

Duck seniors say goodbye during dramatic win

It was an emotional day for four Oregon seniors who played their final games at McArthur Court on Saturday

By Jesse Thomas
Sports Reporter

It was emotional. It was special. It was everything all in one.

MEN'S BASKETBALL

It was senior day for Oregon. "I didn't sleep at all last night," senior James Davis said after the UCLA game. "It was like the night before Christmas. I was just real happy and couldn't wait to play."

Twenty minutes before tip-off against the Bruins, seniors Luke Jackson, Jay Anderson, Andre Joseph and Davis were honored by the McArthur Court crowd.

The Pit Crew chanted the names of each individual while the players hugged and shook hands with all the younger Ducks. The pit crew also chanted "thank you seniors" throughout the day.

"I've played so many games here and it's just been a really special place for me — just to come in at night, you imagine all the fans in there screaming and big games that you've played," Jackson said. "I've had a great four years here and I don't have any regrets. I'm really thankful for everything I've been in position to do."

Each player was presented with a framed Pit Crew T-shirt that was signed by every member of the student cheering

section. And then it was time to begin possibly the final game of their Oregon careers at McArthur Court, pending a possible NIT game in Eugene.

When it began, it was sloppy. It was something Oregon head coach Ernie Kent expected.

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"I've not been at a senior game yet at home that they have not turned the ball over, air balled it, kicked it around, kicked it some more in the first five or 10 minutes of the game — it was no different in this game."

Ernie Kent
Oregon head coach

over, air balled it, kicked it around, kicked it some more in the first five or 10 minutes of the game — it was no different in this game," Kent said.

"Probably my best coaching was staying calm with them and let them kick it all over the place, and at half-time very calmly tell them, we've got that out of our system, let's go play basketball now."

For Jackson, the gut-wrenching win as he scored the final points in the dwindling seconds of the game couldn't have

been better.

Jackson's two free-throws gave Oregon the 60-59 win over UCLA.

"We all had confidence in him," Davis said. "We definitely had no doubts that he was going to win the game for us, getting the foul or making the shot."

After the Pit Crew mobbed the players during the post-game huddle, Jackson walked off the floor, giving one final wave to all his fans.

"I know so many people at these games," Jackson said. "I know a couple thousand people that come to the games. I've made a lot of great friends and a lot of great memories here. I just kind of waved one last time."

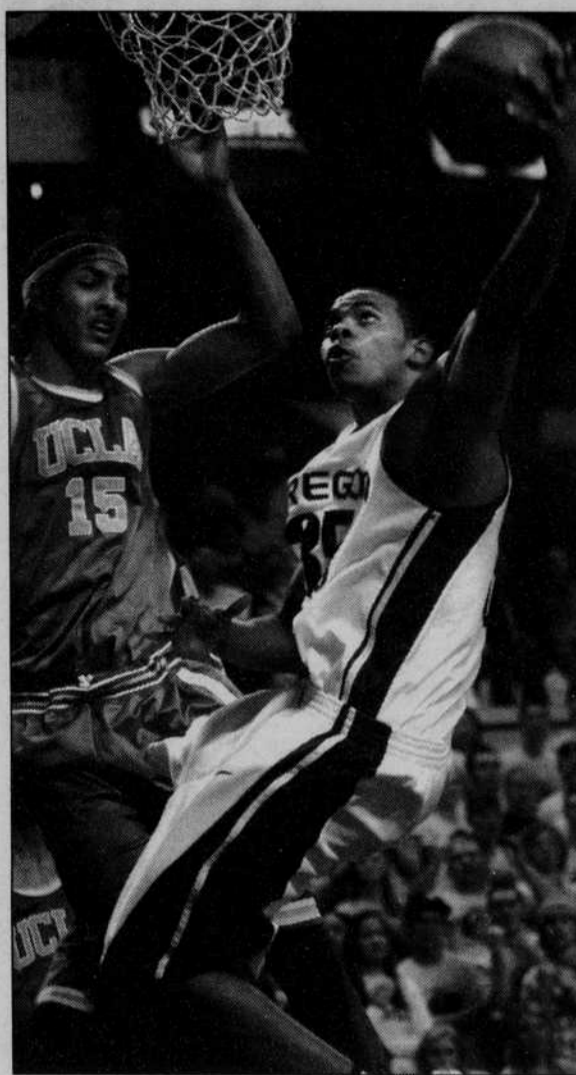
Jackson said he had a great time, adding that he dedicated it all in the memory of his grandfather, Dean Eusted, who passed away before the season began. It was difficult for Jackson that his grandfather wasn't there to walk beside him in his introduction.

"Before the game I just looked up into the stands and I tried to, during the National Anthem, try to imagine him sitting in the third balcony up there somewhere just looking down on me," Jackson said.

After it was all over, they all knew it was a great way to end.

"I'm just truly happy and blessed," Davis said. "It just takes me a minute to take perspective on all four years, everything we've accomplished as a program, as a team. It was just good to get this win."

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Andre Joseph finished with a career-high seven assists in his final game in an Oregon uniform at McArthur Court. He is one of four seniors to leave the program at the conclusion of the season.

Erik R. Bishoff
Photographer

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but Cedric Bozeman couldn't get a fall away jumper to go through the hoop.

The guard drove the length of the floor, caught the attention of Oregon guard Andre Joseph and attempted an 8-foot jumper. But he had four Duck defenders collapse on him as he shot the ball.

Not exactly a clear lane to the basket.

"He got pretty deep into the paint and went up for a shot," Crosswhite said. "It was good there was a lot of guys around him to put pressure on and make him think a little. Well I might have to shoot off the backboard or I might have to do this. He made a tough shot a couple plays before."

Everything Oregon did Saturday against UCLA was in the name of momentum.

That included a 9-0 scoring run to start the second half, 21 points from Jackson and a defensive effort that had escaped the Ducks this season prior to the game against the Bruins.

Momentum, though, isn't always pretty.

The last couple of possessions for both teams were simply an exclamation point to a game dominated by turnovers and missed opportunities.

The teams combined for 22 turnovers in the first half. The Ducks shot 33.3 percent from the field in the first half and held UCLA to 29 points.

Oregon came alive in the first two minutes of the second half. The

Ducks outscored the Bruins 9-0 by

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Ian Crosswhite
Oregon forward

the 18:30 mark and extended that to 18-5 en route to a 41-34 lead with

15:57 to play.

"That's when we get momentum and being down, we know it's really crucial we get off to a good start in the second half," Oregon guard James Davis said. "That 9-0 run was key to getting the victory."

For the second straight game, the Ducks contributed a strong defensive effort throughout the game for the win. The Bruins shot 46.2 percent in the first half and bested that by 1 percent in the second.

But Oregon took advantage of 20 UCLA turnovers — nine coming in the second. The Ducks scored 29 points off of turnovers. Conversely, the Bruins posted 15 points off 15 Oregon turnovers.

"Definitely, defense was key for

us," Davis said. "I think as the score shows it was a defensive game and we were fortunate to get the win."

Jackson's 21 points — 14 of which came in the second half — were good enough to pace the Ducks. He also had three steals, moving him past Luke Ridnour for second place on Oregon's career list.

Davis ended his career at McArthur Court with 11 points and Joseph finished his with a career-high seven assists.

Dijon Thompson scored 14 points to lead UCLA, and T.J. Cummings pitched in with 12 before fouling out with 54 seconds left to play.

Contact the sports editor at hankhager@dailymerald.com.

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