

Friday, March 7, 2003

Oregon cools off in the desert

Second-half letdown likely means the Ducks will finish fifth in the Pac-10 after loss to ASU

Men's basketball

Adam Jude

Senior Sports Reporter

As hard as he tried, Luke Ridnour couldn't be a monster. He couldn't be Ike Diogu.

The Arizona State Sun Devils like Ike, their beast, for a reason.

The 6-foot-8, 250-pound freshman bruised Oregon's best shot at a fourth-place finish in the Pacific-10 Conference as he posted 17 points and 14 rebounds Thursday in Arizona State's 91-77 win at Wells Fargo Arena in Tempe, Ariz.

The Ducks (20-8 overall, 10-7 Pac-10) fell to 3-5 on the road in league play, and must win at No. 1 Arizona on Saturday to secure fourth place in the conference.

Now tied for fourth, Oregon and ASU will meet again next Thursday in the first round of the Pac-10 Tournament at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, regardless of what happens in the regular-season finale Saturday.

If the tournament game is as good as Thursday night's contest — which was closer than the final score indicates — it should be a dandy.

"This was a hard-fought basketball game," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent told KUGN-radio after the game. "It was a good battle. But we've got to regroup. You have to put it behind you."

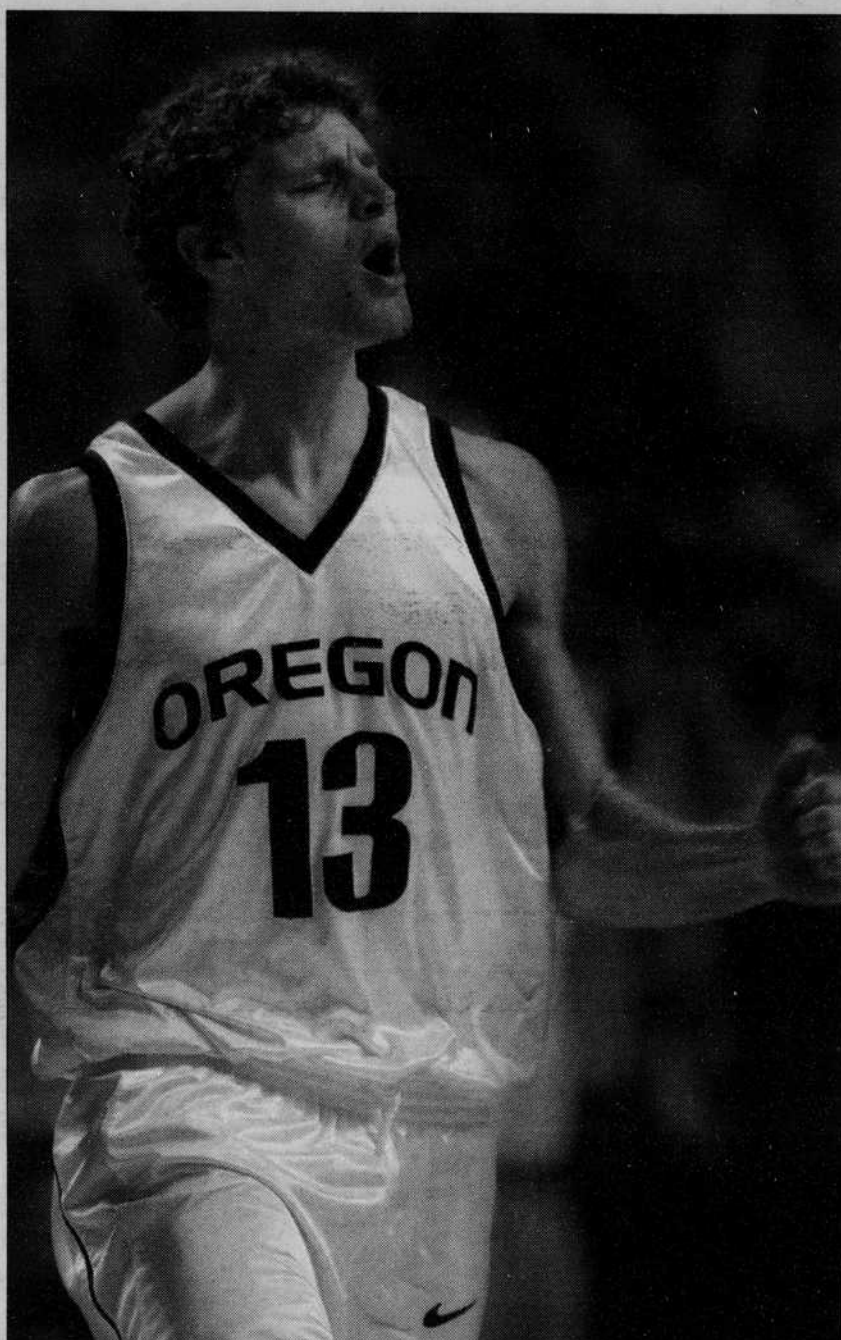
After blazing through the first half with 20 points, Ridnour was held in check in the second half. He fouled out with 1:02 left (and had three offensive fouls), and finished with 26 points, seven rebounds, six assists, but seven turnovers.

