

Monday, March 1, 2004

Ducks clinch Pac-10's No. 8 with home win

Oregon enters the Pacific-10 Tournament on Friday with confidence after beating Cal and Stanford, the first time this season it has won two consecutive conference games

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

Oregon couldn't have asked for much more.

After a season full of injuries and disappointment, the Ducks closed out their Pacific-10 Conference schedule Saturday with a 77-62 victory against California in front of 3,572 at McArthur Court.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

It was Oregon's third-highest margin of victory this season and the first time the Ducks have won consecutive conference games.

Saturday's win, along with an emotional victory against No. 10 Stanford on Thursday, has the Ducks (14-14 overall, 6-12 Pac-10) glowing with confidence as they look ahead to the weekend's Pac-10 Tournament.

No. 8 Oregon and No. 9 California will meet again Friday in the opening round of the tournament. The winner will face the No. 1 seed — Stanford — Saturday.

"This was a very great weekend for us," Oregon center Andrea Bills said. "Our momentum is very high and we're just ready to get at it in the Pac-10 Tournament."

One area the Golden Bears (11-16, 4-14) will need to improve before Friday is their interior defense. Bills torched California for a career-high 22 points Saturday, connecting on 9 of 14 shots.

The 6-foot-3 junior also grabbed 10 rebounds — three offensive — for her sixth double-double of the season.

Saturday's performance snapped a cold streak for Bills, who tallied only eight field goals in her past four games.

"(Oregon) did a great job going to (Bills)," California head coach Caren Horstmeyer said. "I thought she played well. I think the (offensive) boards probably sparked her a little bit.

"When she plays well, (Oregon plays) well."

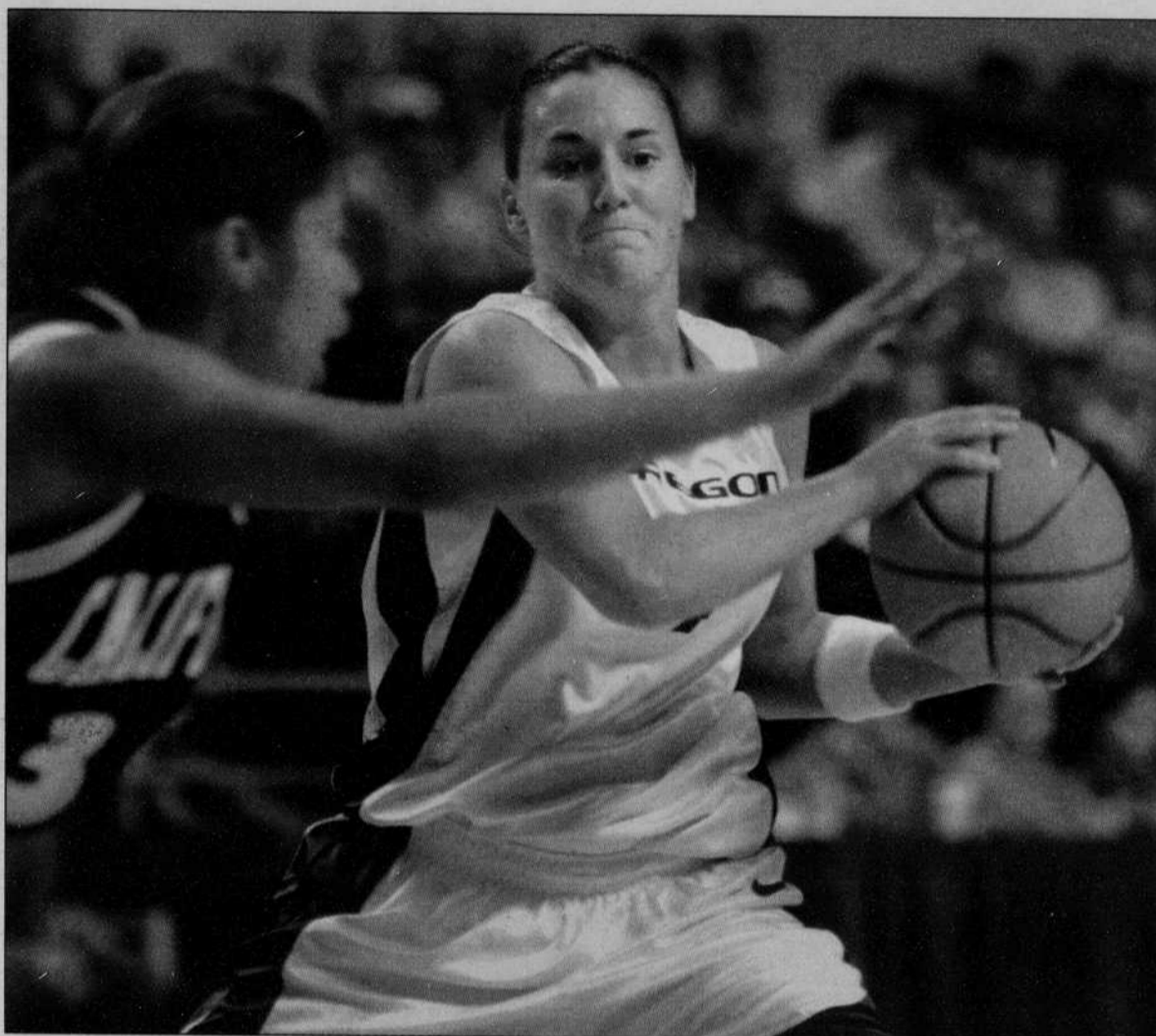
California pulled to within six with 2:42 remaining in the second half when a three-pointer by forward Kiki Williams cut the Oregon lead to 65-59.

