

SPORTS

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NCAA basketball:
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Viva El Paso: Ducks earn invitation to Sun Bowl

Oregon is set to play in its third Sun Bowl game against a team from the Big Ten that still must be announced

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

Oregon linebacker Kevin Mitchell remembers his trip to El Paso, Texas, four years ago pretty well.

DUCK FOOTBALL

The current senior was a redshirt freshman when the Ducks went 8-3 in the regular season and defeated Minnesota, 24-20, in the 1999 Sun Bowl.

"It's nice," Mitchell said on Monday. "The last time we were down there, we were treated very well, and we appreciate that."

Mitchell is set for a return trip to El Paso after the bowl extended an invitation to Oregon on Tuesday. The Ducks' opponent, set to be from the Big Ten Conference, has yet to be named, but it is expected to be either Minnesota or Michigan State with Iowa an outside possibility.

"We had a fantastic experience there in 1999," Oregon athletics director Bill Moos said Tuesday. "The hospitality is second-to-none that the Sun Bowl people provided for us."

Sun Bowl officials said they voted to have Oregon come to El Paso as late as two weeks ago

and never wavered as Washington State lost to Washington and California defeated Stanford.

For some on the Oregon roster, it will be a second trip in five seasons to El Paso.

Back in 1999, Mitchell and two other Ducks, quarterback Jason Fife and Samie Parker, were all redshirts on the team that defeated the Golden Gophers.

Mitchell, for one, took especially well to events surrounding the game.

Even if that meant getting in the ring with a bull.

"That's the most memorable one for me," he said. "I fought the bull, and it almost got me, too. It's brutal. I think it was a baby — everyone said it was old and dying, but either way, the thing

weighed more than I did and it could really hurt me. But luckily I got away and had a fun time doing it."

Don't expect Mitchell to jump in the ring, or any Oregon regular, for that matter. After a long season — one that saw the Ducks at 5-4 at one point — the team will need a full cadre of players to take on its unnamed opponent.

Tight end Nate LiaBraaten and wide receiver Jordan Carey could very well be available to play in the Dec. 31 game. LiaBraaten practiced Monday, as did linebacker Scott Vossmeier.

Oregon will practice today, Friday, Saturday and Sunday this week before taking next week

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Ducks earn second victory in sloppy, error-prone game

Oregon holds on for a seven-point victory over Portland State Tuesday at McArthur

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

Portland State went cold from the field for more than 10 minutes of the first half Tuesday at McArthur Court.

The Vikings went cold, so much that the Ducks followed suit. Together, the teams held a game at the venerable old gym that represented more of a pickup game than a Division-I college basketball affair.

Oregon came away with the victory, 62-55, although it wasn't necessarily earned on the merits of talent. The Ducks earned it the hard way — the Vikings lost their offense somewhere on the way down from Portland. Oregon capitalized just enough to pull out its second win of the season.

"This team needs to play games right now and get into a rhythm," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said. "Offensively, I really felt we were off our rhythm. We turned the ball over too much."

The 10-day layoff Oregon experienced after its first win — a 13-point victory over Fresno State — may have contributed to the Ducks' rust. The Ducks said that wasn't an issue, but shot 42 percent from the field and committed 20 turnovers, proving that Oregon's offense wasn't fully in sync.

"I expect everyone to step up and play smart basketball and within the system," Kent said, alluding to the team's mental and physical mistakes.

It was a game that saw very few lead changes — just four, all of which came in the first half — and very few runs from either team.

The only significant stretch of play for either team — statistics-wise — came from the 10:51 mark of the first half to the 1:18 mark. Portland State failed to score a point during the stretch, allowing Oregon to extend its lead.

However, the Ducks weren't able to stretch it out

much, scoring 10 points in the more than 10 minutes that they held the Vikings scoreless.

"We were forcing it too much," Oregon forward Jay Anderson said.

Forward Luke Jackson led the Ducks with 22 points on the strength of 5 of 11 shooting. He also excelled at the free-throw line, making 10 of his 13 attempts.

