

USC emerges as contender, Pac-10 stretch drive arrives

Led by Ebony Hoffman, the Trojans are within striking distance of second place

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

With its win over Oregon on Saturday, Southern California can officially be recognized as a contender in the Pacific-10 Conference.

PAC 10

The Trojans (11-8 overall, 8-3 Pac-10) trail Arizona (16-5, 8-2) by a half-game for second

place in the conference, with road games against Washington and Washington State this week.

USC is the only Pac-10 team to defeat No. 7 Stanford (17-3, 10-1), dropping the Cardinal 59-56 on Jan. 25. Two of the Trojans' conference losses, surprisingly enough, have come at the hands of Oregon State (11-9, 5-6).

Senior forward Ebony Hoffman has been USC's best player on both sides of the ball. The 6-foot-2 All-American candidate has been a force inside, averaging 15.3 points and 8.1 rebounds per game.

Hoffman was key to USC's 71-56 win over Oregon (11-10, 3-8) on Saturday, scoring 12 points on 5 of 8 shooting in the second half. She provided the Trojans with a spark off the bench after being suspended in the first half for a violation of team policy.

It was only the fifth time in 106 games that Hoffman was not in the

starting lineup.

"I am not above team rules and I should be disciplined as well," Hoffman told the Daily Trojan after the game. "It's a point well-proven and it won't happen again."

Senior guard Rometra Craig has also been big, averaging 11.5 points per game.

USC showed its potential early in the season, giving then-No. 1 Connecticut all it could handle in a 72-69 USC loss on Dec. 7. The Trojans had a chance to send the game into overtime, but Rachel Woodward's three-point shot at the buzzer hit the rim and bounced away.

Blazing Sun Devil

Arizona State junior Kylan Loney scored a career-high 32 points Saturday, helping the Sun Devils defeat Arizona 68-60 at Wells Fargo Arena in Tempe.

The 5-foot-7 guard connected on 5 of 8 three-pointers to pull Arizona State within a game of second place in the Pac-10.

While Loney's offensive outburst was the key to the Sun Devils' win, the defensive-minded guard said she would rather shut down her opponent than produce a scoring outburst.

"My best games are when I hold my player to two or zero points, and she's confused and ticked off," Loney told the Arizona State Press. "It's nice to hit shots, but I like to see my opposing player totally out of her zone."

Loney's performance earned her Pac-10 Player of the Week honors and pushed Arizona State (13-6, 7-3) 2 1/2 games ahead of Washington, Oregon State and UCLA.

Loney's previous career high was 21 against Oregon on Jan. 4, 2003.

Moving up

Stanford moved up one spot to No. 7 in this week's Associated Press poll after demolishing the Washington schools last week.

The Cardinal defeated the Huskies (85-59) and the Cougars (91-67) a week after falling to USC and squeaking past UCLA in overtime.

It appears Stanford was awakened by its loss to USC, which could spell doom for the rest of the Pac-10. The Cardinal face the Arizona schools this week with a chance to take control of the conference race.

Stanford head coach Tara VanDerveer said the Cardinal need to be more aggressive if it is going to be successful down the stretch.

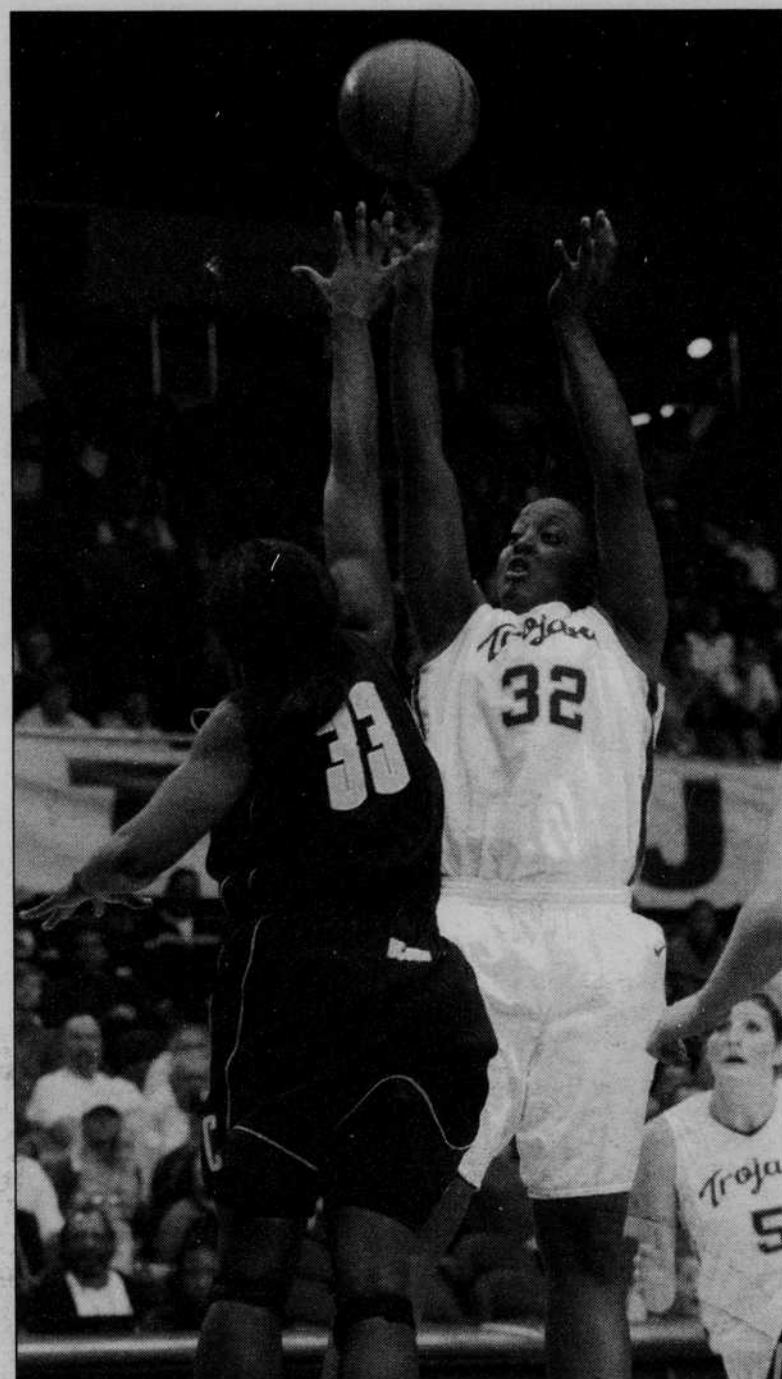
"I actually pulled people who weren't taking their shot," VanDerveer told The Stanford Daily after defeating Washington State. "I saw four or five people who had wide open three-pointers and they didn't take them ... we had 31 attempts and I thought we could have shot 10 more."

