

Ducks now focus attention on WSU-UCLA



Mark McCambridge Emerald

Oregon's bowl fate is in the hands of the Cougars, the Bruins and the bowl directors

Football notes

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There's nothing left for Oregon except to watch and practice.

The Ducks will watch as Washington State and UCLA likely determine Oregon's bowl fate Saturday, and the Ducks will take the practice field today, Saturday and Sunday as they prepare for that bowl, wherever it may be.

Oregon still has two likely bowl scenarios: the Seattle Bowl on Dec. 30 or the Silicon Valley Classic in San Jose, Calif., on Dec. 31. The Seattle Bowl is still the most likely Duck destination, even if Washington State beats UCLA and two Pacific-10 Conference teams go to BCS bowls. In that scenario, the Seattle Bowl would probably try to cut a deal with the Silicon Valley Classic to keep Oregon in the Northwest.

"Let's be honest, we always want Oregon," said Karin Mast, Director of Media Relations for the Silicon Valley Classic. "But with Seattle, it's how badly do they want Oregon? It comes

down to financial dealings and whether or not the Pac-10 is even going to allow that to happen."

Mast said those financial dealings would take place on Saturday night, after the Washington State-UCLA game, which kicks off at 1:30 p.m. on ABC. If Washington State wins, the Cougars clinch a Rose Bowl berth and USC would also go to a BCS bowl, because the Trojans will finish in the top 4 of the BCS. That's the only scenario that could create a controversy between the Seattle and Silicon Valley bowls.

"Everybody knows that, logically, Seattle is the more logical destination for (Oregon), and because of that, it's really just a matter of negotiations," Mast said.

But the bowl scenarios are still filled with speculation, which is why Oregon is doing the only thing it can this week: practice. The Ducks had light practices all week after taking Thanksgiving week off.

"We're getting the young guys back into the swing of things," junior linebacker Kevin Mitchell said. "Just trying to re-introduce everything to everybody."

For those young guys, many of them used to the high school schedule of playoffs directly following their seasons, the time between the Civil

War and the bowl game has come as a bit of a shock.

"I'm not used to having so much time off (between games)," freshman defensive lineman Haloti Ngata said. "But practice is almost like nothing to us. We're just messing around, kind of. It's cool, I guess. We want to be rested for the bowl game."

Mitchell agreed that the loose practices have been welcomed by the team after a long season.

"Right now, we're just kind of hanging out, waiting to see what comes our way," Mitchell said. "Eventually we'll start talking to (the young players), let them know how it works with practice and certain things they need to do throughout the day. Just so they have a heads up on that stuff."

The practices have been run by Oregon's assistant coaches this week, as head coach Mike Bellotti has been out of town on a recruiting trip.

While the coach is away, the Ducks come out to play. But that doesn't mean that the Oregon players aren't ready for another game.

"Whatever team we play, we just want to beat them real bad," Ngata said.

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63-34 in the Midwest Regional final. Nick Collison posted 25 points and 15 rebounds against the Ducks on March 24. Hinrich chipped in 14 points, nine rebounds and five steals.

"With Kansas coming up, rebounding is going to be a huge key for us," said Oregon forward Luke Jackson, who's had back-to-back 12-

rebound games for the Ducks.

Jackson and Luke Ridnour are looking to rebound from disappointing performances in the Elite Eight loss. Ridnour was 3-of-13 shooting with nine points and seven turnovers against Kansas. Jackson had 10 points and 10 boards on 4-of-16 shooting.

Win or lose, though, the Ducks are trying not to put too much onus on a game this early in the season.

"This is not a make-or-break, do-or-die ballgame," Kent said. "This is just a great window of opportunity on center state, and we want step up and take every advantage of it."

Oregon center Brian Helquist, who missed the Portland game after injuring his shoulder Monday, should play against Kansas, Kent said. Redshirt freshman Ian Crosswhite had 16 points and seven rebounds in his first career start in

Helquist's absence.

Saturday's game will be a homecoming for Kansas sophomore Aaron Miles, who was named the Oregon prep Player of the Year in his final year at Portland's Jefferson High School. The guard set a Kansas record last season for assists as a freshman, averaging 6.8 per game.

This season, Miles started off slowly — averaging just 5.3 points in the Jayhawks' first four games — but

busted out for a career-high 20 points in the 97-70 win over Central Missouri State.

"Aaron had a really consistent preseason, but since hasn't played as well," Williams said. "It's still a young year and he had such a great year last year, and sometimes expectations get carried away."

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