

Ducks' home finale ends in heartbreak

Oregon falls to 0-16 this season in the Pac-10; the Ducks lost to Arizona State Friday in a close match

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

Oregon's youthful exuberance was on display during Friday's volleyball match with Arizona State. Unfortunately for the Ducks, their youthful inexperience crept into the equation as well.

Oregon was in position to win each game Friday but fell to the Sun Devils, 3-1 (30-28, 27-30, 30-28, 30-28) in front of 1,127 fans in the Ducks' 2003 home finale at McArthur Court.

After being edged in game one, Oregon captured momentum by securing game two when

freshmen Kristen Bitter and Sarah Mason blocked a Sarah Watkins attack for the game-winning point. The Mac Court crowd erupted as Oregon headed to the locker room tied, 1-1, a situation the team had been in only once all season.

The momentum would carry into the late stages of game three when Oregon built a 27-25 lead. Arizona State, however, put the game away with a 5-1 run coming out of a timeout.

Game four looked like a repeat of game three. After Oregon (3-22 overall, 0-16 Pacific-10 Conference) took a 28-26 lead, Arizona State head coach Brad Saindon called a timeout. The Sun Devils (9-16, 4-12) returned to the court as the more focused team and scored the next four points. Senior Courtney Blocher, who finished with 10 kills and 19 digs, ended the match with a kill.

As the Ducks walked off the floor they looked like a team that knew

they let one slip away.

"We can't ask any more of ourselves than to give 100 percent," Mason said. "We deserved to have that win."

Overshadowed by the Oregon loss was an excellent individual performance by Bitter. The 6-foot-4-inch middle blocker finished with a double-double, including 10 total blocks and a career-high 11 kills. Bitter finished the match with a .368 hitting percentage and provided the Mac Court crowd with plenty to cheer about.

"She was awesome," head coach Carl Ferreira said. "She showed herself, her teammates and the fans the kind of potential she has. That kid has got All-Pac-10, All-American potential."

After the match, Bitter chose not to focus on personal accolades, instead wanting to focus on how Oregon could get better.

"Losing sucks," Bitter said. "It's frustrating because we're so close.

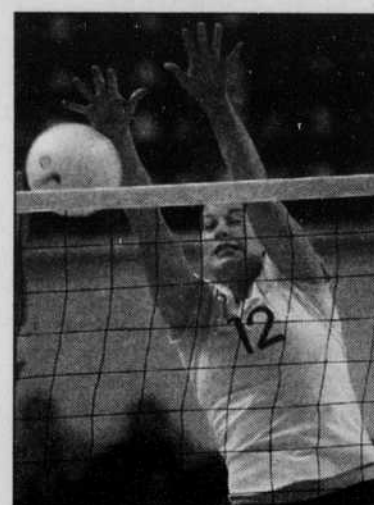
We just need to finish."

Oregon also received a double-double from sophomore middle blocker Kelly Russell, who finished with 14 kills and 10 digs. Mason tied for the team lead with 14 kills, while junior libero Katie O'Neil hammered out a team-high 16 digs.

Another positive for Oregon was the play of freshman setter Heather Madison, who started her second match in place of the injured Jodi Bell. Madison ran the Duck offense with the focus of a three-year veteran, dishing out 53 assists. The former high school All-American was able to spread the ball around to outside hitters and middle blockers alike, keeping the offense in rhythm.

Ferreira said he is pleased with the way the Ducks competed.

"Personally, I think (the players) are remarkable," Ferreira said. "Their resiliency; their persistency; their toughness. They have unbelievable character, and it's always



Danielle Hickey Senior Photographer

Kristen Bitter finished with 11 kills Friday in Oregon's loss at McArthur Court.

on display. I'm real proud of them."

Contact the sports reporter at jonroetman@dailyemerald.com.

Oregon's final tune-up expected to have more bite

The Ducks face a tougher, more experienced opponent in their second exhibition game tonight at McArthur

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

In Oregon's first exhibition of the 2003-04 season, it took on an unknown team from the Ukraine.

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Tonight's game against the EA Sports All-Stars at McArthur Court will afford the Ducks

the chance to see some familiar faces. Well, at least Duck fans will recognize some of those players that step on the court for the visiting team.

Former UCLA stars Ed O'Bannon and Ray Young and former Arizona Wildcat Rick Anderson will be in attendance at the game, which starts at 7 p.m. The trio is just a small portion of the EA Sports roster that includes former collegiate stars and will give the Ducks a more competitive game than the one they played last week from MBC Nikolaev.

"EA Sports will be a stronger, more physical team," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said. "It is a better talented team with several ex-UCLA guys, a couple of ex-pro guys."

Oregon looked like the team that Kent hypes as fast and physical down low in its 96-76 win over MBC Nikolaev. Senior Luke Jackson had a double-double in the win and freshmen Aaron Brooks and Mitch Platt played well in their first games with the Ducks.

"I thought it was a good game overall," Platt said. "We've got a lot of room for improvement, as always."

The game against EA Sports will be a good indication of where the Ducks stand. EA Sports has gone 1-9 so far in exhibition games, losing recently to California on Friday and Washington State on Saturday.

The group has beaten only Colorado State, but lost by seven to UCLA on Wednesday. A night later, it lost by

eight to Fresno State, which happens to be Oregon's season-opening opponent Friday.

The Ducks expect to be ready for EA Sports, despite the fact that Jordan Kent and Matt Short still remain out with injuries.

"Every year it takes the new guys a little time to adjust to the system and understand how they fit," Jackson said. "It takes them a little time to understand their roles. I think it's been exciting how fast Mitch Platt, Ray Schafer and Aaron Brooks have come along this season. I definitely think it's going to help our team the faster they can learn and grow."

Few tickets remain

Fewer than 20 tickets remain for

Oregon's game against Fresno State on Friday. The same is true for Oregon's first Pacific-10 Conference game at McArthur Court on Jan. 15, when the Ducks take on Washington.

The game against Portland State on Dec. 2 at The Pit has approximately 225 tickets still available.

The only game this season at McArthur Court that has an abundance of tickets still available is the Dec. 17 game against Santa Clara. Because it is winter break, tickets that normally go to Oregon students will be sold to the public. Fewer than 1,000 tickets remain for that game.

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