

HAGER

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aside from a few details, it would've been tough to point out the differences.

So when Oregon came away the winner in the first round Thursday, it was no surprise. Had California come away with the win, that wouldn't have been a surprise, either.

Behold the beauty of the Pac-10, circa 2004. Aside from Stanford, and anytime Arizona played Oregon, there's really been no dominance from any one team.

That dominance will be Oregon's big test today. The Cardinal was in control

every step of the way in a 68-47 win over Washington State prior to Oregon's victory over California.

While the Ducks could focus primarily on Leon Powe and Amit Tamir, Stanford is almost faceless. Chris Hernandez and Matt Lottich present the same style of troubles for Oregon. They can both knock down the long distance shot and can handle the ball without taking away any of the team's offensive opportunities.

Joe Kirchofer, Rob Little and Matt Haryasz could step in at any given time and harass Oregon's big men. Each rebounds, clogs the lane and has an ability to play solid defense.

So you can see where the dominance comes into play.

The only real player who stands out as an individual star for Stanford is Pac-10 Player of the Year Josh Childress.

For Oregon to dull that Stanford dominance, the Ducks will have to play as a team. They'll have to see Stanford as a balanced machine that can march down the floor and ride itself to victory with ease, or so it seems.

The Ducks cleared the line between themselves and California by stopping the Golden Bear's big men, Tamir and Powe, to the point where outside play really mattered.

But the Stanford big men aren't

Tamir or Powe. What does that mean?

"I think we're going to play them the same," Oregon forward Jay Anderson said. "We're probably not going to trap as much. We'll try to keep them out of the lane and try to make them make shots over the top of us."

A major theme in Oregon's win over California was offense, and plenty of it. But that may have been the most visible aspect of Oregon's victory.

The Ducks, though, showed a renewed sense of energy and all-around balance. They were making plays on the baseline, keeping the momentum in Oregon's control. As much as the three-point play pushed the Ducks along,

their ability to stop California's outside shot paid off. And that was made possible by energy, and plenty of it.

"Coming down the stretch of the season, our energy has come back to us," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said. "We feel like our energy and legs are back."

"We're going to need that energy tomorrow, every ounce of it."

Otherwise, that line between the Ducks and the Cardinal is going to be crystal clear.

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

SINK

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points in the first half.

Efficient may not be the best way to describe Oregon's defensive effort, but it was enough to keep one of the Pac-10's worst shooting teams from taking control. Tamir scored just five points in the second half, while the Golden Bears (13-15) shot 52 percent from the field.

That, in itself, is impressive. But consider the fact that California took just 25 shots in the second half, and that impressiveness dims a bit.

"In the second half, it was more of just an effort to know where (Tamir) is at all times," Oregon forward Jay Anderson said. "Just concentrate on staying on him and not letting him get an open look."

More than a minute after Brooks sank

the game's final three-pointer, he knocked down two free throws, which proved to be his final points of the game.

A.J. Diggs scored the final two points of his career five seconds later, pulling California to within four. At that point, though, the Golden Bears were forced to foul often.

Oregon made five of six free throws in the final 27 seconds of the game to seal the victory.

"Give Oregon credit," California head coach Ben Braun said. "They made some big shots today."

The win earns Oregon another crack against Stanford, a team the Ducks haven't fared well against this season. Stanford defeated Washington State, 68-47, prior to Oregon's game against California.

What will it take to defeat the Cardinal?

"We're going to have to execute offensively, take good shots and defensively, we're just going to have to be accountable for every possession," Jackson said. "They have guys that give up themselves just to play hard so we're going to have to match that intensity."

"If we do that, I think we'll be right there in the game."

Contact the sports editor at hankhager@dailymerald.com.

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