

Sports Editor:
Peter Hockaday
peterhockaday@dailymerald.com

Best bet
NCAA men:
UConn at UNC
2 p.m. Saturday, ESPN

BASKETBALL PREVIEW

Friday, January 17, 2003

The big box of basketball

Tasty morsel No. 1

The Oregon men won 26 games last season, the most since the 1944-45 season when the Ducks finished the season 30-15.

Morsel No. 2

The Oregon women have reached the postseason for nine-straight seasons, a mark that has included a WNIT Championship and eight NCAA Tournament appearances.

Trivia Bowl

Luke Ridnour became the 24th member of the Oregon 1,000-point club against Stanford. How many members have played for head coach Ernie Kent?

Rank me

The Oregon men and women in the 2003 Pac-10 rankings

Scoring offense

Women6
Men1

Scoring defense

Women9
Men8

Field goal percentage

Women5
Men2

3-point percentage

Women2
Men2

Free throw percentage

Women8
Men1

Assists

Women7
Men1

Rebounding margin

Women9
Men8

Morsel No. 3

The men and women combined to go 30-6 at McArthur Court last season.

Trivia answer

Five 1,000-point members have played for Kent. They include: Freddie Jones, A.D. Smith, Terik Brown, Luke Jackson and Ridnour.

Point perspective

Senior Alissa Edwards has been a consistent piece of the Ducks' offensive weaponry this season

Hank Hager
Sports Reporter

Sometimes, all an athlete needs is a little perspective.

Take for instance, the tragic event that happened at Washington. On New Year's Eve, sophomore starter Kayla Burt collapsed because of heart problems while waiting to celebrate, only to be saved by three of her Washington teammates.

"It really makes you think," Oregon senior Alissa Edwards said. "You have to cherish everything you have. It's career ending for (Burt), and your career could end like that. You need to play every moment to the greatest possible."

Edwards has been playing like every game could be her last. A solid player on the court, the Hermiston native wastes no time diving on the floor for loose balls or mixing it up with opponents. That style of play has led to sprains, bruises and scratches that would keep most players out of the game. Yet, she's managed to post a career-high 17 points against Stanford, and has shown the rest of the Pacific-10 Conference she is more than just an average player.

"I want to be the person that people say, 'Look, she's getting on the floor. We need to be getting on the floor,'" Edwards said. "Or like, 'She's going for the rebound, so we need to get rebounds, too.'"

"She's absolutely been solid," Oregon head coach Bev Smith said. "She's a rock for us. She's been, for us, a quintessential leader."

She's a leader who has helped Oregon to a 2-4 record in Pac-10 play when it seemed in early January that the Ducks wouldn't have enough firepower for two wins all season. And had the Ducks upset No. 6 Stanford last week, Edwards would've been one of the main reasons for it.

Not bad for a guard who never had a position she could call her own before the season.

As a freshman, Edwards toiled on former head coach Jody Runge's bench, appearing in just seven games. As a sophomore, she saw in-

creased playing time, appearing in 29 contests, starting eight.

And last season, Oregon's first under Smith, the now 22-year-old started seven of the 35 games she played in.

A non-stop theme for Edwards was the fact that she could, and would, play at the point, shooting guard or even the small forward position.

"She's always had the capability of being versatile," Smith said, adding that it has been a major benefactor to Oregon's well-being.

Entering the 2002-03 season, it seemed as though Edwards was set as the team's shooting guard. But that turned out to be a premature assessment. Shaquala Williams' dismissal from the team pushed Edwards to the point full-time.

"That really didn't bother me," Edwards said. "Moving to the point guard has been something that has always happened. That adjustment was not very hard at all."

Edwards has seen the good and the bad at Oregon. From her freshman season, when playing time was at a premium, to the Runge coaching controversy and now the Williams full-time suspension, she has been in the thick of things.