"This is really going to be a good game for us," Jackson said. "You really can't teach experience. The best thing we can do is learn as much as we can from this game."

That experience will help Oregon's freshmen starters — Aaron Brooks and Mitch Platt — who together combined for four points on 1 of 8 shooting in a combined 50 minutes of play.

Brooks had a rough game, turning the ball over six times while dishing out just one assist.

"I think Aaron is still out of sync after having the injury," Kent said of Brooks' sore left knee that he tweaked before the Fresno State game. "For a freshman point guard in this system, he needs to play."

The game marked the fifth time in the last six contests between the two teams where the winner won by 11 points or less. The Vikings, who lost to Oregon, 69-63, last season in Portland, were led by center Seth Scott, who posted 15 points in 29 minutes of play.

Portland State committed 16 turnovers — nine in the first half — and shot just under 40 percent from the field.

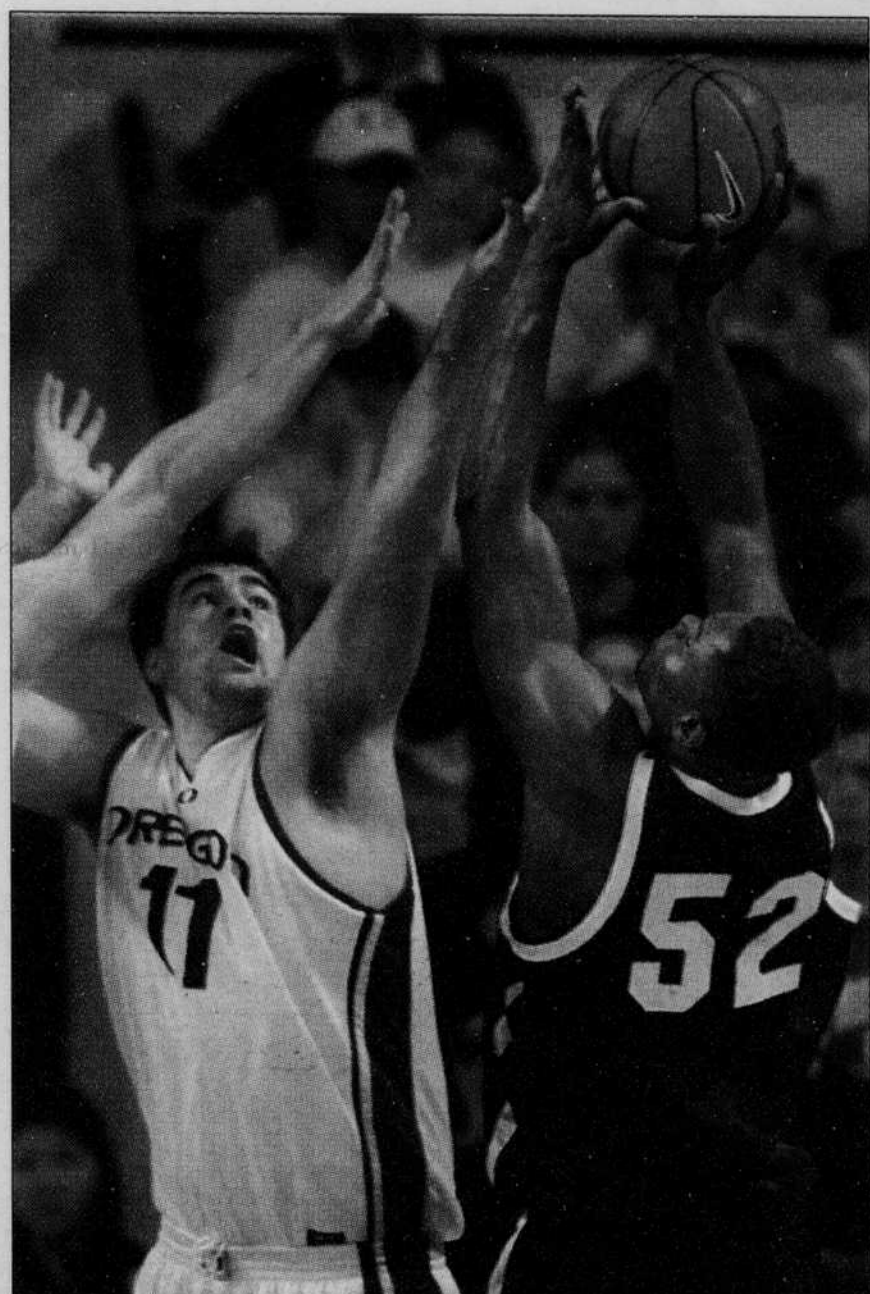
Portland State was markedly better, offensively, than in its last game, a 70-57 loss to UTPEP on Nov. 29 in El Paso, Texas.

