

Justin Best Everett Herald

Seattle's Rashard Lewis said that Luke Ridnour (8) will "be one of the best point guards in the league in the future."

ROOKIE

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ready and teaching me patience and just knowing my time will come."

In his rookie season, Ridnour is averaging 5.7 points, 1.3 rebounds and 2.1 assists per game. He backs up guard Antonio Daniels off the bench.

Although Ridnour's minutes have changed, his speed hasn't. Ridnour says that Seattle doesn't play as fast as the Ducks did, but his teammates believe otherwise.

"I know when I'm out on the floor with him and he gets the ball, he's always pushing it," forward Rashard Lewis said. "Once I see him catch it, I'm running as fast as possible because I know he's an up-tempo player."

Barry, who is currently on the injured list, put Ridnour's speed in perspective.

"And guys understand, when you're playing with Luke Ridnour, if you're running down the court and you don't have your hands up ... you might end up with a broken nose or a jammed finger. He's going to find you," Barry said.

"He's got such great court sense and great vision out there, that if you cut and move and you're open, Luke is going to make your job easier for you."

Ridnour is living his dream. A native of Blaine, Wash., Ridnour was given the opportunity to play for the local team when he was selected by Seattle as the 14th overall pick in the 2003 NBA Draft.

After finishing as last year's Pac-10 Tournament MVP, Ridnour decided to forego his senior season and enter the NBA. Entering the draft, he was criticized on his size and his

defensive capabilities.

"Everybody talks about how he can't defend and how he's small — just watch Luke play and you start to understand he knows the game of basketball," Barry said. "And anybody as smart as he is is going to find a way to get the job done."

As of late, Ridnour has helped his team get the job done.

In Friday's game against Phoenix, Ridnour handed out the game-winning assist and scored 11 points. McMillan said that Ridnour, "was very poised doing that."

Ridnour said he doesn't miss Eugene, except for all his friends, and he has never regretted the decision of passing up his senior season.

He had quite the fan base on Sunday. Along with all the kids screaming for autographs, several of the Oregon players showed up to see if their old teammate still had the moves.

The Duck even showed up and participated in the on-court festivities.

Ridnour has proved to his new teammates that he is ready to compete in this league and on this level. "To be a rookie and show the signs

"To be a rookie and show the signs of greatness that he's going to have, I think he's most definitely going to be a point guard in this league and be one the best point guards in the league in the future," Lewis said.

league in the future," Lewis said.
Ridnour convinced his opponents of his abilities as well. At times, Ridnour was matched up with Portland's Damon Stoudamire in the fourth quarter. More than once, Ridnour was able to split the double-team of Stoudamire and Rasheed Wallace and break to the hoop.

"Luke is in a tough position down there in Seattle because they're trying to get into the playoffs and he's playing in a crowded backcourt," Stoudamire said. "He just needs to continue to work hard, he'll improve and I know he'll be a main-stay in this league."

Ridnour has impressed from the very beginning. In his first career start, he scored a career-high 17 points against Denver and earned 15 points, seven assists and five rebounds against New York.

Ridnour has scored in double figures in 14 games this season and lead his team in assists four times. He said his most difficult transition into the NBA hasn't been physical.

"Mentally, there's just so many games and you got to be ready to play every game," Ridnour said. "In college you play two, you get a week off ... just being mentally ready all the time (is important)."

It hasn't been the easiest adjustment, but he's doing what he loves. Ridnour's days at Oregon are mere memories and he has proved to his teammates and opposing ones that he is in the NBA to stay.

Ridnour has shown a strong work ethic and consistency that has impressed his teammates. And he's proved to his coach how tough of a player he is.

But as with any rookie, Ridnour still has plenty to learn.

"And he's cheap," Barry said. "I don't think he understands. When we go on road trips and stuff, rookies are supposed to pay for meals; they're supposed to pay for room service for veteran players. This is something I'm trying to instill in him before the year's over with."

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Oregon in the standings, is in the second grouping of teams to be left out.

Obviously, neither Oregon nor California has done enough to impress Lunardi, endangering the Pacto's trend of getting at least three teams into the tournament. Not since the 1987-88 season has that happened.

Since then, only once — the 1992-93 season — has the conference placed three teams in the postseason tournament.

Brace yourself: It could be another one of those years.

It's no guarantee just yet, but six teams, like 2002, is out the window. Same goes for a five-team field. It wouldn't be terribly surprising to see the same thing happen to a four-team possibility, although Oregon, California and Arizona could run over the field in the second half, which should force the tournament to take four teams.

The Wildcats, Ducks and Bears — the three teams in question — will have a spotlight following them for the rest of the season.

Not only will they be fighting for their postseason lives, but also for the good of the Pac-10.

It should be interesting to see what happens.

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

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