

SPORTS

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Best bet
NCAA basketball:
Duke vs. Wake Forest
6 p.m., ESPN

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UO focus falls on final six games

Duck players say the team must win its final six to be NCAA Tournament comfortable come March

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

Six games are left in the Pacific-10 Conference season, and Oregon knows the importance of each one.

No, the Ducks can't win four and they can't win five. To feel comfortable enough to get into the NCAA Tournament regardless of their Pac-10 Tournament showing, the Ducks know six wins in six games is important.

MEN'S BASKETBALL

"I think every game for us is a must-win," Oregon forward Luke Jackson said. "That's how we're looking at it and that's how we'll approach every game. We've got to have all the games; we're going to try and go out and take them."

Tied for third in conference play with California, the Ducks (12-7 overall, 7-5 Pac-10) are not in a solid position. With the conference lauded for its parity this season — and in turn, a lack of NCAA Tournament-caliber teams — third may not be good enough.

As it stands right now, the Ducks would probably be one of the last few teams to be left out of the Big Dance, according to Joe Lunardi on ESPN.com's Bracketology, although RPI rankings also support that prediction.

Oregon's six-game stretch begins Thursday with Arizona, a team that beat the Ducks by 24 in January. The Wildcats swept the Ducks last season, but have been decimated to an unaccustomed five Pac-10 losses this season. Injuries and a lack of playing depth have left Arizona further down the Pac-10 food chain this season.

Perfect chance for the Ducks to make it two wins in a row?

Maybe, but it will take some effort.

"If we can get this victory, it will help us out," Oregon guard Andre Joseph said. "I definitely feel that we need to beat Arizona or Stanford. It's the best-case scenario (right now). We're at home and we have the crowd behind us. The team really needs to pull together on Thursday."

Lose one more game, and the Ducks' NCAA chances lessen. Lose two, and the National Invitation Tournament looks like a sure thing.

"Like coach (Ernie Kent) says, the margin of error is getting smaller every game," Oregon forward Mitch Platt said. "We need to win the rest of these."

Leftovers

Final thoughts on the Nate Robinson game-ending dunk flap?

"Coach (Lorenzo Romar) will probably make me run," Robinson told The (Tacoma) News Tribune after the game. "But it's worth it. I'll run all day if I get a little extra dessert for the team."

And this came from Oregon's Ian Crosswhite after the game.

"Nate wanted to prove a point and he proved it," Crosswhite said. "He knows what he did."

Imagine what will happen if the Ducks and Huskies meet in the Pac-10 Tournament in March.

Or even next year at McArthur Court.