Momentum shifted back to Oregon 11 seconds later when Golden Bear forward Leigh Gregory fouled Duck point guard Corrie Mizusawa near midcourt. Mizusawa's smiling reaction to the foul angered Horstmeyer, who was issued a technical foul after screaming at officials for roughly a minute.

"I had a bad technical foul," Horstmeyer said. "I think that was a bad technical foul to get at that time. I think that put our team at a disadvantage."

Oregon started the game on fire, opening with an 8-0 run during the first two minutes. California answered with a 17-1 run

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Oregon senior Kayla Steen scored a season-high 13 points in her final game at McArthur Court. The guard is the only senior on the team.

Erik R. Bishoff
Photographer

Steen gives Mac loud farewell

Kayla Steen hasn't been a quiet leader for Oregon, and she certainly didn't leave McArthur Court with a quiet game.

Steen, Oregon's only senior to be celebrated before Saturday's victory against California, isn't the sort of take-charge leader who is also typical of a basketball team.

Typical isn't a word to describe the guard. It also doesn't describe her play Saturday.

The Portland native has averaged 2.6 points per game this season. She scored 13, one shy of her career high, in her Mac Court finale.

When Steen returned to the Oregon bench for the final time Saturday after playing 26 minutes in her second start of the season, she received a standing ovation from the crowd.

But all thoughts were still on the game, a 77-62 win against California.

"(The emotion) got to me a little bit when we first started warming up," Steen said. "But I tried to forget about it and just focus on the game, our game plan and what we



Mindi Rice

The girl and the game

needed to come out and do."

If Oregon head coach Bev Smith's game plan was to send Steen off in style, then the Ducks played the plan to a "T."

Literally. A technical foul on California head coach Caren Horstmeyer, called after she screamed at a referee, was the loudest thing in Mac Court on Saturday.

The second loudest was Steen's leadership. "She is a tremendous leader," Oregon's

starting point guard Corrie Mizusawa said. "To go out there and talk to everybody and get everyone fired up, Kayla is probably the best on our team that can do that."

