in Madison on Friday.

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