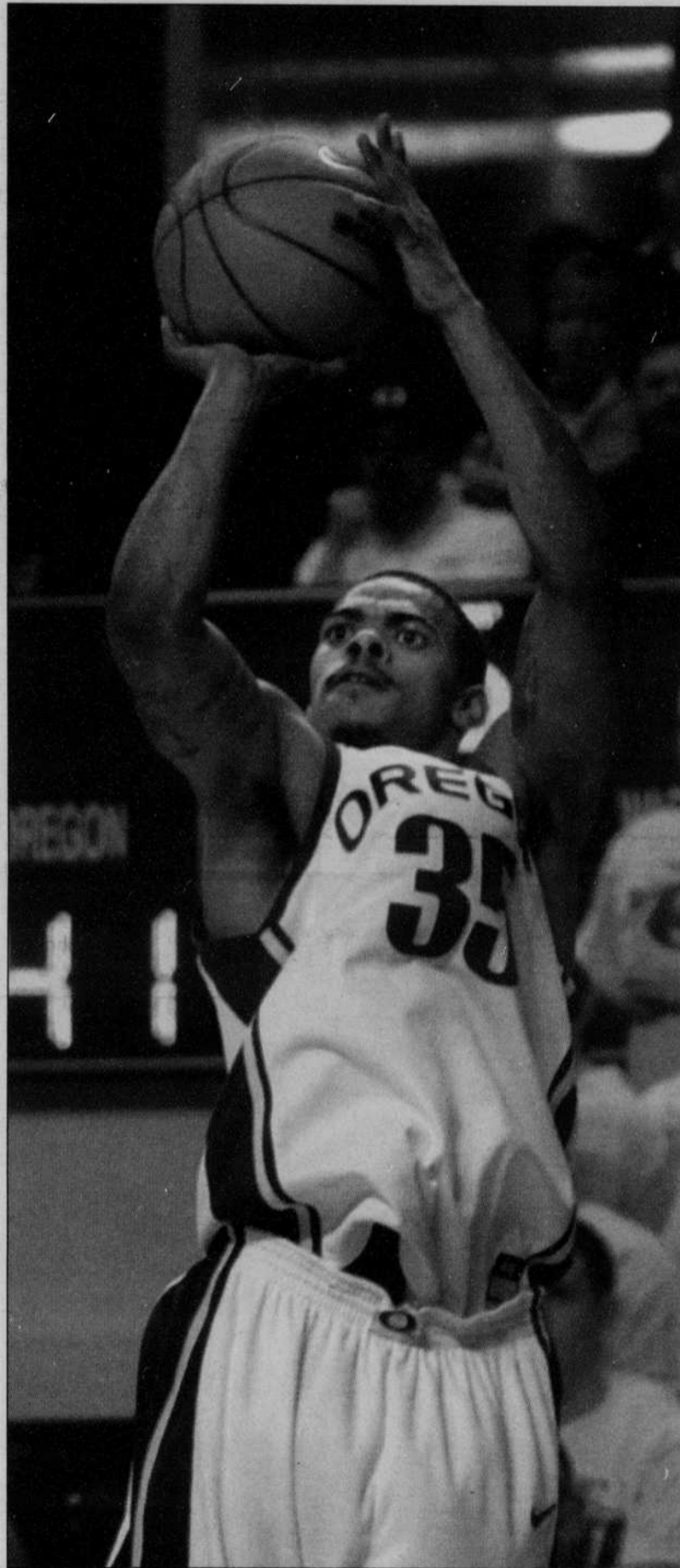
Injury check

Kent said Tuesday that freshman guard Aaron Brooks probably will not play Thursday against Arizona, but that it is not a final decision.

Kent said Brooks could play Saturday, although it might be more likely that Brooks will see his first game action since Jan. 2 when the Ducks visit California next week.

Kent also said guard Jordan Kent was upgraded to probable for Thursday. The younger Kent injured his right ankle in Oregon's loss to Washington and did not play Saturday against Washington State.

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Adam Amato Senior Photographer

Andre Joseph and the Ducks say they must win their next six games if they want to go to the NCAA Tournament. Oregon plays against Arizona Thursday at McArthur Court.

UO heads north for last chance at victory

The Ducks travel to Portland State tonight looking for their first Pac-10 victory in their last regular season match

By Scott Archer
Freelance Reporter

It's come down to this one final opportunity for the Ducks.

Oregon is traveling north to Portland today in a dual match with Portland State starting at 7 p.m.

DUCK WRESTLING

If the Ducks wish to have one Pacific-10 Conference win, it must come tonight.

If they fail to win, they will set the program record for fewest victories in a season, held by the 1953-54 team that won only two matches. The Ducks could also set the school record for most consecutive losses with eight.

However, Oregon is not alone in this endeavor. The Vikings also have yet to

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Jesse Thomas
Go the distance

NBA dunk contest missing its luster

Winning by default is still winning, right? It feels about as good as getting kicked in the groin. It ranks on the pride scale along with when you cut yourself shaving and others snicker when you forget to take the pieces of toilet paper off your face.

Indiana reserve Fred Jones won the 2004 NBA dunk contest by default, didn't he? (Note: I love how he now goes by Fred instead of Freddie.)

Both Jones and two-time dunk contest champion Jason Richardson missed their final dunks. It made the championship round of the contest about as exciting as a history lecture.

Freddie didn't win by default because Richardson missed his final dunk, though. He won by default from the competition.

My ideal dunk contestants would have been LeBron James, Kobe Bryant,

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Trojans, No. 10 Stanford headline week

The winner of Stanford and USC Thursday takes over first place in the Pac-10 with one week remaining

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

First place in the Pacific-10 Conference will be up for grabs Thursday when No. 10 Stanford and Southern California battle at Maples Pavilion.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Two weeks ago, the Cardinal (18-5 overall, 11-3 Pac-10) sat atop the conference at 10-1 and

appeared to be on its way to a fourth consecutive Pac-10 title. Since then, Stanford has lost two of its last three games and leads the Trojans (14-9, 11-4) by only a half game in the standings.

Arizona (18-7, 10-4) is also in the hunt, sitting a game behind the Cardinal.

Stanford has relied on All-American forward Nicole Powell to carry the offensive load for most of the season. The 6-foot-2 senior is averaging a double double — 20.7 points and 11.1 rebounds per game — but her teammates were starting to depend on her a little too much.

That changed Saturday when the Cardinal ran a more team-oriented attack in a 61-53 win over California.

"We can't depend on one person to carry us," Stanford head coach Tara VanDerveer told the Stanford Daily after the game. "And that's what everyone said. T'Nae (Thiel) said 'I'll help out,' and Susan (Borchardt) pushed it, and I thought Kelley (Suminski) and Azella (Perryman) played well."

USC has its own star in All-American candidate Ebony Hoffman. The 6-foot-2 senior is averaging 15.1 points and 8.1 rebounds per game while leading the Trojans to what many would consider an overachieving season.

Hoffman has been the beneficiary of strong performances from her supporting cast. Rometra

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