

■ In my opinion



CLAYTON JONES
SEVENTH INNING STRETCH

Options are running out for Oregon's lollygaggers

As the Oregon men's basketball team's season is in a tailspin going into the second half of the Pacific-10 Conference season, a great scene from a baseball classic, "Bull Durham," came to mind, but in a little different manner.

Imagine head coach Ernie Kent and assistant coach Fred Litzenger in the locker room talking to the team after the first half of the Stanford game:

Kent: "You guys ... you lollygag the ball around the perimeter. You lollygag your way down on defense. You lollygag in and out of the lineup. Do you know what that makes you? Litz ..."

Litz: "Lollygaggers!"

Kent: "Lollygaggers."

At least that's how I saw it in my mind after the horrible thumping they took Saturday.

So what's going wrong?

Oregon has tried lineup changes, different defenses and shifting more or less players in and out of games. None of them has worked.

As I watched the game against Stanford, I struck up a conversation with a guy who had gone to high school at Churchill back in the 1970s when Kent was one of the Kamikaze Kids. He told me back in those days, teams scored their points by creating turnovers. He said this season's team doesn't do that.

He's right.

Turnovers lead to fast breaks.

Fast breaks lead to easy baskets.

Easy baskets lead to more points.

More points lead to more wins.

Oregon has seen other teams take away its fast break opportunities, and that's when we see the Ducks just stand around and hope to get a decent shot.

And "hope" is the key word. Look at the other teams in the Pac-10. They get plenty of decent looks at the basket because they work for a good or great look. Oregon's offense has been about as stale as day-old popcorn and doesn't seem to be getting better.

Speaking of not getting better, Ian Crosswhite appears to be pressing more and more with each game. He seems to play hard in spurts, but something is missing. Whatever it is, Oregon hopes he finds it soon.

One bright spot during the Ducks' skid is the play of freshman phenom Malik Hairston. He has upped his scoring average to almost 13 points a game and is shooting more than 52 percent from the field. With his recent success, Oregon needs to get him the ball more. He's only taking, on average, 10 shots per game. The former high school McDonald's All-American should be getting more shots (I say 20). Oregon needs a go-to scorer they can count on for offensive output and to take pressure off point guard Aaron Brooks, and that guy is Hairston.

With nine games left in the season, the Ducks are riding dangerously low in the standings.

With a tough Oregon State team waiting for them Saturday in Corvallis and the Washington schools on the horizon next week, the Ducks might not be fighting for an NCAA Tournament or NIT bid, but rather a conference tournament bid.

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■ Duck soccer

Former PSU coach to lead Oregon

BY BEAU EASTES
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

After resurrecting a perennial doormat in the Big Sky Conference, Tara Erickson hopes to do much of the same in the Pacific-10 Conference.

Erickson, Portland State's head coach for the past four years, was announced as the new Oregon women's head soccer coach Monday afternoon.

The 31-year-old replaces Bill Steffen, who resigned last fall following a 49-107-14 record in nine seasons in Eugene.

Erickson, the Big Sky Coach of the Year in 2002, led the Vikings to a 29-38-10 record in her four years at Portland State.

She was a two-time All-Pac-10 selection during a standout playing career at Washington. After graduating in 1996 with a degree in communications, Erickson assisted the women's team through 1999 and assisted the men's program in 2000.

In accepting the Portland State head coaching job, Erickson took over a team that had gone 5-31 the previous two seasons, including an 0-18 campaign in 2000. Following a one-win inaugural season, Erickson led the Vikings to a 13-5-4 record and a spot in the Big Sky Conference tournament finals in 2002.

At Oregon, Erickson inherits a Duck team in similar disarray. The Ducks finished 2004 with a 3-13-3 record, including a 0-7-2 record in Pac-10 play. Furthermore, the Ducks were the Pac-10's lowest scoring team, netting only four



GEOFF THURNER | OREGON MEDIA SERVICES

Tara Erickson, Oregon's new women's soccer head coach, was introduced to the media Monday. The former standout player at Washington comes to the Ducks after four seasons as Portland State's head coach.

