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Best bet

NHL:
Philadelphia vs. N.Y. Rangers
4:30 p.m., ESPN

Thursday, January 22, 2004



Jesse Thomas
Go the distance

Blazers produce mistake with Miles

Too bad it wasn't LeBron James who came to Portland in Wednesday's trade. Instead, the Blazers picked up forward Darius Miles.

It was announced on Wednesday that Miles — formerly of Cleveland — is being traded to the Trail Blazers for guard Jeff McInnis and center Ruben Boumtje.

Miles was the third overall pick in the 2000 NBA Draft by the Los Angeles Clippers. Coming straight out of East High School in Illinois, Miles was expected to be the next prodigy from high school to professional basketball. People were comparing him to Minnesota's Kevin Garnett.

Miles has failed to impress or come close to expectations in his first three and half years in the league, however. And Blazers General Manager John Nash has failed to impress and is making a mistake in bringing Miles to Portland.

"In Darius Miles we acquire a superior athlete who has already successfully completed almost four years in the league," Nash said.

Miles is a "superior athlete" who can't shoot — in fact, he's a horrible shooter. Last year's numbers show that Miles' performance declined at a rapid rate and he has never recovered.

In October 2002, Miles began solid play in Cleveland, averaging 14 points and 7.5 rebounds per game. Remember, Miles was the young superstar around whom Cleveland thought it could build a franchise. Enter James and the end of that story.

In November 2002, Miles' numbers slipped to 11.7 points and 6.4 rebounds per game. In December, he was all the way down to 6.9 points and 5.4 rebounds per game. He was shooting 36 percent from the field in December.

"If (NBA personal trainer) Tim Grover can teach Darius Miles to shoot, then he deserves a lifetime achievement award," Charles Barkley told ESPN Insider in June 2003. "I'm not sure anyone can fix that."

In the summer of 2002, before he joined the Cavs, Miles was a little too busy filming the movie "The Perfect Score" to be in the gymnasium working on his game. At least it's clear where his priorities are.

Miles is an inconsistent player who lacks confidence. He has played few minutes for Cleveland this season because head coach Paul Silas has been hesitant to put him on the floor due to his inconsistencies.

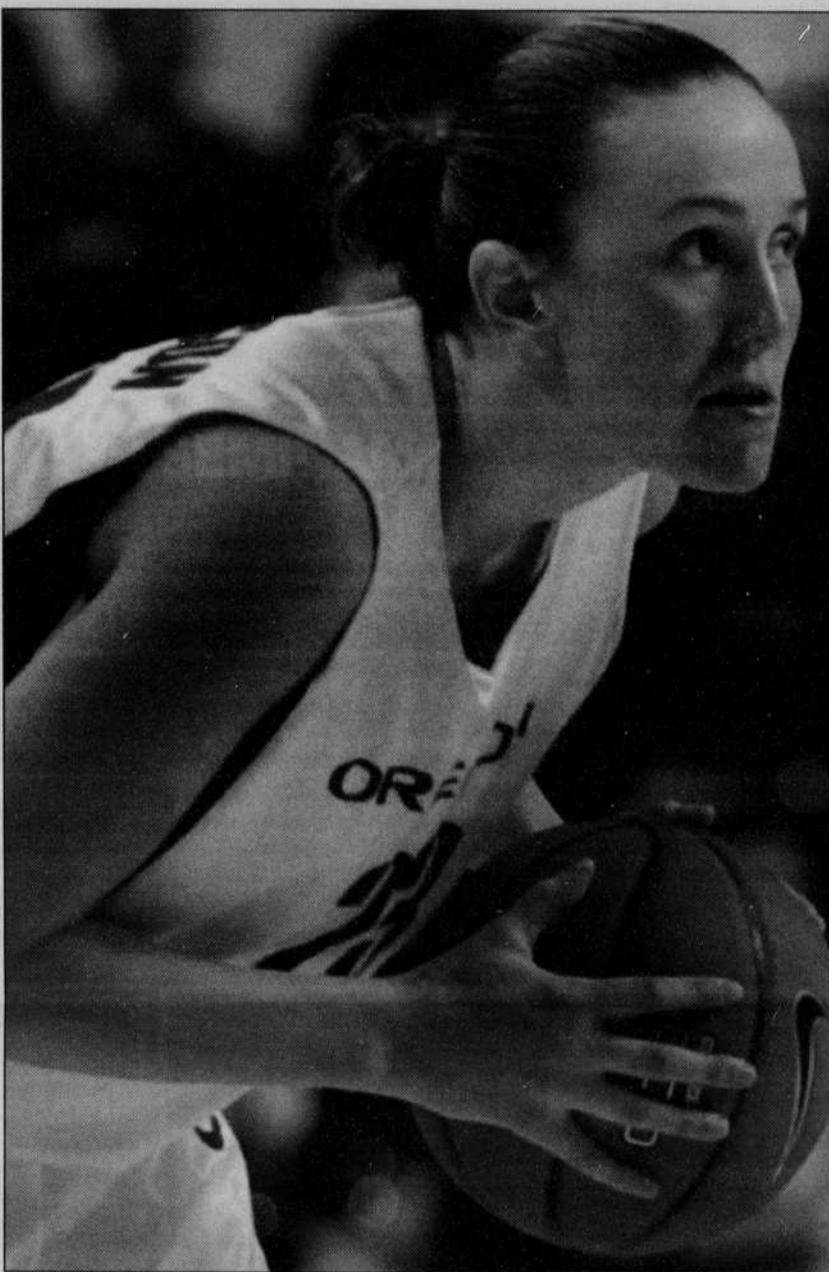
In 16 starts and 37 games this season, Miles is averaging 8.9 points, 4.5 rebounds and 2.2 assists per game. Miles played his best ball in his rookie season with the Clippers when he averaged 9.4 points and 5.9 rebounds per game.

