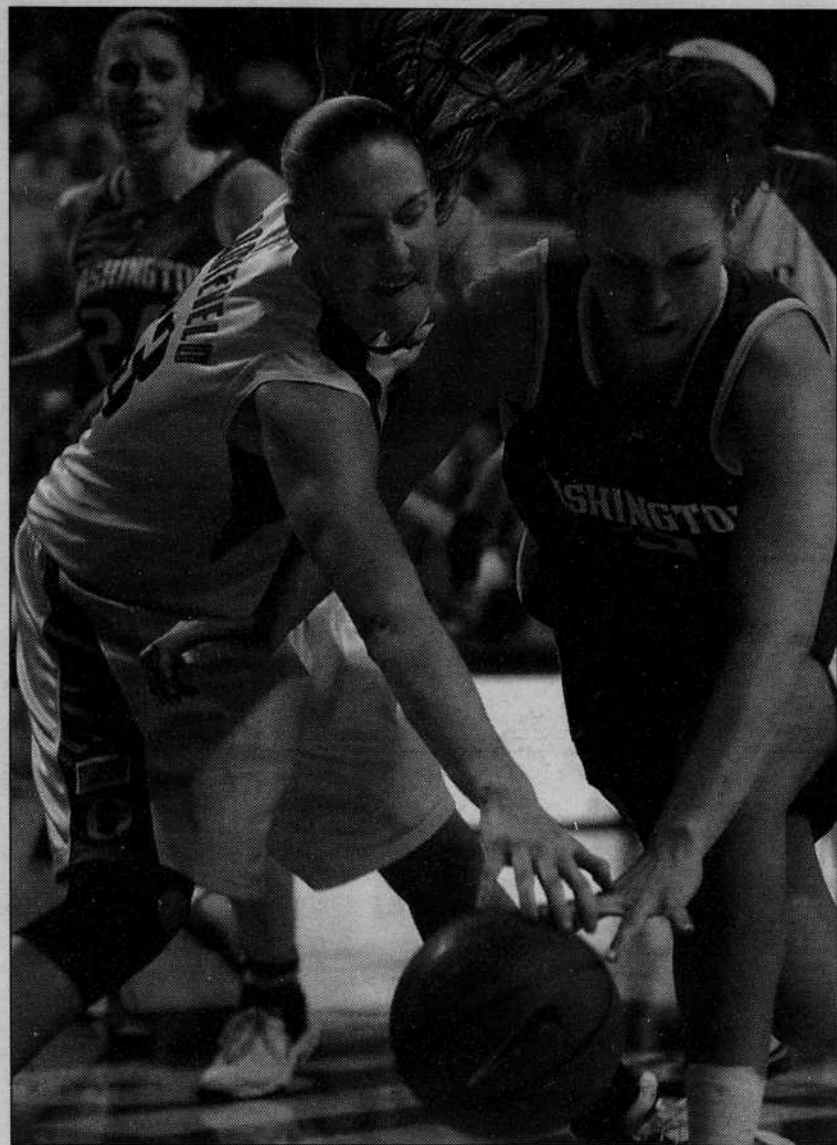


SPORTS

Best bet
NBA: Toronto at Portland
7 p.m., Fox Sports

Wednesday, March 12, 2003



Mark McCambridge Emerald

Cathrine Kraayeveld (left) is one of many experienced Duck post players returning next year.

At a loss

Oregon has a lot to learn from a season that had everything from injury to conflict, but not a postseason appearance

Women's basketball

Jesse Thomas
Sports Reporter

For the Oregon women's basketball team, the Pacific-10 Conference Tournament was like New Year's Eve.

It was a chance to be reborn. A chance to start over after a season of brick walls standing in Oregon's path.

That rebirth lasted only 40 minutes. One round and one more chance against UCLA.

But now the season has come to a close. There is no chance for a do-over, no mulligan and no advance to "Go" and collect \$200 to start the path over.

