

Arizona leads Pac-10 teams with No. 1 seed

Five Pac-10 teams make the NCAA Tournament, splitting the four regions

Mindi Rice

Freelance Sports Reporter

The Pacific-10 Conference managed to get five men's teams in the tournament, with the lowest seed going to No. 10-seeded Arizona State.

While the Ducks head to Nashville, Tenn., as a No. 8 seed, Arizona, Stanford, California and Arizona State will find their way through the other three regions.

Arizona (25-3 overall, 17-1 Pac-10) earned the No. 1 seed in the West region, and will face No. 16-seed Vermont in Salt Lake City on Thursday.

Vermont is in the NCAA Tournament for the first time in school history after beating Boston, 56-55, for the America East Conference title and the conference's automatic berth in the tournament.

The Catamounts (21-11 overall, 11-5 America East) are the third-best rebounding team in the nation with a +7.9 rebounding margin. Vermont has won 18 of its last 23 games, playing strong during most of the season.

The winner of Arizona-Vermont will face the winner of No. 8 Cincinnati-No. 9 Gonzaga on Saturday.

Joining Arizona in the West is rival Arizona State (19-11 overall, 11-7 Pac-10), which drew a No. 10 seed. The Sun Devils will face No. 7-seed Memphis (23-6 overall, 13-3 Conference USA).

Memphis' last game was a loss to Louisville in the semifinals of the C-USA tournament. Memphis lost by three points on a last-second shot by Louisville.

The winner of the Arizona State-Memphis game will face the winner of No. 2 Kansas-No. 15 Utah State.

Stanford (23-8 overall, 14-4 Pac-10) received a No. 4 seed in the South region, drawing No. 13-seed San Diego (18-11 overall, 10-4 West Coast Conference) in the first round.

San Diego earned the WCC automatic berth with a win over Gonzaga in the conference championship game after ending the regular season with a loss to Gonzaga.

It is the Toreros' first NCAA berth since 1987, and the first under their current head coach.

The winner of the Stanford-San Diego game will face the winner of the No. 5 Connecticut-No. 12 Brigham Young game.

California (21-8 overall, 13-5 Pac-10) found a spot in the East region with a No. 8 seed. The Bears will face No. 9-seed North Carolina State (18-11 overall, 13-5 Atlantic Coast Conference) in the first round.

NC State finished the season with a loss to Duke in the ACC tournament title game. The Wolfpack gave up a 15-point lead and eventually lost the game by seven points.

In the Wolfpack's last five games before the conference tournament, they shot 88 percent from the free-throw line, making 90 shots in 102



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Arizona guards Salim Stoudamire (20) and Hassan Adams (21) are the No. 1 seed in a tough West region.

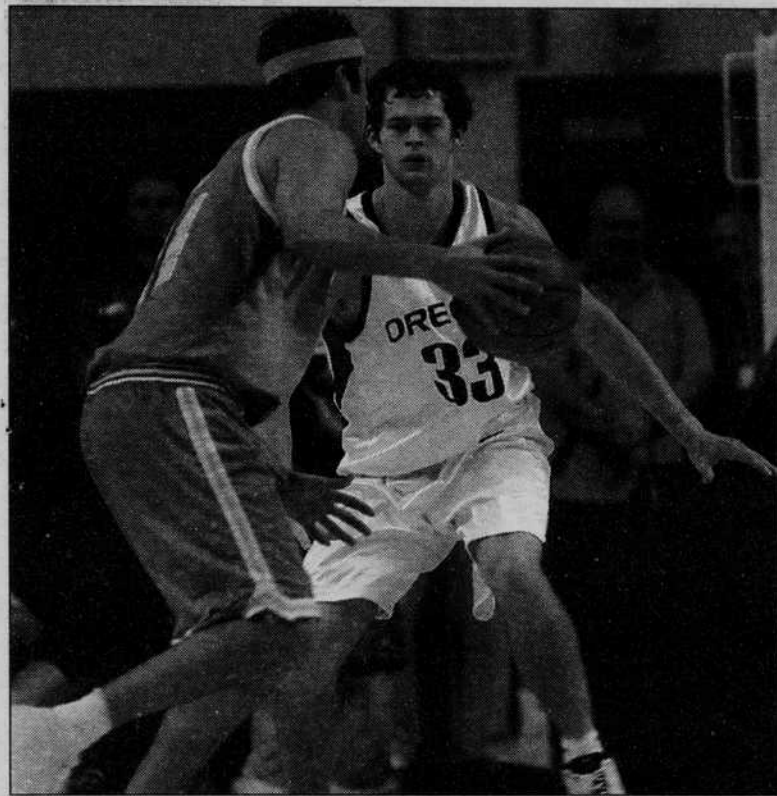
attempts. They are also a strong three-point shooting team, making 38 percent from behind the line in their 18 wins, while shooting only 29 percent in their 11 losses.

