

SPORTS

Best bet

NBA: San Antonio at Portland
7 p.m., Fox SportsSports Editor:
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Tuesday, February 11, 2003

*Run, Forrest, run,
away from painful
pingpong tourney*

Bum.
Bum bum bum.
Bum bum bum.
Bum bum buuuuuuuuum.
That's me, Rocky blaring from the stereo, standing in my T-shirt and boxers in front of the mirror, punching my reflection like the famous pugilist.

It's time.
For pingpong.
That's right, I'm psyching myself up for a pingpong tournament. So what? Pingpong is a serious sport. Anybody who's seen Forrest Gump knows that.

And I thought I was Forrest.
Oh, how wrong I was.
I had wanted to enter the intramural pingpong tournament since my freshman year. I played hours of pingpong in high school and was, essentially, champion of my school. We played on a plywood board set up on two trash cans, and I was King of the Plywood, taking on all challengers and beating them soundly before the end-of-lunch bell.

But when I got to college I just didn't have the time for table-tennis training. It was sad, really. I played occasionally at The Break, but only in between games of Quarterback Challenge.

I still wanted to enter that tournament, just to weigh myself against the Oregon competition, see how I stacked up. But I was always busy each year.

This year, I finally caught a break, an open schedule on the big day, a Sunday two weeks ago. I signed up.

I'm fully psyched by the time I get to Gerlinger. The athletic juice is flowing through my veins, the kind of juice that I envision flows through the veins of Michael Jordan before he steps on the court.

But then I step into the pingpong gym, and right in front of me is a student who I later learn is the pingpong club team coordinator. He's taking his paddle out from a pingpong paddle case, like a mini tennis racket case.

I have two thoughts.
"Oh. No."
And things don't get any better. The format of the tournament is a round-robin seeding set of games, followed by a bracket.

I find out that my four-player round-robin group consists of me, Lee (the pingpong instructor at Oregon), Vivien (who later loses in the tournament's final) and Nick (the aforementioned club coordinator).

Vivien's last name is actually Pong.
I'm in for a rough afternoon.
I hold short-lived leads on Vivien and Nick, but in the best-of-five matches, I don't win a single game in the round-robin portion. I figure I'll face a high seed in the bracket and leave the premises early.

But then I get a blessing from the intramural people running the tournament. A play-in game. In the play-in game, I face a student who went through the round-robin tournament in similar fashion to me; that is, he didn't win a game. I like my chances.

I win the first game, start looking around the other tables to scout out my possible second-round competition. But then my competitor wins the second game.

OK, fine.
Then he wins the third game handily to go up 2-1. Then he takes a 9-4 lead in the fourth game, with the games played to 11.

OK, tough guy. You might be good, but I'm Forrest Gump.
I come back and tie the game at 10. Have to win by two, so we battle back and forth, neither able to put the game away. Finally I win it at 16-14.

As we switch sides, we look at each other, the glance containing a mix of I'll-get-you machoism and who-cares-either-one-will-lose-the-next-match shame. We're headed to a fifth and deciding game.

But it doesn't go well. He goes up big at 5-1, then 7-3, then 10-4. My serve. I win both. Break both his serves. He actually says "Jesus" at one point. I try not to think about the possibility of a comeback.

Then it happens. I've come all the way back at 10-10. We

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Peter Hockaday
Two minutes for crosschecking

Tennis, tabled

Club Sports
Tuesday

Participation in the Club Sports Pingpong team has been dwindling, but that hasn't shaken the enthusiasm of the players

Jon Roetman
Sports Freelancer

Participating in one of the few events that causes people to stare at a table endlessly, Tong Johnson and Vivien Pong battle for the intramural table tennis championship.

Exchanging volleys at a feverish pace, the duo mesmerizes the surrounding audience.

"Someday," Nick Gillespie and Eric Reinemann said, as they watched enviously, hoping one day to be as good.

Whack! With the games' final point, Johnson has won his second consecutive intramural championship, defeating Pong three games to none.