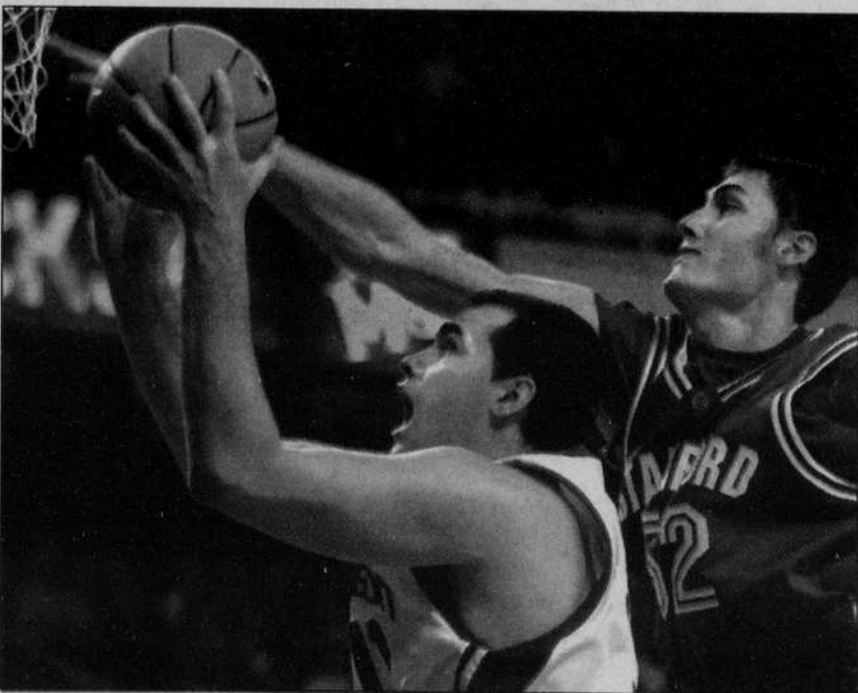
"Everyone looks to her and listens to her and responds to what she has to say."

In her two years at Oregon, Steen has battled teammates for playing time. She has battled injuries. She has battled opponents. Essentially, she's a fighter.

In her junior season — her first as a Duck after two years at Clackamas Community College — Steen was slowed by a back injury. In the 2002-2003 regular season finale, she tore the anterior cruciate ligament in her left knee. After offseason surgery, she returned in November. Shortly after she took to the court, Steen was left as the lone senior when Cathrine Kraayeveld tore her ACL.

Steen, a point guard by nature, averaged 11.3 minutes this season. She shot 84.2

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Erik R. Bishoff Photographer

Ian Crosswhite and the Ducks struggled Saturday in a 76-55 loss to Stanford. It was hardly similar to the 83-80 loss to Stanford on Feb. 1, when the Ducks actually led at one point in the game.

Oregon battered at Stanford; Cardinal rolls to 25th victory

The Ducks lost their 18th straight game at Maples Pavilion on Saturday, 76-55

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

PALO ALTO, CALIF. — The Stanford juggernaut keeps on rolling.

Oregon headed into the Pacific-10 Conference's lion's den on Saturday and came out bruised, battered, beaten and basically left for dead in the race for an NCAA Tournament berth.

And now, the Ducks are almost on life support for a berth in the Pac-10 Tournament in March. That all comes courtesy of No. 1 Stanford, which defeated Oregon, 76-55, in front of 7,391 at a sold-out Maples Pavilion.

"Stanford plays so solid," Oregon forward Luke Jackson said. "We knew it was going to be tough tonight."

"They play great team defense. They don't have many stars but they play solid as a team."

There's currently a list of issues for the Ducks, the

most pressing of which surrounds the team's berth in the Pac-10's postseason. The loss forces Oregon into a three-way tie with UCLA and USC for fifth-place in the Pac-10. Coincidentally, the Ducks host both teams to end the season at McArthur Court.

One win and the Ducks should be in. Another loss — or two — and it could get close.

Oregon can't afford to lose focus, especially after scoring a season-low 55 points and shooting a season-worst 31.1 percent from the field against the Cardinal.

"We've got to focus on USC and UCLA," Jackson said. "We're not taking anything for granted because we're not in for sure. I'm absolutely frustrated. That can only go so far. We have to come together and we have to get wins."

The Ducks allowed the Cardinal to connect on 45 percent of the team's three-point shots. Stanford also outrebounded the Ducks, 42-33, highlighted by 12 from forward Josh Childress.

Childress, for that matter, gave the Ducks fits. He

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