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Pac-10's equality should be beneficial



Hank Hager
Behind the dish

If you've heard or read anything about Pacific-10 Conference basketball this season, it's probably sounded something like this:

- 1) The teams are too soft.
- 2) The league is on a down year. It can't compete with the likes of the Southeastern or Atlantic Coast Conferences.
- 3) The Pac-10 will only get two teams into the NCAA Tournament this season.

Answers: Wrong, wrong and might just be the case.

Welcome to the Pac-10, circa 2004. There's Stanford, then there's everybody else. Seems like a crapshoot for anybody but the Cardinal.

Right?
That's true, but an unfortunate reality for the conference this season. Flat out, there's just too much parity. When California can defeat Arizona, only after the Wildcats manhandled Oregon, which defeated the Golden Bears, it's a sign.

It's a sign that, well, it's going to be a down year for the conference in the NCAA Tournament.

You can't necessarily argue that the teams are too soft. They've gone 56-30 against Division I clubs this year, a 65.1 winning percentage. Of course, that record comes with a 3-7 combined record against the SEC and Big 12 Conference, but three of those defeats — Oregon's losses to Kansas and Alabama and Arizona's defeat at the hands of Florida — have been close. So close, in fact, that a points swing of five or more at any time of a game could have meant the difference. Factor that in, and that record shifts to 5-5 or 6-4.

It also can't necessarily be argued that it's a down year for the Pac-10. A conference is only as good as its bottom teams, and in that regard, the Pac-10 is doing somewhat poorly. Oregon State and Arizona State are the anchors. But they are dangerous anchors.

Oregon State almost defeated the Ducks on Saturday and the Sun Devils came within two points of upsetting second-place California.

It's called parity, and that should be a stopping point for the pundits who try to rank the conferences. But, like above, it's really a crapshoot to rank groups that have anywhere from eight to 14 teams. Those that try usually show inconsistencies in their rankings.

That parity is exactly what's hurting the Pac-10 teams this season. If Arizona can't defeat Washington or Southern California, how could it possibly defeat a team like Utah or Air Force? That's a valid argument, one that will be used against the Pac-10 when determining the postseason field.

Joe Lunardi, the man in charge of Bracketology on ESPN.com, has only Stanford and Arizona getting into the Big Dance. Oregon is close; he lists the Ducks as one of the last four teams excluded from the field. California, one-half game ahead of

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Rookie road

Seattle rookie Luke Ridnour made his return to Portland on Sunday and received a warm welcome

By Jesse Thomas
Sports Reporter

Two hours before the game started and before any fans had entered the Rose Garden, he was among his teammates in the shoot around. He stayed on the court for about an hour, practicing his mid-range jumper and stretching out.

As he headed towards the locker room, he was bombarded by several requests for autographs.

Seattle rookie Luke Ridnour took the time to sign each one until all the young fans were satisfied.

"It's like that everywhere you go," he said.

Then just before game time, Ridnour went to chapel. Part of Ridnour's routine is taking the time to write a Bible scripture on the inside of his left forearm before every game.

This time it was 1 Corinthians 10:31, which states, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

"He's got strong faith, both in himself and in his religion," veteran Seattle guard Brent Barry said of Ridnour.

At the start of the second quarter, the former Duck stepped onto the court for his first return to Portland as a professional athlete. As Ridnour stepped onto the floor, an echo of "Luuuuuke" took the air that was eerily reminiscent of McArthur Court.

"It's always good to hear the fans are still here," Ridnour said after the game. "That's always exciting for me. I haven't been gone that long, but just to know they're still here, it's always fun."