In that game, the Vikings committed 23 turnovers and allowed the Miners to shoot 48 percent from the field.

"We've obviously addressed a lot of things," Portland State head coach Heath Schroyer said. "We've watched a lot of tape to not turn the ball over. That's been our achilles heel."

Schroyer said the Vikings were focused on limiting turnovers, taking away Oregon's transition game and forcing the Ducks to stay away from the three-pointer.

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Mark McCambridge Photographer

Ian Crosswhite scored 14 points in Oregon's seven-point win over the Vikings Tuesday.

Free throw shooting saves day for Oregon offensive output

The Ducks pull out a win over the Vikings despite both teams' struggles from the field

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

Field goals were hard to come by for Oregon and Portland State Tuesday at McArthur Court.

Fortunately for the Ducks, free throw shooting played a huge factor down the stretch. Oregon connected on 22 of 29 freebies for the game — compared to 7 of 15 for the Vikings — en route to a 62-55 victory.

Oregon was able to battle through an 18 of 43 shooting night by getting to the line. When the jumpers stopped falling, the Ducks attacked the rim and made plays with their athleticism. Oregon took advantage of its trips to

the charity stripe by connecting on 14 of 15 in the second half.

"The good thing was we shot free throws very well," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said.

Portland State had numerous opportunities to steal a win against a Pacific-10 Conference team but couldn't hit a big shot when it needed to. The Vikings got as close as four with 2:27 remaining, but their poor shooting would eventually catch up with them. They shot 39 percent from the floor, including 4 of 17 from three-point range.

Junior guard Blake Walker felt the worst of the Vikings shooting woes, finishing 3 of 17 from the field, including 1 of 7 from three-point range.

While it would be easy for a team like Portland State to enter McArthur Court as a nervous bunch, Vikings head coach Heath Schroyer said his team

was prepared to enter a hostile environment.

"I think they were excited," Schroyer said. "I talked to them about the crowd. You've got to take away transition and take away the three and in turn, that will take away some of the crowd. I don't think our guys were nervous, they were really more excited."

Oregon trio shines

Amidst the shooting struggles of many, Luke Jackson, Ian Crosswhite and Brandon Lincoln were able to carry the load offensively for Oregon. Jackson stepped up his production in the second half en route to a 22-point performance. The senior attributed his shooting 1 of 4 in the first half to the Portland State defense.

"I wasn't getting a lot of good looks," Jackson said. "They were staying out on (the perimeter) and not collapsing on the big guys."

The senior forward's night ended on a sour note, however, as he took a shot to the stomach and left the floor feeling sick.

Crosswhite was a force inside and seemingly was able to score whenever his teammates were able to get him the ball. The sophomore finished with 14 points on 7 of 10 shooting.

Kent said Crosswhite was "unstoppable" at times.

Lincoln finished with 12 points and used his energy to help Oregon on both sides of the ball.

"I thought Brandon had a good game," Kent said. "He was one of the bright spots on the floor."

High school memories

Lincoln and Portland State forward Antone Jarrell were opponents Tuesday, but were once

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