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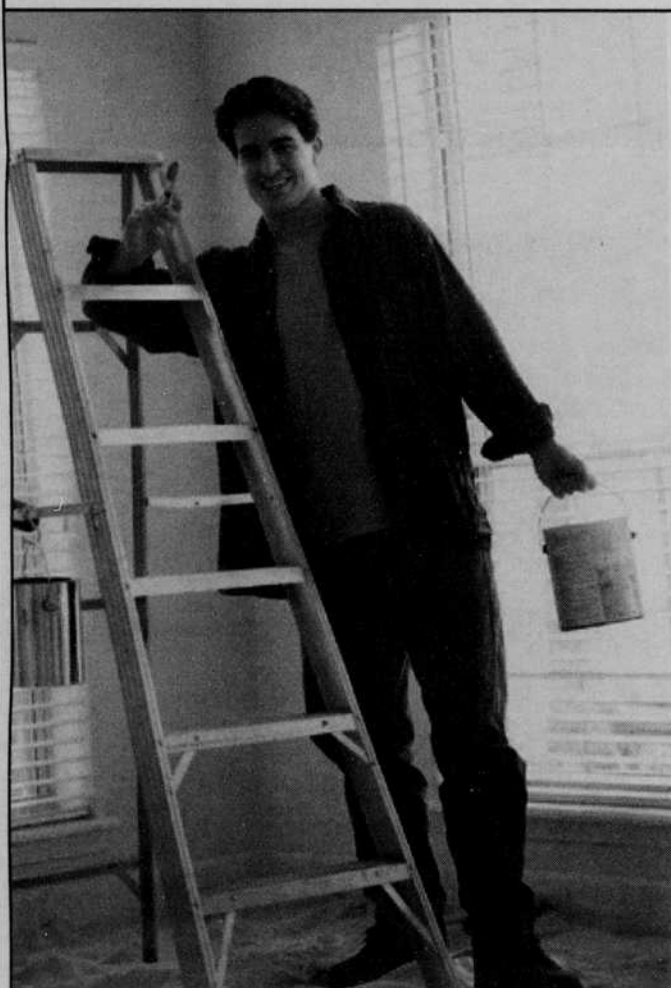
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DANIELLE HICKEY | PHOTO EDITOR

Oregon point guard Aaron Brooks hopes to find consistency after an up-and-down start.

Consistent play vital to Oregon's success in Pac-10

The Ducks' top players must repeat non-conference performances and put forth strong efforts every game

BY JON ROETMAN
SENIOR SPORTS REPORTER

The best basketball teams in the country can experience consistency problems from time to time.

But when a team has no seniors and its most-hyped player isn't old enough to buy a lotto ticket, erratic play is to be expected. So far, the Ducks have played a fairly steady brand of basketball for a team with 11 freshmen and sophomores. They won eight of their first nine non-conference games and looked like a team talented enough to earn a spot in the postseason.

When Oregon opened its Pacific-10 Conference schedule last week, however, the Ducks were plagued by inconsistency and split a pair of home games against Southern California and UCLA.

Most notably, the Ducks received spotty performances from three of their most talented players. Sophomore

point guard Aaron Brooks and freshmen guards Malik Hairston and Bryce Taylor need to have a positive impact one way or another for Oregon to avoid letdowns similar to Sunday's 70-62 loss to the Bruins.

After dropping 34 points on USC, Brooks connected on only 4 of 12 shots for 14 points against UCLA. Taylor followed an 18-point performance against the Trojans with a single field goal against the Bruins. And the 17-year-old Hairston struggled in both games.

"I actually expected it to be that way," Hairston said. "I just wanted my team to win but I had a rough weekend."

The jump from playing weaker non-conference opponents to getting into dogfights with Pac-10 opponents is all part of the learning curve for Oregon's talented newcomers, which also

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