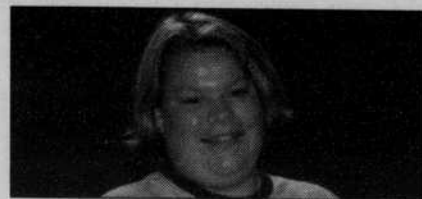


Wednesday, February 25, 2004



Mindi Rice

The girl and the game

## Renovate Howe Field instead of new arena

In all the racket surrounding the indefinite postponement of a new sports arena, there has been talk of missed opportunities, the ongoing collegiate arms race and the letdown after such a quick buildup.

One thing remains forgotten: Howe Field. The softball team's home sweet home that was set to close following this season, allowing the Athletics Department to construct a 15,000-seat arena on the site, will remain standing.

At least for now.

Despite the University's desire to keep the new arena's location the same — regardless of when it is built — it would make a cheaper deal to shelve the Howe location and move the new arena to the Autzen Stadium area. Just work out a deal with Lane Transit District for student-only shuttles from campus and one problem is solved.

Some of that saved money — from the estimated \$10 to \$12 million budgeted to relocate the softball field — could instead be put to use upgrading Howe Field and giving it amenities. Someday, head coach Kathy Arendsen and her No. 21 Ducks want to host an NCAA Regional Tournament.

In the NCAA's list of 20 different "Facility Requirements for Softball Championship Hosts" (also known as Appendix C) in the Division I softball handbook, Howe meets many of the standards already. The field is the right material, the dimensions fit the requirements and Mac Court is right across the parking lot for training facilities and closed interviews.

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## Crunch time comes for UO

The Ducks are reeling after losing two straight at McArthur Court to Arizona and Arizona State

By Hank Hager  
Sports Editor

As the Pacific-10 Conference regular season begins to grind down and teams prepare for the conference tournament, one ugly truth for Oregon is beginning to show.

The Ducks need to win the Pac-10's postseason tournament in order to get to the NCAA version.

OK, so it's still possible that four wins in four games to end the season could get Oregon to the Big Dance. That, however, is not a likely scenario.

### MEN'S BASKETBALL

"Yeah, it is hard not looking forward to (the Pac-10 Tournament)," Oregon forward Ian Crosswhite said. "You think about it a little bit. But still we're not going to win it if we don't play well up to it. If we don't kind of get on a roll and win some games, it's going to be hard to get into the tournament and play good basketball."

This season, eerily, has mirrored Oregon's 2002-03 effort. With four games left to play last season, the Ducks were 8-6 in Pac-10 play. They went on to drop two of their next four before winning three straight in Los Angeles at the conference tournament.

Oregon needed to win it last season to get into the NCAA Tournament, and it did. The scenario this year will be the same.

But as Crosswhite said, the Ducks can't look too far ahead. California and Stanford are pivotal opponents, especially on their home courts.

"The thing you learn in terms of being in athletics is that you can't look back, you've got to continue to look ahead," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said. "We're still in the grind of the season. Obviously it has not gone the way we want it to go, but that's OK. We're still here and we're still in the hunt for some things."

Playing to the Ducks' favor this season is the lack of any clearcut favorites after No. 1 Stanford. Arizona showed its vulnerability in a loss to Oregon State on Saturday, and teams ranked third through sixth in the Pac-10 standings are just a game and a half apart.

"With the exception of Stanford, everybody has had some tough losses along the way," Kent said. "We're just sitting there battling each other, so someone is going to emerge out of all of that. We have just as good a chance as anyone else to do that."

After the Ducks emerge out of the muck that will be California's Haas Pavilion and Stanford's Maples Pavilion, they return to McArthur Court to face off against Southern California and UCLA. Then comes Pac-10 Tournament time.

### Watch the ball bounce

Aaron Brooks emerged before Tuesday's practice without

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Erik Bishoff Photographer

Luke Jackson and the Ducks will likely need to win the Pac-10 Tournament to go to the NCAA version.

## Battle for top Pac-10 berth comes down to Cardinal, 'Cats

The top two Pac-10 teams are one game apart with two games remaining in conference season play

By Mindi Rice  
Senior Sports Reporter

One of Stanford's three Pacific-10 Conference losses this season came almost three weeks ago against the team now sitting one game behind the Cardinal in the Pac-10 standings.

