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Ducks turn reflective after tough nonconference losses

Oregon is ready to pick up performance as the season's pace increases

Scott Archer
Freelance Reporter

It's not how a team starts a season but how it finishes a season, according to Oregon wrestling head coach Chuck Kearney.

DUCK WRESTLING

That thinking might explain why Oregon wrestled against two of the nation's elite teams during the winter break but is still confident after being held scoreless in both matches. Unlike in football, wrestling teams

aren't measured by records and strength of schedule, but rather by late season performance in conference play and conference tournaments.

So it's understandable why Kearney scheduled No. 1 Oklahoma State and No. 5 Nebraska so early in the season.

"It's been a baptism by fire," Kearney said. "There is a reason we are doing this and it's to expose weaknesses. We find them, then we get tougher later and fix them."

"We don't have to carry losses with us," Kearney said. "We want to wrestle the toughest schedule. A team can go .500 and win the national title."

Although a national title isn't in Oregon's plans this season, expectations among the players and coaches are set to personal standards the coaching staff and wrestlers have for themselves.

"We focus on performance," Kearney said. "We can't control our opponent. Instead, we give ourselves an opportunity (to win). If we are better (than the competition), we win."

"We are learning how to learn. We are toughening up. (From these matches) we can start applying the lessons into other matches."

"All of us get wrapped up in winning and losing," redshirt sophomore Chet McBee said. "But it's more important to have positive performances, the rest will take care of itself."

While being shut out can make wrestling every day seem like a chore, the Ducks are looking at the situation differently. The Ducks don't believe it would have been different to lose

44-43, as opposed to the losses of 41-0 to Oklahoma State and 44-0 to Nebraska. To Oregon, a loss is a loss where lessons are learned and areas for improvement are noted.

"We are where we need to be and in what direction we need to be in, (at this point in the season)," McBee said.

Pride on the line

After being shut out for the second time in as many weeks, the Ducks got together immediately after the Nebraska loss to run more drills, which turned into some heated exchanges among teammates.

"(That) practice showed a lot," McBee said. "Emotions came out. (There was) some fighting, which happens. (There were) some breakdowns, which shows it's important to us to succeed."

It's the intensity Oregon hopes to bring to the mat this weekend in matches with Air Force, Army and Cal State-Fullerton, teams that possess talent but are a break from the top-tier teams more recently on the Ducks' slate.

"Army, Air Force and Cal State-Fullerton are tough, but they aren't near what we've seen already this year," Kearney said.

Oregon hopes to take its aggressions out against its competition this weekend, demonstrating that there is more fight in these Ducks than any winter break box score might have indicated.

Scott Archer is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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Happy New Year!

Here's what's happening in the Oregon Daily Emerald this January:

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- January 9: Pac-10 Basketball Preview
- January 14: Duck Bucks™
- January 21: Bridal Guide
- January 26: Career Fair Guide

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ESPN launches new channel today

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — With Hispanic television booming, ESPN Deportes, a Spanish-language version of the main cable network, launches Wednesday.

ESPN Deportes will telecast a wide variety of domestic and international sports programming, including Major League Baseball, the NBA, the NFL, UEFA Champions League, Major League Soccer, Wimbledon and the IRL

Indy Car Series.

In addition, the network will offer a selection of Spanish-language shows featuring sports news and information shows, including its own SportsCenter, which originates in Mexico City.

Other featured programs are Gol ESPN: Fuera de Juego, a round-table discussion of the world of soccer, and ESPN's Perfiles, a half-hour interview show that takes a look at Latin American sports stars.

— Jim Sami
South Florida Sun-Sentinel

THOMAS

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weren't supposed to happen.

Oregon is continuing to learn how to adapt to the many combinations that Oregon head coach Ernie Kent puts on the floor. With two freshman in and out of the starting lineup due to injuries, it has left the Ducks questionable in games, much like the one against UCLA.

Oregon is now a team desperately in need of a point guard. With freshman Aaron Brooks out, sophomore Brandon Lincoln will need to do more than just rise to the occasion.

Although senior James Davis should, in turn, get more playing time and if he can continue to be spot-on from three-point range, the Ducks will be fine.

Some Ducks are still finding their roles on the team, but sophomore Ian Crosswhite has comfortably found his. Crosswhite has dramatically improved from last season as he now shoots nearly 85 percent from the free-throw line and is Oregon's second leading scorer (14.4 ppg).

Redshirt freshman Jordan Kent had an impressive defensive performance against the Bruins on Sunday.

Coach Kent is likely to give his son more playing time at the wing position with Brooks out and in the event that Davis plays the point guard spot.

Most important will be if the real Oregon basketball team shows up to play rival Oregon State at Gill Coliseum on Saturday night.

The real Duck team isn't one that will

let the Beavers go on a 20-point run. The real Oregon team isn't one that will allow a three-point lead with one minute left to slip away as it did against Alabama on national television.

No, the Oregon men are none of those things.

In the sports world those games are what we call mulligans, redos, do-overs or best-out-of-threes.

In reality, those are the games that make coaches pull their hair out when they review game film. The games that keep an All-American up all night long wondering how he couldn't create plays for his team.

The real Oregon men's team is the one that is capable of leading the nation in three-point shooting percentage. That's the team that tied the Chiles Center record against Portland, hitting 15 from downtown and 14 against USC in the next game.

The real Oregon team is the unselfish team that will go and get 20 assists a game.

A team that will hit Davis for the three even when he isn't open and let him create.

The real Oregon team is the one in which Jackson and Crosswhite show up every night and combine for 40 points and 20 plus rebounds.

The real Oregon team will win its 10th straight game in the rivalry matchup against the Beavers on Saturday. The real Oregon team will be 9-1 and 3-0 in conference after this weekend.

Contact the sports reporter at jessethomas@dailyemerald.com.