

Thursday, January 29, 2004

Coming to a point

After an injury to freshman point guard Aaron Brooks, the starting duty has gone to Brandon Lincoln

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

Brandon Lincoln knows success. As a sophomore at Jefferson High School in Portland, the Oregon point guard teamed with current Kansas stars Aaron Miles and Michael Lee to win the state's 4A championship.

Two years later, he was rated as a "super prospect" by <http://www.FansOnly.com> and was ranked as the 67th-best player in the nation by ESPN.com. That equated to a No. 2 ranking in the state of Oregon.

So when freshman point guard Aaron Brooks went down with an injured wrist in early January, there were no worries.

Right? "Right now, just filling in the spot, the job just kind of takes care of itself because I'm surrounded by great players," Lincoln said.

"We're just getting better with every game. We had an unfortunate loss to Arizona where it kind of got out of hand. We're still making forward progress. We're not going to let that loss knock us back too far."

Against the Wildcats, Lincoln and senior James Davis, the heir apparents

when Brooks went down, combined to score 12 points, dish out six assists and turn the ball over two times. It can be viewed as a setback, based on statistics alone, but they've been successful to a point considering the adjustments the two have had to make.

Since Brooks suffered the injury, Lincoln has averaged 2.8 points and 2.4 assists per game. He failed to score against Washington State and Arizona State, both Oregon wins.

Coming into the season, Davis was virtually anointed the team's perimeter sharpshooter. He has yet to start a game this season, playing in all but one, and has been deadly from outside. His shooting ability has not been affected by Brooks' absence.

Overall this season, he is shooting 48.3 percent from beyond the three-point line. In Pac-10 play, he has knocked down 54.3 percent of his shots from downtown.

He ranks second in the Pac-10 in three-pointers — just behind Stanford's Chris Hernandez, who has made 54.8 percent of his three-pointers, but in

47 less attempts.

He's been a key offensive leader since Brooks went down. In the past five games, Davis has averaged 13.2 points per game.

"I think we're doing all right now," Davis said. "I think it could be a lot better, but as far as us two together, and Luke Jackson playing a little bit, we're doing all right."

Jackson has been taking the ball up the court and running the Oregon offense from the point at times. That was the case in the Ducks' loss to Oregon State on Jan. 10, a game in which the Creswell senior had a career-high 39 points.

During that time, Oregon was a work in progress. Lincoln was starting his first career game in a Ducks uniform and had just six points and two assists. Davis, meanwhile, connected for 17 points but was unable to establish an offensive rhythm in the second half.

Last season, Lincoln played in 26 games for the Ducks, averaging a little more than eight minutes a contest. He was a valuable contributor off the bench and served that role well on a team that had Luke Ridnour.

Ridnour was on the fast track to the NBA, eventually getting drafted by Seattle with the 14th overall selection in the 2003 draft.

When Brooks came to Eugene, it was expected he would see backup action at the point, allowing Lincoln to come off the bench at the other guard position. When Ridnour left, it threw a wrench into the Oregon offense,

forcing Brooks, the super freshman, into increased playing time.

That meant Lincoln was an even more valuable tool as a sophomore. Lincoln said Oregon head coach Emie Kent's feedback for him has been to "stay aggressive and stay optimistic."

"Guys make mistakes all the time. I'm not perfect. Nobody's perfect. He knows I'm going to make mistakes. He just wants to make sure I stay optimistic and keep trying to get better."

For Lincoln, the adjustment is obvious. He had been well-acustomed to seeing the first minutes of the game from the

reacting to the situation when replacing Brooks on the floor.

Now he has to know what he's going to attack before the game even starts.

"At first, it kind of caught me by surprise," Lincoln said of his starting role. "It's still a work in progress. There's still a lot of things I need to work through. There are things the guys are helping me on. I'm getting better with it every day."

"Coming off the bench, you can get a feel for the how the game is going. I wasn't really adjusted to starting the game, getting right into it. That was something I wasn't used to. Coming straight out and playing is kind of different."

Lincoln is expected to get consistent time on the floor until Brooks gets back on the scene, which is expected to be in late February. Kent said the freshman from Seattle is right on schedule for his return to the lineup.

Brooks is set to have pins taken out of the wrist on Monday and will undergo a CT scan on Wednesday. If all is well, Kent said, the cast could be taken off the same day.

From then on, he will start his rehabilitation

Turn to **POINT**, page 14

California forwards provide backbone of Bears' offense

Cal's Leon Powe leads the Pac-10 with eight double-doubles and in averaging 9.7 rebounds per game

By Jesse Thomas
Sports Reporter

His nickname is "The Show."

Not coincidentally, one only earns such a nickname by putting on a show for the fans, for the team and for the opponent.

California forward Leon Powe has proven his worthiness of such a nickname in just his first season with the Golden Bears.

The freshman from Oakland, Calif., was named the Pacific-10 Conference's Player of the Week on Monday after the terror he brought to USC and UCLA last week.

Powe is only the 20th freshman in league history to receive the honor.

He is the Bears' leading scorer and rebounder and will lead his team into McArthur Court tonight in the hope of starting Cal's first winning streak all season.

Powe scored 14 points against USC Jan. 22 and grabbed eight rebounds on the night of his 20th birthday. Against UCLA on Saturday, he electrified the crowd with 19 points and 14 rebounds, accounting for his league-leading eighth double-double of the season.

Powe had 12 points and eight rebounds in the final eight minutes against the Bruins.

"It's like having another point guard in the lineup, and that's helped us," California head coach Ben Braun said. "He's an extra ball handler. He's certainly a

Turn to **BACKBONE**, page 14

Oregon opens second half of Pac-10 against UCLA, USC

The Ducks are in Los Angeles today for a 7 p.m. tip-off against UCLA; UO looks for its third Pac-10 win

By Mindi Rice
Senior Sports Reporter

Halfway through Pacific-10 Conference play, the Oregon women's basketball team is looking to change its fate.

The Ducks (10-9 overall, 2-7 Pac-10) travel to Los Angeles to take on UCLA at 7 p.m. Thursday and USC at 4 p.m. Saturday in search of their second conference win on the road.

The start of the season's second half gives Oregon an opportunity to finish strong: finish a play, finish a game and finish a season.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

"The one thing we need to work on is finishing games at the end," point guard Corrie Mizusawa said. "Against Arizona and ASU, we had chances to win at the end and we just didn't come through and make plays. We've been playing well for 35 and 38 minutes but just not finishing the game."

The Ducks are even running end-of-game situational drills during their practices to help them with their approach if they're ahead or behind with a few minutes remaining.

"We're a little more tentative on offense," Mizusawa said. "Just kind of waiting instead of not being aggressive. That's the thing we're working on in practice — being more aggressive no matter how much time is left on the clock."

The Ducks have had the lead in the waning minutes more often than not in their Pac-10 games, but Oregon has let as large of a lead as 12 points slip away to become a loss.

Thursday, Oregon gave up a six-point lead to Arizona before the Wildcats turned the game around and earned the win, 70-66. Against Arizona State on Saturday, the Ducks held an eight-point lead with four minutes remaining. The Sun Devils went on a 13-3 run to close the game and earn the 69-67 victory.

"Our players certainly understand that both of those games were within our hands," Oregon head coach Bev Smith said. "It's just a matter of extending 37 good minutes of basketball to 40. Playing UCLA and USC is a great opportunity for us to get back and play those games for 40 minutes and get back on the

Turn to **WOMEN**, page 14