This championship matchup was expected, though, as Johnson and Pong are two of the most talented members of the Oregon club table tennis team.

Johnson, a second-year masters student from China, and Pong, a second-year masters student from Hong Kong, have been playing pingpong, a monster sport in Asia, since they were little.

"I play pingpong like Americans play basketball," Johnson said.

Pingpong is a game Americans often misunderstand, unaware that it's more than a garage activity.

"It's hardly recognized as a serious sport here," said Gillespie, a sophomore and student coordinator. "Most people kind of snicker when you tell them you play table tennis."

Gillespie, who grew up in Eugene, has been playing pingpong for eight years.

Club participation has dropped from

Turn to **Pingpong**, page 10A

Photo illustration Mark McCambridge Emerald

Pingpong is a game of speed and many types of slices, according to head coach Lee Werthamer. The Club pingpong squad is preparing to play a tournament in Seattle on Feb. 22.

Race tightens for Pac-10 crown

No. 1 Arizona, despite struggling against the Washington schools, holds a one-game lead over Cal

Men's Pac-10 notes

Adam Jude
Senior Sports Reporter

Despite narrow victories at Washington and Washington State last weekend, Arizona jumped back into the top spot in the national polls Monday.

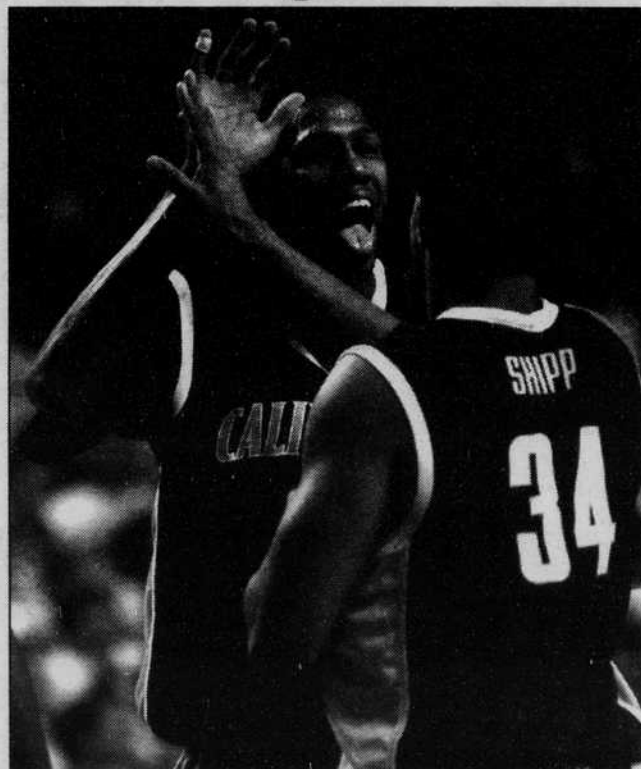
More importantly, Arizona (18-2 overall, 10-1 Pacific-10 Conference) remained No. 1 in the Pac-10, maintaining a one-game lead over California. The Bears (16-4, 9-2), by sweeping Oregon and Oregon State, jumped back into the national rankings at No. 22 in the Associated Press poll (23rd in the ESPN/USA Today coaches' poll).

Stanford (17-6, 8-3) is the only other Pac-10 team ranked (No. 24 by the AP). Oregon is not ranked for the first time in 13 months.

With seven conference games remaining, Cal seems to have a more favorable schedule than Arizona. The Bears have four games at home — including Washington State and Washington this week — and two of their road games are at UCLA and USC. Cal and Arizona meet in Berkeley on Feb. 27.

The Bears have not been surprised by their success this season, even though the media projected them to finish fifth in the conference.

"Our goal is to win the Pac-10, and we're going to do that," Cal's Joe Shipp, the Pac-10's scoring leader, said after the Bears'

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Mark McCambridge Emerald

Cal's Gabriel Hughes, Joe Shipp and the Bears sit second in the Pac-10.