The Blazers get the worst end of this deal.

Boumtje was easily dispensable.

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Ducks face challenge against 'Cats



Tim Kupsick Freelance Photographer

Junior Kedzie Gunderson is one of several Oregon players who needs to step up offensively.

Oregon faces the daunting task of stopping Arizona stars Shawntinice Polk and Dee-Dee Wheeler when the Wildcats visit tonight

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

Tonight's challenge for the Oregon women's basketball team is to slow down the Pacific-10 Conference's version of Shaquille O'Neal.

Arizona center Shawntinice Polk leads the Wildcats (14-4 overall, 6-1 Pac-10) into McArthur Court tonight to face the Ducks (10-7, 2-5). At 6-foot-5 and with a sturdy build, Polk is considered one of the nation's top players, averaging 16.3 points and 9.4 rebounds per game.

With Oregon's recent problems in the paint, the Ducks will need a tremendous defensive effort to slow down last season's Pac-10 Freshman of the Year. The last time Arizona ventured to Eugene, Polk had a dominant 23-point, 15-rebound performance in a 71-66 victory over Oregon.

"Her presence and her talent require some extra thought defensively," Oregon head coach Bev Smith said. "She's a player we have to have a good individual game plan against, but also a great team game plan."

Having Polk on the floor often causes opposing defenses to collapse, leading to wide-open looks for her teammates. One of those teammates is junior guard Dee-Dee Wheeler, who is third in the conference in scoring at 17.4 points per game.

Wheeler, the 2001-02 Pac-10 Freshman of the Year, makes a living off burning defenses that focus on Polk. Oregon will likely counter with Corrie Mizusawa, who has done a good defensive job against opposing point guards.

"In the games that we've played where we've had to have somebody shut down a point guard, Corrie has done it very well," Smith said. "I think Corrie has the smarts and the quickness to stay with (Wheeler)."

Tonight's game will be the toughest test the Ducks have faced since defeating then-No. 9 LSU 76-67 on Nov. 16.

The Oregon team that beat the Tigers at McArthur Court and the Oregon team facing Arizona tonight, however, are quite different. The Ducks relied on Cathrine Kraayeveld to carry them early in the season, a luxury Oregon lost after the senior All-American candidate injured her right knee on Dec. 2.

