

"This is the toughest time I've ever had at basketball with my personal game. I know that it can only get better from here."

Oregon guard Bryce Taylor on his current 6 of 37 shooting slump

■ Men's basketball

Bringing down the wall

Freshman guard Bryce Taylor is the Ducks' third-leading scorer, but he has hit a shooting slump in recent games

BY JON ROETMAN
SENIOR SPORTS REPORTER

A shooter's mentality must be rock solid.

A shooter must exude confidence. At times, he's asked to carry his team by drilling perimeter jump shots and scoring points in bunches. Any self doubt can lead to hesitation and hinder his ability to produce.

If a shooter is off-target, he must continue to fire, knowing his shots will eventually start falling.

At times, he will be viewed as a selfish ball hog, who possess a "me first" attitude. But he will also, at times, be viewed as a hero — capable of rescuing his team from sure defeat.

Bryce Taylor is Oregon's best shooter. At times this season, he carried the Ducks offensively, scoring 26 points against Washington State on Jan. 15 and 20 points against Arizona days later.

But recently, the freshman guard has run into a problem. Taylor has been in a shooting slump for Oregon's last four games, connecting on only 6 of 37 field goals — including 3 of 16 from three-point range. While missing shots is a part of every player's career, the Encino, Calif., native can't seem to shoot his way out of his current funk.

Entering tonight's 7:30 p.m. tipoff against No. 11 Washington (19-3 overall, 9-2 Pacific-10 Conference) at McArthur Court, Taylor said he's

looking to end his shooting woes along with Oregon's (11-8, 3-7) five-game losing streak.

"This is the toughest time I've ever had at basketball with my personal game," Taylor said. "I know that it can only get better from here."

While Taylor has never experienced a slump like this before, the Oregon coaching staff could see it coming from a mile away. Head coach Ernie Kent has seen plenty of freshmen make the transition from prep basketball to Division I hoops, and at some point, he said, they all "hit the wall" and run out of energy.

"With any freshman, there's a big change from high school to this level," Kent said. "The intensity factor, the mental aspects, the physical aspects of it. All of them go through stages where they're up and then go through stages where they're down."

"We need to get him back on the upswing, obviously."

Taylor said the transition has affected him physically and mentally.

Physically, an increase in the number of practices and games from his prep career has left the 6-foot-5 guard wobbly legged at times, not allowing him to get maximum lift on his jump shot. The intensity of his daily physical activity has also forced him to pay more attention to how he takes care of his body.

"One of the things they tell you

before the season and in late January is that you're probably going to hit the wall," Taylor said. "You don't believe it can actually happen to you. But then you find it's tougher to wake up early in the morning and tougher to suit up for practice. We've practiced so hard and played in so many games that you find yourself not having the legs that you would have in high school at this point in the season."

"It's not a mythical type of wall. It actually does exist."

Mentally, Taylor's confidence has been tested. While shots in practice and pregame warmups fall with ease, it's shooting in front of roaring Pac-10 crowds that causes occasional jitters.

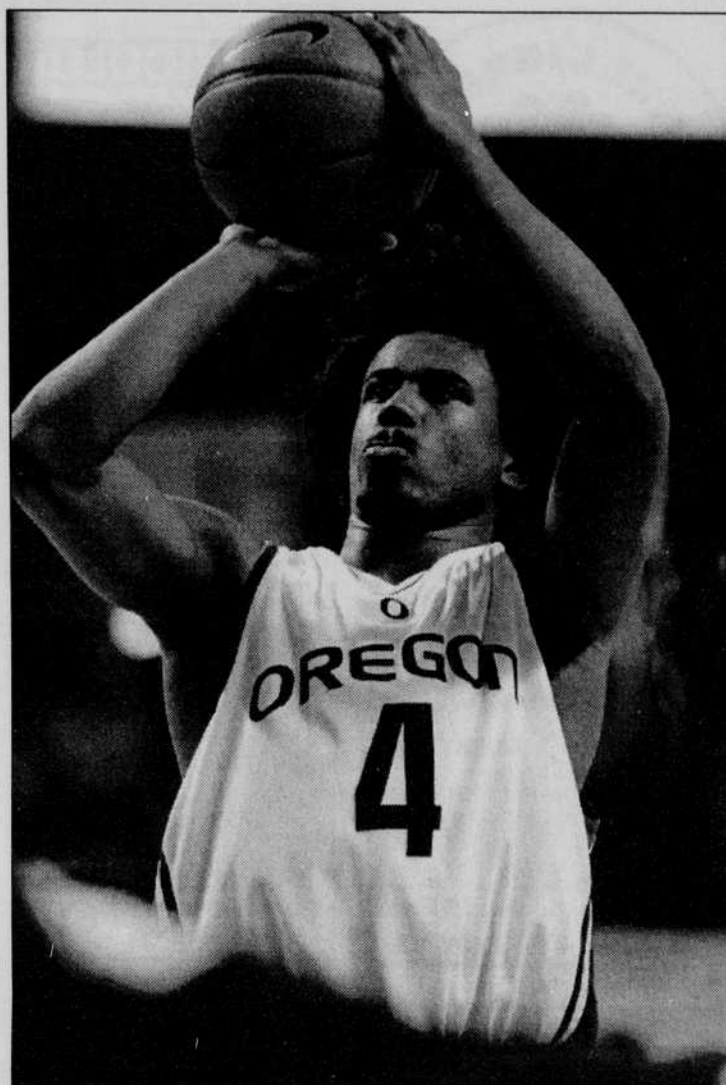
How does such a talented shooter feel pressure during games?

