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Sports briefs

Softball swings for fourth tourney win

The Oregon softball squad will head to St. George, Utah, this weekend in search of its fourth tournament crown of the season. The Ducks have won three of the four tournaments they've played in preseason action, and have a good chance to get No. 4 at the Red Desert Classic.

Oregon (12-5 overall) will be the only ranked team making the trip to Utah. The Ducks will face Utah State and Brigham Young today, then Arkansas and tournament host Utah on Saturday before closing the tour-

namment against Alabama-Birmingham on Sunday. Arkansas already beat Oregon this season, a 3-1 battle at the Southwest Texas Tournament on Feb. 2.

This weekend's tournament is almost the final preseason tournament for the Ducks. Oregon will head to San Jose, Calif., next weekend for a tournament, play a home double-header against Portland State on March 13, then open Pacific-10 Conference play at Oregon State on March 15.

Track set for Pac-10s

The Oregon men and a small contingent of women will make the trip to Seattle this weekend for the Pac-

10 Invitational.

The men will be led by sprinter Samie Parker, who currently ranks 11th nationally in the 60-meter dash, and Adam Kriz, who ranks eighth in the weight throw. Kriz is coming off an outstanding performance at the Mountain Pacific Championships, where he threw a personal-best of 67 feet, 7 inches.

On the women's side, the pole vaulters will be the only group traveling to Seattle. But it is perhaps Oregon's most exciting unit, as Becky Holliday and Niki McEwen rank second and third, respectively, in the nation, and Kirsten Riley is ranked No. 24.

—Peter Hockaday

UCLA tops OSU in Corvallis

Lee Jenkins
The Orange County Register (KRT)

CORVALLIS — A few years too late, UCLA has found its starting point guard.

For the third game in a row, Cedric Bozeman sat out because of a strained right shoulder, and for the third game in a row, the Bruins didn't seem to need him.

Senior Ray Young continued a campaign for comeback player of the year with 19 points and a career-high nine rebounds, none more important than the last.

With one minute remaining at Oregon State, and UCLA ahead by one point, Dijon Thompson missed a free-throw-line fade-away. But the 6-foot-3-inch Young hustled for the rebound and converted the putback.

"The game was close, and I had to make something happen," Young said after the Bruins' 69-66 victory. "I was just being active."

This prolongs the best week of Young's career, in which he racked up 40 points and nine assists against the Bay area schools. He nailed three-pointers on consecutive possessions in the second half Thursday and gave UCLA an eight-point lead that stood up down the stretch.

"Ray Young is a guy who struggled for four years to put the ball in the basket," Oregon State coach Jay John said. "Now (the basket) looks as big as the Pacific Ocean."

The Bruins finally found a way to at least slow down Oregon State forward Philip Ricci, who was getting used to pushing them around.

UCLA rotated both freshman centers and an assortment of forwards against Ricci, often at the same time. They dared the Beavers to hit an outside shot, and usually they could not, making 5 of 22 three-pointers.

Although Ricci finished with 15 points and five rebounds, he had to sweat for each one. By contrast, when Ricci was at Pauley Pavilion, he powered for a career-high 26 points, 14 rebounds and a victory.

"UCLA was a lot more aggressive this time," Ricci said. "Back in L.A., I had single coverage. Tonight, I had two guys on me and it was a lot tougher."

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Matsui goes deep in first spring contest

Josh Robbins
The Orlando Sentinel (KRT)

TAMPA, Fla. — For one day, at least, Hideki Matsui lived up to the hype.

Making his spring training debut for the New York Yankees on Thursday, the slugger displayed the power and steely nerves that made him a superstar in Japan.

Matsui hit a two-run home run in his second at-bat with the Yankees, rocketing a fastball from Cincinnati Reds left-hander Jimmy Anderson over the right-field fence at Legends Field.

"I'm very happy that I could play like this in the first game of the pre-season," Matsui said through his interpreter, Roger Kahlon.

Matsui, who received a three-year contract for \$21 million to join the Yankees, had plenty to be happy about, even if rain had scattered the announced crowd of 10,169 at Legends Field.

He went 1-for-3, including a scalding line drive that was caught by Reds second baseman Rainer Olmedo.

Matsui faced a total of 18 pitches, nine of them during his second at-bat. With two strikes, he forced a full count and fouled off three pitches before hitting his home run in the third inning.

"He's a great player," Yankees first baseman Jason Giambi said. "There's no doubt about it. He took a great at-bat today and hit a home run. That's the part of the game that a lot of people don't realize — that he is a great hitter. He's not only got a lot of power, but he's a great hitter."

Not only did Matsui impress his new teammates, who stood up to meet him once he reached the dugout after his home run, but he also no doubt satisfied his fans in Japan, where the game was tele-

vised live at 3:15 a.m.

Thursday's game attracted about 130 Japanese journalists, according to Isao Hirooka, a former sports writer who covered Matsui in Japan and was hired by the Yankees specifically to deal with the Japanese media.

Before taking batting practice, the Yankees gathered in right field to stretch and warm up. At 9:46 a.m., as a trainer led the team through a drill designed to stretch players' right hamstrings, 43 members of the Japanese media contingent stood on the gravel nearby, scribbling notes, taking photographs or shooting videotape that would be beamed back home.

"He was the most popular professional athlete in Japan," said journalist Yoric Kittaka, who writes for the Kyodo News, a Japanese wire service. "And a guy like this coming over here and playing for the Yankees (is) going to be a great story, I guess, for everyone."

What everyone wants to know is whether Matsui, 28, can generate the same kind of results in the major leagues as he did in Japan's Central League, where he won three MVP awards for the Tokyo-based Yomiuri Giants.

Last year, Matsui hit 50 home runs while compiling a .334 average. He hit at least 34 homers in each of his final seven seasons in Japan.

Yogi Berra, the Hall of Fame catcher who played for the Yankees from 1946-63, watched the Yankees' batting practice beside Manager Joe Torre and bench coach Don Zimmer.

"It looks all right," Berra said of Matsui's swing. "We still can't tell now. Wait till the games start."

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