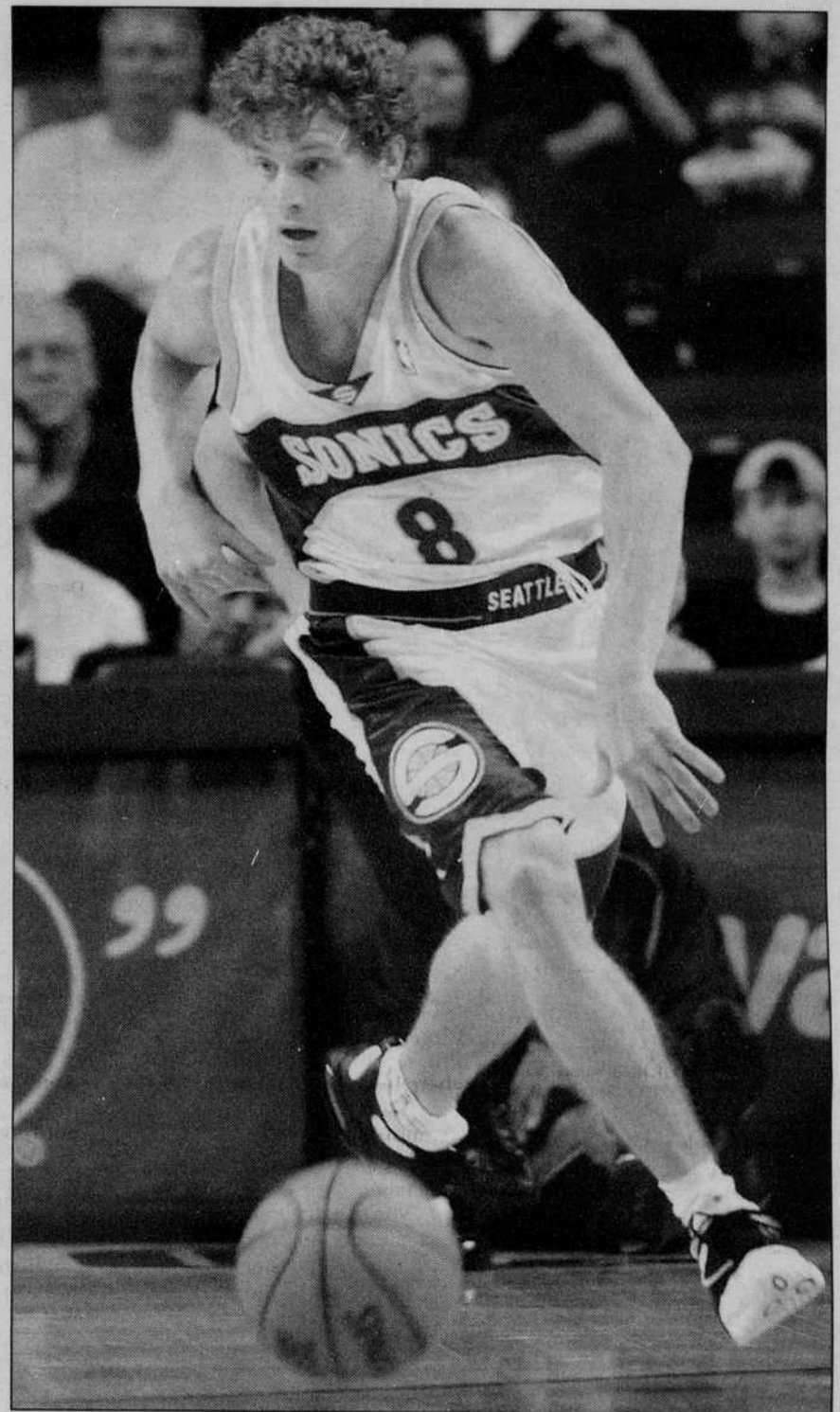
Ridnour played 17 minutes for the SuperSonics in Portland's 95-85 win on Sunday. He grabbed five rebounds on the defensive end and had two points and two assists.

He's learning.

"It's too early to make a judgment on him," Seattle head coach Nate McMillan said. "He has had some good games and some games where he's struggled. You expect that out of a first-year player. I like what I see when he's on the floor. I'm comfortable with him being out on the floor. It's just a matter of giving him an opportunity to play."