Confidence wasn't always present for Taylor. He grew up a shy power forward who wouldn't shoot much, afraid to anger his teammates with a miss. Only after years of practice and positive mental training did the fuzzy-haired sharpshooter realize his potential as a scorer.

"In a game, I'm trying to put points on the board for my team," Taylor said. "So if I'm missing, I feel like I'm hurting my team, so I may think twice about an open shot, and I know that's the wrong thing to do. Being a shooter, I just try to have the mentality that if you miss five in a row, that you're going to make the next five."

"That's one of the things you try to learn as a scorer is to stay positive."

After 19 games, Taylor is third on the team in scoring, averaging 11.3 points



TIM BOBOSKY | PHOTOGRAPHER

Oregon guard Bryce Taylor has struggled with confidence as of late, connecting on only 6 of 37 field goal attempts during the Ducks' last four games.

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■ Women's basketball

Ducks head to Evergreen State seeking first win out of Oregon

BY STEPHEN MILLER
SPORTS REPORTER

With only six games remaining in its regular season schedule, the Oregon women's basketball team is sitting better than it was last season.

The Ducks (15-6 overall, 8-4 Pacific-10 Conference) eclipsed last season's win total of 14 with a victory against Oregon State last week. Head coach Bev Smith has only coached one Oregon team to a winning record, which occurred during her first season in 2001-02 when the Ducks finished 22-13 overall and 10-8 in the conference.

This week, Oregon heads to the Evergreen State in search of two road wins against squads that are resting in the lower half of the Pac-10 standings.

"It's very important for us to get two wins up there and on the road," Kirkland, Wash., native Cathrine Kraayeveld said. "We haven't played well on the road, but that's something we can change and something that we have control of."

At 1-4 away from home, the Ducks have not been able to win outside Oregon, as their only win came against the Beavers. However, they have yet to lose against a Northwest team this season.

Oregon begins its road trip against Washington State (5-17, 1-12), and the Ducks realize it will be a challenge to obtain their second road win against a team looking for just its second total conference win.

"Washington State has been playing really well," Kraayeveld said. "They have a lot of confidence, and they're at home, so we have to come in and play our game."

But the Ducks have a confidence booster: They currently have a seven-game winning streak against the Cougars. And Kraayeveld should have plenty of confidence after a 17-point performance against Oregon State and a double-double effort



TIM BOBOSKY | PHOTOGRAPHER

in her last game against the Cougars.

Smith said her team has to focus on scoring, offensive rebounding and transition defense with Washington State forward Kate Benz lurking in the paint — she leads the conference with 9.6 rebounds per game.

The Cougars are playing well coming into their final home-stand of the season, losing by single digits to UCLA and USC.

"Coach (Sherril) Murrell has played a lot of people this year, and it looks like she's getting different starting lineups that are starting to produce for her," Smith said.

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■ Men's basketball

Forward Crosswhite suspended from Ducks indefinitely

BY ALEX TAM & BRIAN SMITH
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Forward Ian Crosswhite was suspended indefinitely from the Oregon men's basketball team for violation of team rules, head coach Ernie Kent announced on Wednesday. He did not disclose the details of the suspension.

The 7-foot junior from Castlecrag, Australia, was averaging 8.4 points and 5.7 rebounds per game this season. Since Pacific-10 Conference play began on Dec. 31, Crosswhite's numbers have dropped to 5.5 points and 5.2 rebounds per game. He also leads the team in turnovers with 55.

In the Ducks' 76-72 loss to Oregon State in Corvallis on Saturday, Crosswhite played 17 minutes and scored two points on 1 of 2 shooting. He grabbed one rebound and had three turnovers.

The 22-year-old Crosswhite has come under much scrutiny for his play this season after seeing a drop in his statistics from a year ago. In his first season at Oregon in 2002-03, Crosswhite

averaged 9.3 points and 3.8 rebounds per game. In 2003-04, his numbers jumped to 12.5 points and 5.0 rebounds per game.

Troubles for Crosswhite came when he was benched before the Arizona State game earlier this season. As Kent put it, Crosswhite was ineffective, and freshman Maarty Leunen was playing better basketball at the time.

Crosswhite started the next two games but came off the bench against Oregon State.

"As a coach, you feel like you've failed when you lose a guy for any reason," Kent said. "Anytime you go through adversity, I look at the positive side of things."

This season, Crosswhite was the team's top returning scorer and rebounder and was looked upon to be a leader for the Ducks, who have no seniors. After receiving a Pac-10 honorable mention last season, Crosswhite dedicated himself this past summer to becoming stronger and spent time in Los Angeles working out with college and NBA players.

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