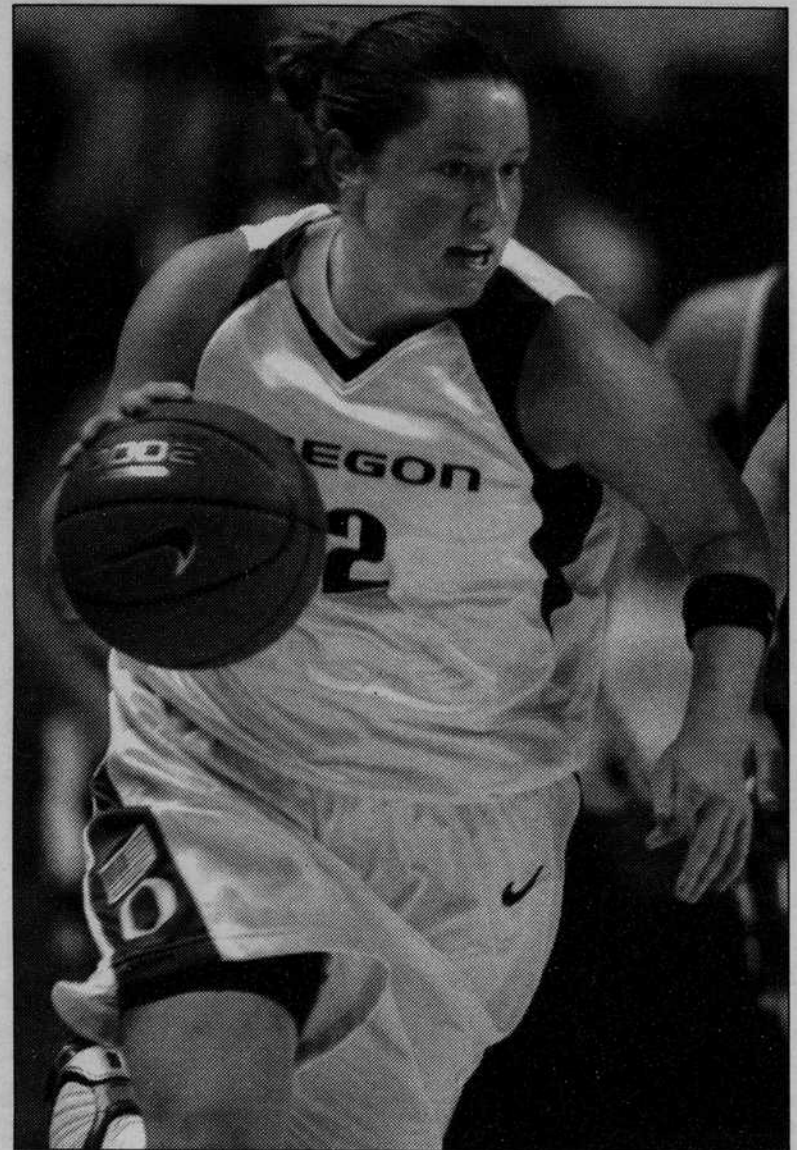
But she has also been involved in some of the best things the Ducks have had to offer. From two NCAA Tournament appearances to a WNIT Championship last year, she has tasted success every season.

"Four years is a long time," Edwards said. "We've had our good times all four years, and we've had bad times and a lot has happened. I think it has made both Kourtney (Shreve) and I grow as people and as basketball players. I'm just proud that I've stuck through it."

Opposing coaches haven't necessarily defended the Ducks' offense differently with Edwards at the point instead of Williams. But they do understand the importance of Edwards' play, much like Smith, and have given the guard recognition for her strong performances to this point.

"Her senior leadership is a great advantage for Oregon," California head coach Caren Horstmeyer said. "She really helps to keep them settled."

"She's really come along a lot in the last four or five games and im-



Adam Amato Emerald

Bev Smith calls Alissa Edwards a 'quintessential leader' on the Oregon team.

Alissa Edwards File

Senior guard
Hermiston, Oregon
High School: Hermiston

Oregon: Played in 35 games as a junior, starting seven...had the best assist-to-turnover ratio for the Ducks last season...made a career-high 17 points against Stanford on Jan. 11 of this season...also set a career-high with five 3-pointers made against Stanford...while as a prep athlete at Hermiston, earned letters in basketball, volleyball and softball.



Edwards

proved in (her) role," said Oregon State head coach Judy Spoelstra, whose Beavers take on the Ducks on Saturday in the first installment of this season's Civil War.

The Civil War marks a final moment for Edwards. It will be the final regular-season contest for the senior at Gill Coliseum in Corvallis. Edwards admitted she has begun to think about some of her

"lasts" this season, but hasn't really let it get to her.

"Kourtney and I talk a lot about it," Edwards said. "Like we're almost done. (But) you've got to look past 'this being the last' and focus on what's coming up and not worry about what's our last thing until it's over."

Contact the sports reporter at hankhager@dailymerald.com.

Men's

continued from page 1B

Freddie Jones.

"Where we miss Freddie the most is on offense. He would always draw the other team's top defender," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said. "That would mean another good defender was on Ridnour, but players like Luke Jackson were freed up. Now, Jackson is drawing the No. 2 defender, and it's a little tougher for him."

Even when Jones had that top defender on him, he always seemed to come up with the big shots at the end of games. The

drive and finger roll against Texas in the Sweet 16. The jumpers to beat UCLA and USC at the end of the regular season.

Now, three threats have been distilled to two, and opposing defenses are keying on the two. In all of the Ducks' wins this season, a third or fourth Oregon player has stepped up to help "The Lukes." The Ducks have had four players in double figures 10 times this season, nine of them wins. In the four losses, Ridnour twice has been the sole player to score in double-digits.

The lesson? When other players help the stars, the Ducks win games. But that's obvious. So who's going to step up?

It starts under the basket, where

Oregon's rebounding struggles have been well-documented this season. The Ducks' mantra has been that rebounding and defense key their transition game, and it's true; in each of their losses they have been grossly out-rebounded.

Overall, the rebounding margin isn't bad — the Ducks are being out-rebounded 37.7-36.6 on average. But in the four losses, Oregon has been out-boarded 167-115, or an average of 42-29.

But hope isn't all dim for the Ducks. With two games this week against lesser competition — Portland State and Oregon State — Oregon should be rested and ready for four-straight games against struggling competition in

Washington, Washington State, UCLA and USC. The Ducks get all the California schools at home in the second half of the season, and the season's last weekend — which Oregon played well in last year — is in Arizona.

For Oregon to make a run in the NCAA Tournament again, the Ducks will need to focus on rebounding and defense. An offense that averages 86.3 points per game doesn't need much work. But the Ducks will need to do it now, do it here.

And stop all the head-scratching.

Contact the sports editor at peterhockaday@dailymerald.com.