Ridnour is averaging just less than 16 minutes a game for a Seattle (24-26) team that is struggling in the playoff race. It's a different lifestyle for the 2003 Pacific-10 Conference Player of the Year who helped lead Oregon to the NCAA Tournament in back-to-back seasons.

"It's been tough," Ridnour said of being on the bench. "The Lord has been teaching me things and keeping me

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Justin Best Everett Herald

Seattle rookie Luke Ridnour had two points, two assists and five rebounds in his 17 minutes against Portland on Sunday. It was Ridnour's first return to Portland as a professional.

Chaney provides problem defensively for Shettters

Jessica Shettters can use Saturday's struggles against Oregon State's Brina Chaney as motivation to improve defensively in her last games

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

Jessica Shettters was frustrated. The 6-foot-6 Oregon freshman was trying everything she could to slow Oregon State's Brina Chaney Saturday, but it was to no avail. The 6-foot-5 Beaver center had her way with Shettters — and everyone else who tried to defend her — to the tune of a career-high 31 points.

With 6:26 remaining in the second half, Shettters' frustration peaked when she was whistled for her fifth foul in six minutes.

Shettters reached out and appeared to block Chaney's shot attempt. When the whistle sounded, however, a look of disgust and disbelief covered the face of the Portland native as she realized she had just fouled out.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Oregon head coach Bev Smith said rough nights are just part of the maturing process that is being a freshman in the Pacific-10 Conference.

"If you look at where Chaney was four years ago as a freshman, I'm not sure that she was that much further ahead of (where Shettters is now)," Smith said. "In fact, I think Jessie has a little bit of a step on (Chaney)."

"To get her to understand what it means to play against a player who is 6-foot-5, and how you can play, I think it's the best lesson that Jessie can have."

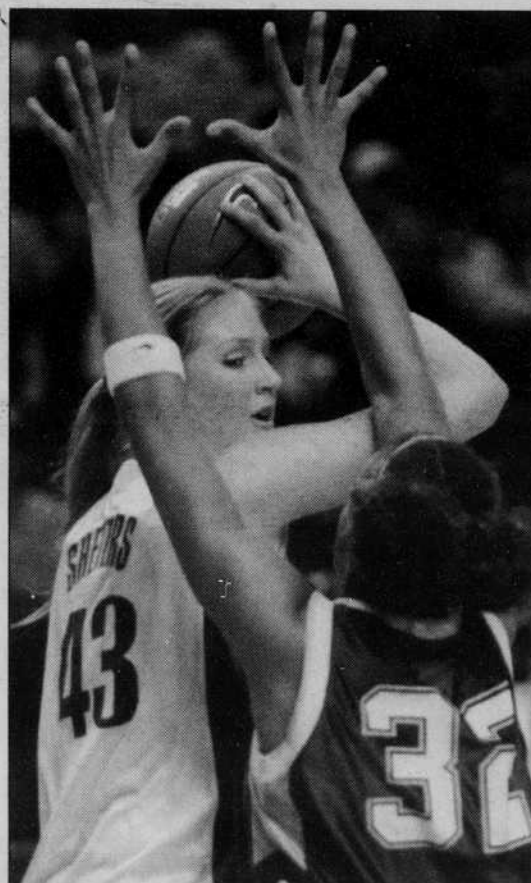
For Shettters, the competition she faces in the Pac-10 is light years ahead of what she faced while playing for Portland's Wilson High School.

"In high school, I didn't really play against anyone close to my height," Shettters said. "Playing against someone like Brina — she's definitely a very good basketball player — definitely inspires me to work harder."

In 18 games, Shettters is averaging 2.9 points and 2.3 rebounds per contest.

Slow start

An all too familiar problem reared its ugly

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Adam Amato Senior Photographer

Jessica Shettters fouled out after playing six minutes Saturday.