With the final conference games of the season taking place this weekend, Arizona (20-7 overall, 12-4 Pac-10) and No. 10 Stanford (20-5, 13-3) are in a tight race for the No. 1 seed in the Pac-10 Tournament. The Wildcats travel to the Washington schools while the Cardinal closes its home season with Oregon and Oregon State.

"We are in control of our own destiny," Arizona head coach Joan Bonvicini said following Saturday's victory over Oregon. "We need to be a little tougher on the road. We are not going to look back, we are going to look forward."

The second-place Wildcats closed their home season 14-0 at McKale Center on Saturday. Arizona is 3-4 on the road in conference play, which lends some worry to the Wildcats' run

at the top seed. They close the regular season against Washington and Washington State this weekend.

"I am not sure why we play like we do on the road," Arizona guard Dee-Dee Wheeler said. "I mean, we take the same players, but we don't play our game."

The race for the top of the Pac-10 doesn't just include two teams, however. Arizona State (17-8, 11-5) is close behind in third, and Southern California (14-11, 11-6) is a half-game behind the Sun Devils.

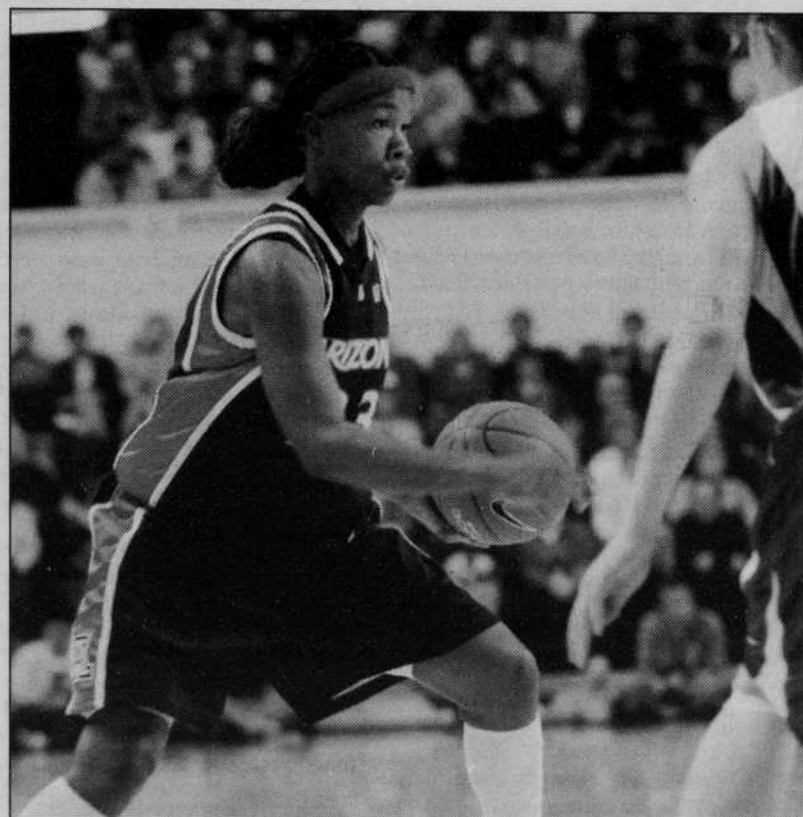
The only conference teams who have a record — Pac-10 or overall — below .500 are the bottom three: Oregon, California and Washington State.

"The Pac-10 is a tough conference," Oregon head coach Bev Smith said Saturday. "You can separate the top and the bottom. I think Stanford, Arizona, Arizona State and Southern California had good (non-conference) preseasons, and it carried through to the Pac-10 competition. The Pac-10 has tough teams that play well at home."

With the Pac-10 Tournament taking all 10 teams, the bottom four play on the first day. The No. 7 and No. 10 seeds face each other first while the No. 8 and No. 9 seeds play the tournament's second game.

The only team that appears to have its conference tournament position wrapped up is Washington State. The Cougars' (5-20, 1-15) only conference win came at California.

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Danielle Hickey Photo Editor

Natalie Jones leads Arizona and is third in the Pac-10 with a 78.8 free throw percentage.