"It was a very good first half for us," Kent said of the Ducks' 45-41 lead at the break. "In the second half, though, they became the aggressor and we went away from our game plan."

Diogu tipped in his own miss to cap off a 12-0 run early in the second half to give the Sun Devils (18-10, 10-7) a 55-47 lead. Ridnour hit a three-pointer with 7:16 to play to cut Arizona State's lead to 69-66, but that's as close as the Ducks would get the rest of the way. ASU responded with an 11-1 run, which included a Diogu layin and a Tommy Smith dunk.

Ridnour tried to spark the Ducks during the Sun Devils' run, but was called for a controversial charging foul. One official had called a blocking foul on Arizona State's Kyle Dodd, another the charge on Ridnour. After conferring, the call went to the Sun Devils.

"When one team becomes the aggressor, the calls tend to go their way,"



Mark McCambridge Emerald

Luke Ridnour had 20 points at halftime, but was held to just six points in the second half in Oregon's 91-77 loss to Arizona State on Thursday. Ridnour had seven turnovers to six assists.

Kent said.

ASU's Curtis Millage hit all eight of his free throw attempts in the final 1:31.

Diogu, a contender for the Pac-10 Player of the Year award, put the stamp on the win by blocking a Ridnour layin attempt with about two minutes to play.

"Diogu was a load in there," Kent said.

Luke Jackson had 20 points for the Ducks, but didn't score his first points of the second half until the final 92 seconds.

The Sun Devils, needing the win to secure a spot in the NCAA Tournament, got 27 points from Millage while Smith added 24.

"Arizona State was in a must-win situation, and they got it done," Kent said.

Ridnour connected on four threes and hit 7-of-11 of his shots to lead Oregon to 51.5 percent shooting. In the second half, though, the Ducks shot just 31 percent.

Jackson scored Oregon's first seven points and had 12 first-half points, but sat the final 8:36 of the opening period after picking up his second foul.

The Ducks travel to Tucson to face top-ranked Arizona at 1 p.m. Saturday. The game will be broadcast on CBS.

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Ducks begin 'must win' tournament

Oregon will miss the postseason for the first time in 10 years if it fails win the Pac-10 Tournament

Women's basketball

Hank Hager

Sports Reporter

SAN JOSE, Calif. — This is where the real season begins for the Oregon women's basketball team.

After a Pacific-10 Conference regular season that netted eight victories, Oregon must be hungry for more. The Ducks must win the Pac-10 Tournament, held at the HP Pavilion, to avoid missing the postseason for the first time since the 1992-93 season.

The WNIT is out. So is the NCAA Tournament, unless, well, you get the picture.

And you couldn't blame the Ducks if they had a sense of déjà vu heading into their first game Saturday, set to tip off at 7:15 p.m.

Losers in the team's final contest, 54-52 to UCLA, Oregon (12-15 overall, 8-10 Pac-10) now takes on the fourth-seeded Bruins. The Ducks are ranked fifth in the tournament.