The Ducks leave a bruised and beaten path behind them. A 12-16 overall record is far from the 22 wins Oregon racked up in the 2001-02 season. And the 8-10 showing in Pac-10 play was the first sub-.500 conference record since the first George Bush was in office.

"It's hard to lose; we did have a tough season, and we played as hard as we could," junior forward Cathrine Kraayeveld said.

Yet, Oregon could have given up long ago. Two weeks prior to the Pac-10 Tournament, the Ducks sat in ninth in the Pac-10. Two weeks later they entered the tournament in fifth place.

"Our coaches put one thing in our head and we just wanted to go out and achieve that goal of getting into the second game," sophomore Andrea Bills said.

Nothing along the Oregon speedway ever

went smoothly. Through adversity, injury and a short bench, the Ducks never could get out of second gear to reach what they thought was cruising speed.

But the finish line is now behind them, and the Ducks ended the season without a postseason appearance for the first time in nine seasons.

Oregon was outscored by an average of almost five points on the season against its opponents. The Ducks averaged 65.9 points per game, the second-lowest in the last decade.

In other season statistics, Oregon was beat out in almost every category by its opponents. The Ducks' rebound margin was -3.4 and the turnover margin was -0.7. Oregon's opponents averaged more steals, free-throws attempted and assists than the Ducks.

The problems began just four games into the season, when senior Shaquala Williams was dismissed for reasons still unknown.

Then, just before the winter break, Kraayeveld developed a staph infection in her knee. Kraayeveld was the backbone to the Oregon squad, leading the team in points and rebounds.

Oregon's bench continued to shrink as sophomore Amy Parrish announced Christmas Eve that she would leave the team because of medical conditions.

"Just one thing after another skewered a lot of the things we were going to do," Oregon head coach Bev Smith said. "We understand that things are just out of our control, and we have to make the best of it."

The Ducks were left without a full bench for the majority of the regular season. Kraayeveld did return after 13 games but the damage had been done. At one point, Oregon suited up only eight players.

After a season that ended with three losses in

Turn to **Women's**, page 6

Duck forwards excel late despite tough injury

Oregon's frontcourt, expected to be a weakness, became the team's most powerful weapon this year

Hank Hager
Sports Reporter

In a year of turmoil and bad luck for the Oregon women's basketball team, one thing could be said.

If anything, the Ducks had a year to grow up. A year that produced tears, sweat, broken noses and shattered hopes. But it also pro-

duced a group of forwards that could very well become the Pacific-10 Conference standard next year, if not for longer than that.

The group — junior Cathrine Kraayeveld, sophomore Andrea Bills and freshmen Carolyn Ganes and Yadili Okwumabua — may have been hit the hardest this year. This is especially so because of Kraayeveld's staph infection that kept her out of the team's first 13 Pac-10 contests.

"I think (missing the postseason) is a break we're going to need," Kraayeveld said. "It's going

to be nice to have a break, but we are still disappointed."

Statistically, the group produced solid figures. Kraayeveld led the team in scoring at 14.5 points per game, although that was an average of just 15 games. Ganes was close behind at 10.5, although she did score 13.5 points per game during the Pac-10 season.

Bills wasn't the scoring machine she was projected to be after a monster freshman season, but she posted 9.8 points per game, and was solid down low, averaging 6.8

rebounds per game.

Of the group, Okwumabua produced the lowest figures, but ultimately, she proved to be the most athletic forward. She averaged just two points a game, but was used more often late in the season.

"I liked the way I've been playing, especially in the last few games," Bills said after Oregon lost, 71-58, to UCLA in the Pac-10 Tournament Saturday. "It was a struggle dealing with all the stuff that's been happening this season, but I'm just going to take my intensity and just work on

stuff over the summer."

On a team that loses just two players to graduation — Alissa Edwards and Kourtney Shreve — the forwards will be the most seasoned next year. Kraayeveld should have been an All-American candidate this year, and was before her injury.