Stanford has easily been the best team in the conference. Eight of its 10 conference wins have come by at least 10 points and six have come by at least 20.

All-American forward Nicole Powell has played like her usual brilliant self, averaging 21.1 points and 11.1 rebounds per game.

If Stanford can stay away from serious injury, it could make a run at a national title.

Contact the sports reporter at jonroetman@dailyemerald.com.



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Ebony Hoffman missed her fifth-ever start for the Trojans after a suspension Saturday.

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shooter despite his 6-foot-11 frame. Platt has problems shooting free throws — he was 1 of 4 from the line Saturday — but has become a big body down low.

"We've just got to get them a little further ahead in terms of conditioning, toughness, little mental things like that," Kent said. "That's just time. (Stanford's Nick) Robinson and Little were not like that their first year in the Pac-10. They've developed into that and that's where Mitch needs to go. He will develop into one heck of a basketball player."

For the time being, the Ducks will need Platt to be a solid freshman, helping hold down the fort until Aaron Brooks can get back, pushing Oregon's depth even further.

Contact the sports editor at hankhager@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

SPORTS BRIEFS

Henson spurns baseball, returns to NFL

NEW YORK — Four years ago a New York Yankees official called Drew Henson a "(Derek) Jeter-like prospect," but now the better comparison might be to Tom Brady.

Henson announced Monday that he is divorcing himself from the Bombers — and the unheard-of six-year, \$17 million minor-league contract he signed in 2001 — to return to the gridiron. A source said Monday the former Michigan quarterback will not be paid any part of the remaining \$12 million he would have been owed, while the Yanks are not seeking any of the \$5 million they have already paid.

"I have truly enjoyed playing professional baseball, but after a great deal of thought and discussions with the people closest to me, I have decided to make football my career," said Henson, who played behind Brady for two years in Ann Arbor. "I want to thank the Yankees and Mr. (George) Steinbrenner for

the opportunity to be a part of their organization. My time with the Yankees gave me experiences in baseball that I will always remember."

Henson's NFL rights are owned by the Texans, and Houston, which already has David Carr, likely will try to work out a sign-and-trade with another team. If such a deal isn't made, then Henson would reenter the NFL draft, where he has been projected as high as the third-ranked quarterback available.

— Sam Borden
New York Daily News

Nets' Griffin breaks curfew

NEW ORLEANS — Eddie Griffin spent Monday night in jail after he allegedly violated his bail terms from a felony assault charge.

According to the Houston Chronicle, Harris County prosecutors say Griffin broke curfew restrictions when he attempted to assault a man outside a gas station around 3 a.m. on Dec. 23 despite being under a 6 p.m.-to-6 a.m. curfew. Griffin, who is in a Houston jail, had his bond

revoked and a hearing is set for today to determine how much longer he'll have to stay locked up.

Jane Waters, assistant district attorney for Harris County, said prosecutors are looking into Griffin's bizarre incident at the Renaissance Hotel in Rutherford, N.J., on Jan. 25, when he knocked on the door of a hotel guest looking for a party that a couple of girls had invited him to. It was the wrong room.

Griffin's attorney, Rusty Hardin, did not return phone calls. The New Jersey Nets also had no comment on Griffin's legal trouble.

Griffin faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted of hitting and shooting at a girlfriend last year. He was scheduled to appear in court on Feb. 13 for that and also for a sentencing hearing for a misdemeanor marijuana possession charge.

Griffin was on the verge of making his debut before leaving the team last week and it is likely he will not play a single minute for the Nets this season.

— Ohm Youngmisuk
New York Daily News

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