The winner of the California-NC State game will face the winner of No. 1 Oklahoma-No. 16 South Carolina State.

The Pac-10 teams have some room to breathe in their brackets, but can-

not forget that March Madness often means upsets all around.

Mindi Rice is a freelance writer for the Emerald.



Adam Amato Emerald

Luke Jackson, guarding UCLA's Jason Kapono, and the Ducks earned a No. 8 seed.

Ducks

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"We've got work to do in the NCAA Tournament," Ridnour said. "We want to go deep like last year or even deeper. We've got to refocus and get ready to go."

One advantage the Ducks have is playing on Friday instead of Thursday, allowing for an extra day off. The team will rest today before practicing on Tuesday, and then travel on Wednesday.

Overshadowing the short break, though, is finals week.

"Rest is the key to preparation right now," Kent said. "We're going to take a couple days to let our bodies bounce back and get going on finals. We're going to stay right on top of finals through the tournament run that we're fortunate enough to have."

To make any kind of run, the Ducks will first have to get past Utah (24-7), the Mountain West Conference regular-season co-champion with Brigham Young.

Kent said he is familiar with Utah head coach Rick Majerus' system,

and the Utes are familiar with Oregon, too. Utah assistant Silvey Dominguez was Kent's assistant for five years at St. Mary's.

"We know their program in terms of being able to prepare for them, and I'm sure (Utah) is feeling the same way," Kent said.

A common opponent of Oregon and Utah this season was Arizona State. Oregon won two out of three against the Sun Devils — including a last-second, one-point win Thursday at the Pac-10 Tournament — while the Utes split a pair of games with ASU, including a 78-55 win in Salt Lake City on Dec. 7.

"This is an exciting time of year for us to be a part of March Madness again," Kent said. "This is an excellent opportunity for us to continue to showcase who we are and what we're all about."

Friday's tipoff time at The Gaylord Entertainment Center will likely be announced today.

A win over Utah would probably pit the Ducks against Kentucky (29-3) on Sunday. The Wildcats, who have won 23 straight games, play 16th-seed Indiana-Purdue-Indianapolis Universi-

ty in the first-round. A No. 1 seed has never been upset in the first round.

"If we're fortunate enough to get to (the second round), that would be a very good basketball game," Kent said. "Kentucky is a great program, and obviously they've had tremendous success this year. When you look at Utah and you look at Kentucky, those are schools that we can get up for."

"We feel like we can play with anybody if we're on our game."

The Ducks showed that at times this year, with a win over Kansas and its championship run in the conference tournament. Their success, however, is countered with road losses to Washington and USC.

In a season that featured a high of a No. 5 national ranking and the low of a "bubble" label, the Ducks are hoping they've peaked at the right time.

"We're battle-tested and we're ready," senior center Brian Helquist said.

Ready for a little rest, for sure. But that can wait until the madness is over, perhaps in a few weeks.

Contact the senior sports reporter at adamjude@dailymerald.com.

Women's

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represent ourselves extremely well."

If Duck fans recognize any team at Mac Court, Washington (22-7, 13-5 Pacific-10 Conference) would be that squad. The Huskies, after bowing out to NCAA-bound Arizona in the semifinals of the Pac-10 Tournament in San Jose, Calif., return to the Pacific Northwest.

Last season, the Huskies were not assured of an NCAA Tournament berth

entering the Pac-10 Tournament, and a loss to Oregon in the team's first game doomed them to the WNIT.

This year, well, is a different story.

"We're in... and that's the most important thing," Husky head coach June Daugherty told The Tacoma News-Tribune before the team's selection. "You can't control where you're going and who you'll play. You can't get caught up in worrying about what the committee will or won't do."

If Loree Payne gets hot, the


Phoenix will have to look out. The Husky senior scored 15 points in the second half against the Ducks at Mac Court this season, ultimately leading Washington to victory.

Both games represent first-round contests. Winners of both games will meet Monday night in the second round to determine who goes to the West Regional at Maples Pavilion in Palo Alto, Calif.

Contact the sports reporter at hankhager@dailymerald.com.



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