Bills is showing promise, the kind that could lead to an All Pac-10 team award soon. Ganes could step into Kraayeveld's spot when the Kirkland, Wash., native graduates after next season. And

Turn to **Forwards**, page 6

Bubble-icious: Men need win to secure NCAA berth

Oregon will move squarely onto the infamous 'bubble' with a loss to ASU on Thursday

Men's Pac-10 notes

Peter Hockaday
Sports Editor

The Oregon men are thinking bubbles these days, and we're not talking about Michael Jackson's monkey.

Nope, it's March, so "bubble" takes on a much more ominous tone.

"I hate that word," Luke Jackson said.

Indeed, the Ducks are now a "bubble" team in the eyes of many pundits around the country, meaning they could miss out on an at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament.

Especially if they lose to Arizona State on Thursday in the first round of the Pacific-10 Conference Tournament. Oregon faces a daunting task in

beating Arizona State, considering the Sun Devils blew the Ducks out of Tempe, Ariz., only six days ago.

"It's all us right now," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said.

"It's one-and-done from here on out; that's how we're viewing this tournament," guard Luke Ridnour said.

Of course, the Pac-10 Tournament is literally a one-and-done format like the NCAA Tournament, but on a theoretical level, the Ducks may be one-or-NIT when they face the Sun Devils on Thursday.

"If the Ducks don't win their Pac-10 Tournament quarterfinal vs. Arizona State, they'll have less than a 50/50 chance for an at-large bid," wrote ESPN.com's Joe Lunardi in his weekly "Bracketology" report, which predicts the NCAA Tournament field. "It should never have come to this, but losses at USC and Washington made it so."

Sports Illustrated's Stewart Mandel lists Oregon as a team that "needs a

strong showing in its conference tournament this weekend to avoid a sad Selection Sunday."

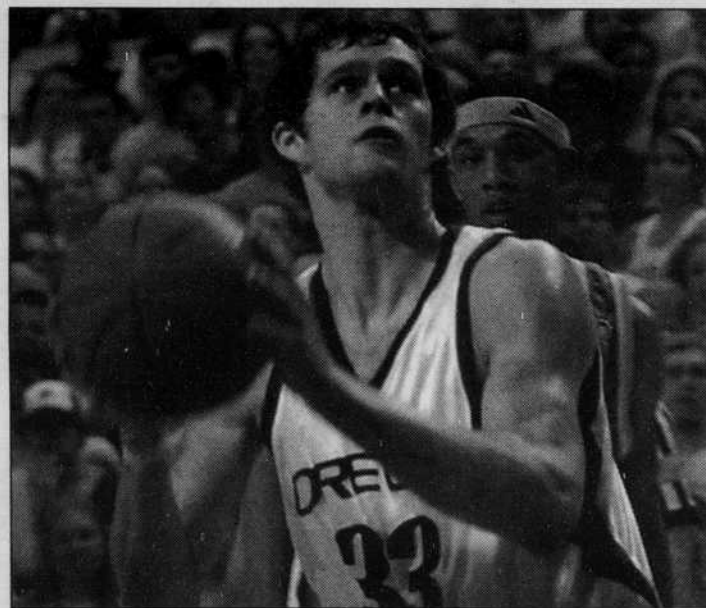
Oregon has slipped because of the road losses and a low RPI. The Ducks are 53rd in the RPI rankings, just ahead of 15-12 Providence and right behind 15-12 St. Louis. The RPI factors in winning percentage, schedule strength and opponents' schedule strength.

Only a win over ASU will get that bubble monkey off the Ducks' back.

Double Luke departure?

With all the hype surrounding Ridnour's possible early exit to the NBA (in case it wasn't already seared into your memory, fans repeatedly chanted "one more year" at the junior in Oregon's final home games), Jackson has avoided the draft spotlight.

But when Jackson was named to the All Pac-10 Team Monday, the spotlight

Turn to **Men's**, page 6

Adam Amato Emerald

Luke Jackson's NBA hopes have fallen from people's minds this season.