

Emerald sports writers reflect on 2003-04 year

From games in New York City to Corvallis, Oregon Daily Emerald sports writers were there. They saw wins against Michigan and California, Oregon State and Fresno State. They saw losses to another Michigan team, Washington State and Stanford.

Suffice it to say, those trips produced a ton of memories.

Oregon Daily Emerald sports writers reflect on their favorite games or trips they covered this year.

Hank Hager, sports editor: I'd never been to El Paso, Texas. And I'd never been to New York City. So when I went to El Paso for the Sun Bowl and New York for the NIT, I had fun. But Los Angeles and the men's Pacific-10 Conference Tournament — now that was great.

There's three days of great basketball. There's four days of incredible weather in probably the biggest and most bustling city this side of the Mississippi River.

Sitting behind Lute Olson on press row for Arizona's game against Southern California? Priceless.

Making sure you don't fall over laughing when Olson begins yelling

at his players — right after the opening tip, mind you — for whatever reason? Golden.

The Pac-10 Tournament was an absolute blast. Oregon beat California in the first game, then narrowly lost to Stanford in the second. Both games were great to watch.

But just being able to be around that tournament — where eight of the conference's 10 teams huddled for three days at Staples Center — was an incredible experience.

None of the games welcomed huge crowds, but it was a fun atmosphere for writers and athletes alike.

Of course, it helped that the sun shone every day I was there and coastal water appeared just by walking around the block.

Too fun.

Mindi Rice, senior sports reporter: These are the moments that make childhood dreams.

Tied at zero through seven and a half innings, Oregon was staying hit-for-hit with No. 1 Arizona on April 25.

Third baseman Ashley Richards, who had walked once and grounded out twice, led off the bottom of

the eighth.

With the Ducks' sixth hit of the game, Richards crushed a pitch over the left-center field fence and sent her bench — including pitchers Amy Harris and Ani Nyhus, who had combined for a five-hit shutout, and head coach Kathy Arendsen — jumping into the air with elation. The Ducks had done the unthinkable: Beat No. 1 Arizona and give Wildcats pitcher Alicia Hollowell a loss to go with her 32 wins.

The best post-game interview was Richards. After everyone interviewed her, I approached her. With the inevitable "So how did that feel?" question, her reply captured the moment:

"I still can't find the words," she said. "I've been talking to so many people and I still can't figure out what this feeling is. I feel like our team's on the top of the world right now."

You were, Ashley, you were.

Jon Roetman, sports reporter: Redemption.

There were 8.2 seconds left on the clock and the Oregon women's basketball team led then-No. 10 Stanford 67-66 at McArthur Court

on Feb. 26.

Duck fans couldn't help but fear the worst, however, as Oregon had found itself in a similar situation last season and was torched by Cardinal All-American Nicole Powell, who sank a pair of free throws with 3.3 seconds remaining for a 75-74 win.

Along with the fear of Powell, Oregon had seemingly played against a stacked deck all season. Injuries to key players and a general lack of experience plagued the Ducks to the tune of a 4-12 Pacific-10 Conference record entering the contest against one of the nation's best teams.

But this February night was different. Junior forward Kedzie Gunderson had played the defensive game of her life, holding Powell to 13 points on 4 of 13 shooting for the first 39 minutes and 52 seconds of the game.

Stanford would have one final chance as a player inbounded the ball in the backcourt. Everyone in McArthur Court knew the ball was going to Powell. Now it was up to Gunderson to stop her.

If Gunderson needed any added

motivation, it was her foul on Powell during the final seconds of last season's game that led to a Stanford win.

As Powell dribbled down court, Gunderson moved her feet beautifully, staying in front of the All-World forward and forcing her into an off-balance jumper that fell short. As the buzzer sounded, the Mac Court crowd erupted in celebration of the Ducks' 67-66 win.

Alex Tam, sports reporter: Games should be decided by each team's top players.

The best that both teams have to offer going head-to-head to decide the outcome is the pinnacle of sports.

This situation presented itself in this year's Oregon men's tennis dual match against hated rival 18th-ranked Washington at the Student Tennis Center. I was privileged to cover this event in early March with the crowd sitting on the edge of their seats and anticipating every single point.

Tied 3-3 with one dual match point left, Oregon's No. 1 player Manuel Kost ended up defeating the Huskies' No. 1 player, Alex Vlaski, in an intense three-setter 5-7, 7-6 (12-10) and 6-4. Vlaski, a two-time All-American, was ranked third in the nation at the time. Afterward, teammates rushed onto the court while the crowd gave Kost a long standing ovation. It was a sight that only sports can produce.

The 4-3 win marked only the fifth victory in Oregon history against Washington in 112 attempts. The Ducks' losing streak against the Huskies had spanned more than half a century. Oregon head coach Chris Russell said they "had been haunted by that (streak) for a while."

"But finally we're no longer haunted," Russell said afterward.

Truly, this match showed what sports is all about.

Today's crossword solution

G	R	A	P	H	S	P	B	S	P	A	L	L
I	N	F	L	O	W	R	A	H	A	R	I	A
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