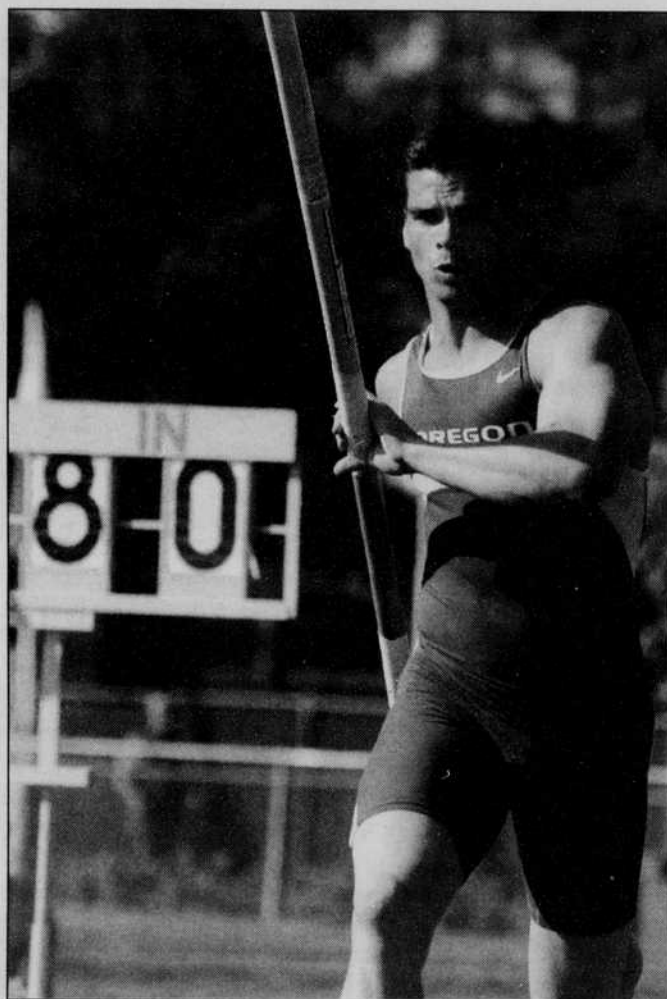
goals in their nine conference games.

On the bright side, Erickson will have 22 of 25 players returning, including six of the eight top goal scorers for the Ducks. Also, several underclassmen, including five freshmen, saw quality

minutes last fall due to a rash of injuries: At times, the Ducks were without six starters.

Erickson's familiarity with the Northwest should play a key role in recruiting within the

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LAUREN WIMER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Sophomore Tommy Skipper, seen here last spring, won the pole vault event at the Athletes.com Invitational this weekend, out-vaulting all other competitors by at least a foot with a mark of 18 feet, 6 1/2 inches.

■ Duck track and field

Skipper, Logsdon earn automatic qualifying bids

Four other Oregon athletes earn provisional NCAA qualifying marks at their respective indoor events

BY BEAU EASTES
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

Spread across the Northwest, six Oregon indoor track and field athletes took home NCAA provisional or automatic qualifying marks this weekend.

In Nampa, Idaho, at the Athletes.com Invitational, sophomore Tommy Skipper easily cleared the NCAA automatic qualifying mark of 18 feet, 1/2 inch by vaulting 18-6 1/2, a full foot higher than the next vaulter at the Idaho Sports Center.

"I was pleased to come in and compete right away," said the 2004 NCAA outdoor pole vaulting champion. "But technically, I made too many mistakes."

Skipper, who made his winning height of 18-6 1/2 on his second attempt, missed three tries at 19 1/4.

"Tommy had a great shot at nineteen feet, but barely knocked it

off on his way down," Oregon pole vault coach Mark Vanderville said. "He dropped his legs a little too soon and hit the bar on the way up."

Sprinters Kedar Inico and Matt Scherer also qualified for the NCAA Indoor Championships, which will be held in March, earning provisional marks in the 400 meters. Senior Inico took home the gold with a 46.95-second sprint, just ahead of junior Scherer, who ran a 47.04.

Inico's time was the second fastest all-time Oregon indoor 400-meter mark, 0.54 seconds off Scherer's record run last year. Both runners easily bested the NCAA provisional mark (47.25) and were within one second of the automatic qualifying time (46.05).

"The sprinters have looked good," assistant coach Dan Steele said.

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IN BRIEF

Oregon's Davis named Pac-10 Player of the Week

Oregon senior guard Brandi Davis has been named U.S. Bank Pacific-10 Conference Women's Basketball Player of the Week for Jan. 24-30.

The La Habra, Calif., native averaged 21 points and 2.5 rebounds in a combined 52 minutes of play off the bench as Oregon

swept the Southern California schools at home.

For the weekend, she shot 51.9 percent from the field (14-of-27) and 47.6 percent from behind the three-point line (10-of-21), propelling the Ducks to a 6-0 conference record at home.

In Oregon's 78-71 victory over UCLA on Jan. 27, Davis came off the bench to score a career-high 28 points on 10 of 19 shooting, including 6-of-13 from three-point range in 27 minutes of play. Davis' first points came with 3:13 left in the first half, scoring the Ducks' final 11 points of the half to give Oregon a 33-31 advantage heading into intermission. In the

second half, with the Ducks up by one, Davis hit a pair of three-pointers and made a layup, giving Oregon a 10-point lead with 8:14 left, a lead they would never relinquish.

In the Ducks' 81-59 win over USC on Jan. 29, Davis again came off the bench to score 14 points on 4 of 8 shooting from beyond the three-point line.

The weekly honor is the first of Davis' career and the second for the Ducks this season. Oregon senior Andrea Bills received the award for the week of Dec. 30.

— Brian Smith