

SPORTS

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Best bet
NCAA basketball:
Cincinnati vs. Xavier
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Season still up in the air for Duck men, women

Oregon will need a healthy dose of wins in the second half to ensure an NCAA Tournament bid

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

Third place in the Pacific-10 Conference is not a bad place to be as the league season sits at its midway point.

It's not bad considering Oregon had lost its starting point guard for all but two games of the Pac-10 season. It's not bad figuring the Ducks used just eight players against Stanford, and the three reserves combined to score no points.

MEN'S BASKETBALL

It's not bad considering the collective Pac-10 is down this season, ranked at or below the Atlantic Coast, Southeastern and Big 12 Conferences.

Or is it?

"With everything that this team has been through, losing Matt (Short), Mitch (Platt) and Jordan (Kent) and Aaron (Brooks) still not back, for us to be sitting here in third place, and we were playing for second for two weeks in a row, I think that says a lot about this team," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said after the Ducks' loss to Stanford on Saturday.

Oregon is tied for third with California and UCLA, and all three teams sport identical 5-4 records in conference play. The wild card, however, may be the fact that Oregon will play two fewer games than the Golden Bears and Bruins this season. That

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Erik Bishoff Photographer

Oregon's James Davis (1), Mitch Platt (background), Andre Joseph (35) and Luke Jackson (33) have been key contributors to the Ducks' success this season. Oregon is 5-4 in Pac-10 play, good enough for a tie for third place.

The Oregon women have a tough road to travel one week into the second half of the Pacific-10 conference season

By Mindi Rice
Senior Sports Reporter

One week past the midway point of the women's basketball Pacific-10 Conference schedule, Oregon has its work cut out for it.

With an 11-10 overall record, the Ducks are barely afloat in the eligibility for an NIT berth at the end of the season.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

With a 3-8 Pac-10 record, Oregon is eighth and slowly sinking in the conference standings.

Amid the injuries, the lost leads and the punishing practices, the Ducks are actually coming together and making progress.

"We have been really searching for an identity — for a lineup that will bring us consistency," head coach Bev Smith said. "We've realized as a team how we needed to play."

This season has been a roller coaster ride for the Ducks as a team. The team has gone from extreme highs, like a nine-point win against then-No. 9 LSU in November, to extreme lows, like the 45-point loss at Washington on Jan. 15, and has had continued falls and climbs

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Bruins' streak reaches five after loss to St. John's

After a perfect start to what appeared a glorified Pac-10 season, UCLA has lost five in a row and is sinking fast

By Jesse Thomas
Sports Reporter

After a perfect 5-0 Pacific-10 Conference start, UCLA desperately needs to return to its winning ways.

PAC 10

After keeping pace with Stanford and its undefeated record, UCLA has slipped to a tie for

third in the Pac-10.

The Bruins just lost their fifth game in a row to St. John's at Madison Square Garden over the weekend.

St. John's, which entered the game on the brink of the worst losing streak in school history, beat UCLA for the sixth straight time using solid three-point shooting.

"We have to go back to the drawing board and make some changes," UCLA head coach Ben Howland said. "We are not getting off to good starts offensively or defensively."

The Red Storm entered the game on a seven-game losing streak. The only other time St. John's had such

a bad record was during the 1918-19 season, when the team went 0-7.

"This was a long time coming for us," St. John's interim head coach Kevin Clark said. "I want them to celebrate this one, enjoy this one and take the lessons from it."

Elijah Ingram lit up Madison Square Garden when he hit five first-half three pointers. UCLA as a team had one. The Red Storm finished with a season-high 10 three pointers.

Howland had no problem with praising Ingram after the game.

"In the first half, Ingram was absolutely spectacular," Howland said. "The threes he made were

money in the bank every time he shot it."

UCLA struggled in all aspects of the game. The Bruins only scored 55 points, their third-lowest point total of the season. UCLA managed 48 points against Washington State on Jan. 8.

The Bruins were outrebounded 49 to 30 against the Red Storm. They shot 5 of 15 on three-pointers and were a mere 4 of 15 from the free-throw line.

UCLA's Trevor Ariza is the only one who brought light to the Bruins with his 19 points, yet he did miss all five of his free-throw attempts.

"Trevor was the only one in my mind who had a good game for us,"

Howland said.

The Bruins will return to Pauley Pavilion and conference action this week when Washington and Washington State visit Los Angeles. UCLA accomplished the Northwest sweep in early January but only by a combined margin of five points.

Arizona barely surviving

What is going on down in Tucson? Does the Arizona men's basketball team even know?

After what appeared to be a chance to regain their footing with three straight wins, the Wildcats headed north over the weekend and got shut out by Washington and squeaked by

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Platt provides new option for Oregon in first season

Whether he was grabbing defensive rebounds — 10 in all — or posting up his defender for 13 points, Mitch Platt was a big piece of Oregon's puzzle on Saturday in the team's 83-80 loss to Stanford.

The freshman from Henderson, Nev., collected key rebounds and showed a flair for hard work in the paint. It was his first career double-double and shouldn't be the last.

With his efforts, Platt became that ever-important facet of an offense that holds a variety of special roles. Luke Jackson is the all-around shooter, James Davis is the perimeter threat and Ian Crosswhite is the dangerous forward.

What does that make Platt?

The filler. The dyed-in-the-wool

filler who acts as the team's fourth option but can play down low like its second. Platt is a grinder and needs to be. When Robert Johnson left after last season, the grinding, scraping aspect of the Ducks left with him.

Jackson can have that mentality, but he needs to be finessed through the season. He is too valuable to be banging play after play, tempting injury and probably a subsequent end to Oregon's season.

That's Platt's role, to bang, grab those rebounds and run the floor. With his ankle almost completely healthy, he is beginning to strive in that role, and he's becoming one of the Pacific-10 Conference's big-time freshmen.

He has proved that, so far. In the 12

games he's played — four were missed due to an ankle injury suffered during the Papé Jam — he is averaging



Hank Hager
Behind the dish

ing 5.7 points and 4.5 rebounds.

Those statistics aren't gratuitous but reflect his steady presence first off the bench and now as a starter.

The Sporting News described Platt as a "skilled big man who can pass, run (the) floor," in its 2003-04 season preview.

If only the magazine knew then what the rest of the Pac-10 should know now.

"I think he's made a stride in just the last month in general," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said after the team's loss Saturday. "Since he's gotten that brace off his ankle, each day he gets a little bit better.

"For him to play like that in this environment is huge. This is very similar to how he played down at Arizona State. He is starting to come; he is starting to feel very confident with what he does."

Platt had 13 points and eight

rebounds against the Sun Devils. That was with Ike Diogu on the floor, who is one of the toughest big men in the Pac-10, if not the nation.

Platt's effort against Stanford came against Rob Little, Matt Haryasz and Co., a group of big men who were as much a reason for the Cardinal's perfect start than any other players on Stanford's roster.

Kent pointed out that Platt and Crosswhite have created a duo that, with a little more toughness and full health, could have potential to be very good. That's no doubt, especially considering the duo has dominated different aspects of the game.

Crosswhite has earned a reputation as a dangerous outside

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