Facing Arizona with a healthy Kraayeveld wouldn't seem like such a daunting task. Facing Polk, sans Kraayeveld, with the worst per-game rebounding margin in the conference (minus 3.6), is a

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Diogu, Tempe troubles await Oregon

The Ducks have never swept the Sun Devils and Wildcats on the same road trip

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

How do you guard the player that some call the best in the Pacific-10 Conference?

MEN'S BASKETBALL

How do you keep the 6-foot-8 forward from dominating the low post and having his way? How do you guard the sophomore who averages 23.1 points and 9.7 rebounds per game?

Do what everybody else does: Double team him, say the Ducks.

It just might not be that easy.

"If he gets inside and he gets low position, he's going to score just about every time," Oregon's Ian Crosswhite said of Arizona State's Ike Diogu. "You can't foul him because he's such a great free throw shooter. It's going to be a big job. It was last year and it will be this year."

Diogu, of course, is central to Crosswhite's focus when Oregon travels to Tempe to take on Arizona State at 7:30 p.m. today.

The Garland, Texas, native constitutes the bulk of the Sun Devil offense. He accounts for 31 percent of Arizona

State's 74.4 points per game. His rebounding rate of 8.7 per game amounts to 23.5 percent of the team's average (36.9).

To sum it up, Diogu leads the conference in scoring, is second in blocked shots (33), third in rebounds per game and eighth in free throw shooting (84.6 percent).

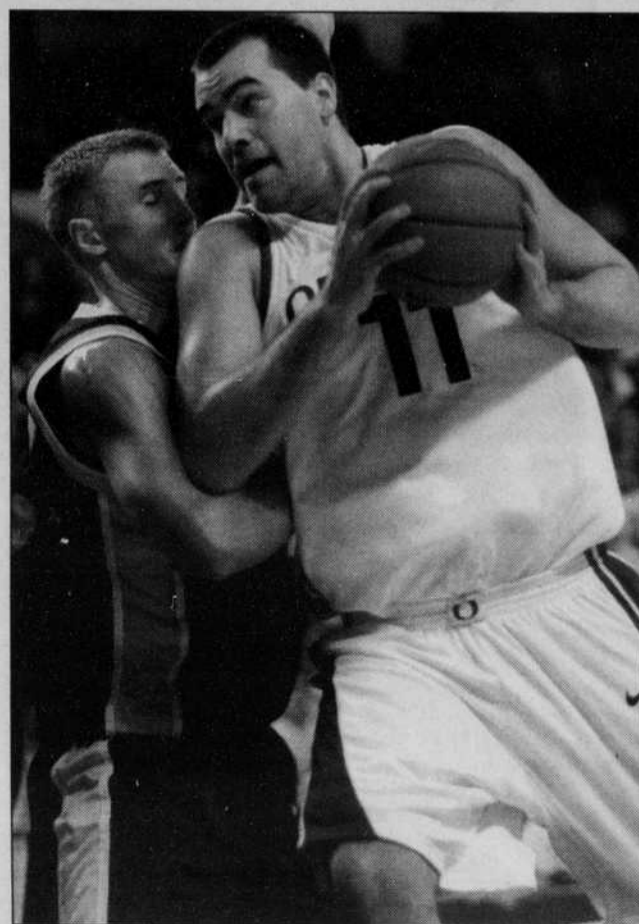
Diogu is Arizona State. He dominates the Sun Devils' media guide, appearing on its cover with descriptions, including: "Wooden Award candidate and a First-team Preseason All-American by Dick Vitale, Street & Smith's, Basketball News and Sporting News."

Not too shabby.

"You don't attack Ike on defense," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said. "Ike's going to get his points. You just need to make sure he doesn't have a monster game, but I think you need to make Ike play defense. We have some capable post guys that we're not going to be afraid to turn loose and have them go score the basketball."

During the 2002-03 season, Diogu posted 17 points and 14 rebounds in Arizona State's 91-77 win against the Ducks at Wells Fargo Arena. That's the same place the teams will play tonight.

It's also the same place that has presented itself as a house of horrors for Oregon over the past three seasons. The Ducks have not won in Tempe since Feb. 5, 2000. That was the year before Luke



Danielle Hickey Photo Editor

Ian Crosswhite and the Ducks have not won in Tempe, Ariz., since 2000.

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