

■ Women's volleyball

Oregon plunges below .500 after loss to No. 6 USC

Ducks fall in straight sets to the Women of Troy, despite valiant comeback effort in game three

BY STEPHEN MILLER
SPORTS REPORTER

A wall of middle blockers shielded Oregon's view of a possible victory against No. 6 USC on Friday at McArthur Court. The Ducks departed from their winning record and received their sixth-straight Pacific-10 Conference loss to the Women of Troy, 3-0 (30-19, 30-12, 30-27).

Oregon's defensive presence vanished in the middle of the first game, and USC showed no mercy. In the second game, the Ducks were held to their lowest point total of the season (12). In the third game, the Women of Troy muscled through Oregon's revived attack.

"Oregon kept getting better," USC head coach Mick Haley said. "The second game was a downer for them, but they came back and fought in that third game ... so we feel real fortunate to come away with a 3-0 win."

The Ducks (9-10 overall, 1-8 Pac-10) saw USC compile a .406 hitting percentage and an 11-0 scoring run in the second game. They responded in the third game with 27 points — the most they have scored since Oct. 15 in a match against California.

"In game three we didn't let ourselves get stuck so it was really easy to keep that momentum," Oregon attacker Allyson Leavitt said. "We weren't feeling very good after UCLA so this was very reassuring to come off the court with a good feeling that we laid it all out there."

Leavitt recently moved from defensive specialist to outside hitter. The

sophomore was a helpful component in Oregon's starting lineup as she recorded a career-best 11 digs. Her previous career mark was 10. The Springfield native landed five kills and a match-high three service aces.

Oregon head coach Carl Ferreira said Leavitt provides team chemistry and adaptability to the roster.

"She's one of our better all-around players," Ferreira said. "I thought the energy and the chemistry she played with was real significant. She served well, and I thought she attacked well against a very dominant block."

USC (11-3, 6-2 Pac-10) utilized a pair of towering middle blockers to restrain Oregon's offensive attack and fuel its own. Senior Emily Adams (6-foot-6) and junior Bibiana Candelas (6-foot-5) each posted a match-high 15 kills.

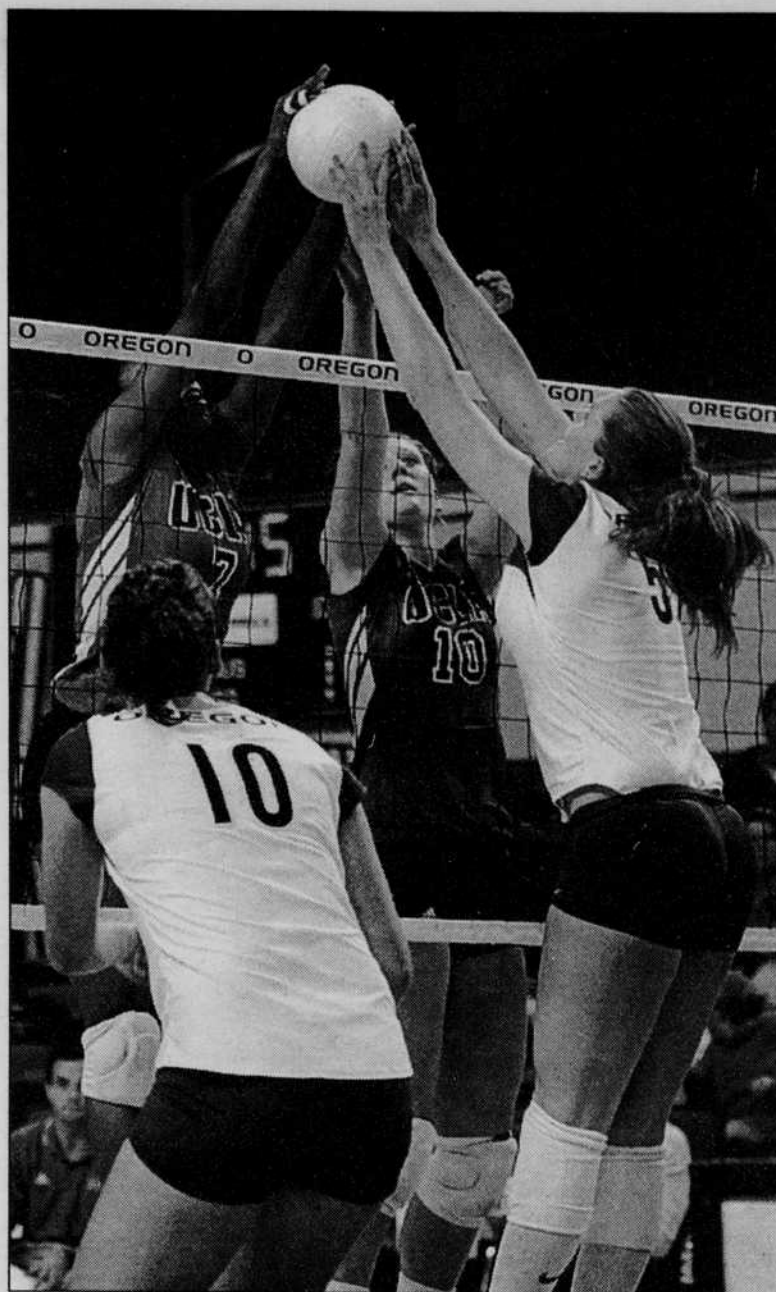
"They're not just big, they're extremely talented," Ferreira said. "It's arguably one of the best middle blocking tandems in the history of collegiate volleyball."