"I think that both teams kind of know each other by now," senior Alissa Edwards said. "We just, at the end of the game, we gave it away and didn't play as hard as we should have. I think we're going to take that into our next game, play hard and not give up."

Oregon and UCLA (17-10, 12-6) have a storied history throughout existence, and have produced some intense battles. Before this season, Oregon had won six straight against their Southern California foes. This year, UCLA took both games, one in convincing fashion, 93-68.

Overall, the Ducks lead the career series, 19-18. But throw the records and the scores out the window. With a tournament that is packed into just four overall days, numbers can get distorted.

"You just never take anything for granted," head coach Bev Smith said. "You never assume. Just forget about the past. The next game is the future, and just believe, and I think that's what we did in the WNIT last year."

The Ducks have a short, but impressive history against Pac-10 teams in the postseason. That postseason, of course, is reflected in last year's conference tournament and WNIT.

Oregon defeated Washington State and Washington before succumbing to eventual Pac-10 Tournament champion Arizona State.

The Ducks then added victories over Washington again and Oregon State en route to the WNIT Championship.

That championship came with a full bench that had yet to go through the adversity Oregon has this year. The Ducks are now down to nine players after junior Kayla Steen tore her ACL late in the game against UCLA last week.

Junior Cathrine Kraayeveld is looking to get back to full strength, although she is still below 100 percent. Edwards has battled bumps and bruises all season, and it seems, since a Dec. 19 contest against Montana, sophomore Kedzie Gunderson has a permanent broken nose. Maybe, it just seems that way because she's been hit there so often.

It's a blessing for Oregon that it was able to finish in the top-six in the Pac-10. That gave the Ducks the opportunity to open the tournament Saturday instead of Friday.

"Without even thinking of that, it is important for us," Smith said. "We do have a shorter bench. There's no doubt about it."

If Oregon is able to defeat the Bruins, the Ducks will play

Turn to **Women's**, page 8

No. 23 Oregon softball to wrap up tournament play

The Ducks look to win their fifth tournament of the preseason at the National Invitational in San Jose, Calif.

Softball

Mindi Rice

Freelance Sports Reporter

The Oregon softball team travels to San Jose, Calif., this weekend for its last preseason tournament.

The No. 23 Ducks (12-5 overall) will face Georgia Tech and San Jose

State today in the National Invitational Softball Tournament, while three games Saturday and Sunday will be determined by today's results.

Fellow Pacific-10 Conference teams Arizona State, Oregon State and California will also compete in the tournament.

Oregon received an unexpected vacation when the Feb. 28 Red Desert Classic was canceled due to inclement weather. The Ducks were scheduled to play five games and are trying to schedule some of those teams to play in Eugene at a later date.

The last time the Ducks saw action was on Feb. 23 when Oregon won its fourth tournament title in five preseason tournaments. The Ducks finished the Houston Invitational with a 3-1 record, after rains canceled the first two games of the six Oregon was supposed to play.

While each player on Oregon's roster has played in at least one game, freshman shortstop Breanne Sabol is the only Duck to have started all 17 games. Sabol is also the only Oregon player to have started the same position in each start. Every player, with the exceptions of

freshman pitcher Amy Harris and junior pitcher Anissa Meashintubby, has at least one hit on the season.

Oregon has stolen 18 bases in 21 attempts this season, after stealing only 20 bases during the entire 2002 season. Senior outfielder Alyssa Laux leads the squad with five, while senior outfielder Amber Hutchison is a perfect four for four.

The Ducks are ranked in the NFCA top 25 for the second consecutive week at No. 23. Before the Ducks earned their first ranking of the season on Jan. 29, they had not been ranked in the top 25 since

March 8, 2001. On Feb. 25, the Amateur Softball Association released the first-ever ESPN.com/USA Softball Collegiate Top 25 poll. Oregon premiered at No. 22, but fell to No. 23 in this week's poll.

All eight Pac-10 teams are ranked in both polls, with No. 1 UCLA leading and Oregon bringing up the rear.

After the National Invitational, the Ducks return home for a double-header against Portland State on Thursday afternoon at Howe Field.

Mindi Rice is a freelance writer for the Emerald.