Candelas committed two attack errors on 19 attempts and hit at a .684 percentage. On defense, she recorded match-highs in solo blocks (two) and block assists (five).

All together, the Women of Troy posted a .294 hitting percentage.

"I think our middles dominated — they were high percentage for us," Haley said. "We had a few too many hitting errors (17), but I really think Oregon caused those. Oregon played real well against us, their block was real good on the right front."

Oregon finished with six team



LAUREN WIMER | PHOTOGRAPHER

Oregon's Karen Waddington (5) forces a block against UCLA, assisting in the Ducks' defense at the net against USC on Friday.

blocks, and USC posted 11. Kim McNally and Kristen Bitter each acquired four block assists for the Ducks.

Senior libero Katie O'Neil tallied a match-high 18 digs, nine in the third game.

USC used three setters into its rotation who each finished with double digits in assists. Allison Dillon led the setting trio and the match with 22.

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Jones: Duck defense gets ten sacks

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"I didn't even think about it when I went in," Allen said. "I changed after that play."

A little too gutsy on that one, Keith.

Terrence Whitehead punched the ball into the end zone on the next play with his usual it's-going-to-take-a-mac-truck-to-bring-me-down style of running, and the Ducks took the lead for good.

Did I mention Oregon's defensive line tore through the Stanford line like a wet paper sack and accumulated a ridiculous 10 sacks?

The defense stepped up as a whole when it needed a stop and punished the Stanford quarterbacks all day long.

Ask Trent Edwards.

Edwards was flattened by Robby Valenzuela during Stanford's first play from scrimmage in the second quarter. Edwards then left, Stanford citing a bruised shoulder and hand as the cause, but I think his ego was bruised the most, and he didn't return.

The defense dominated. The offense did enough to get the victory.

Winning on the road in this fashion once is a nice surprise, but doing it twice really says something.

Another tough road win says this Oregon squad has IT right now.

The IT is the swagger of a team that knows it can win in the Pac-10 anywhere, anytime.

Will this continue?

Who knows.

Are the Ducks a serious contender in the Pac-10?

You bet.

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■ Men's golf

Ducks to host inaugural Big Ten/ Pac-10 Challenge

Fourteen teams will compete against Oregon in the challenge, including five ranked in the top 25

BY BRIAN SMITH
SPORTS REPORTER

The Oregon men's golf team will open a two-day tournament on one of the best courses in the country today.

The Ducks will play dual roles as

host and competitor in the inaugural Big Ten/Pacific-10 Challenge, held at the par-72 6,980-yard Bandon Dunes Golf Course in Bandon, Ore.

Oregon will tee off today for the first 36 holes against seven teams

each from the Pac-10 and Big Ten conferences. An impressive field that includes defending NCAA champion California, 2002 NCAA champion Minnesota and 2004 Pac-10 champion Arizona will be awaiting the Ducks.

Five of the 14 teams in the field are ranked among the top 25 in the recent Golfweek poll.

"We are a little nervous but happy to have opportunities like this to play against other talented schools," Oregon junior Justin St. Clair said. "I'm eager to go out there and play."

Oregon's squad will consist of juniors St. Clair and Gregg LaVoie, sophomores Eric Hastings and Matt Ma and freshman Joey Benedetti.

Teams will play 36 holes starting at

8 a.m. today and 18 on Tuesday.

"This is a unique event that has a chance to develop into something really special," Oregon head coach Steve Nosler said. "I hope we as a team can focus and go out and play solid golf to help represent our conference."

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