

Men: Ducks currently ninth in the Pac-10

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from Collin County Community College in 1999.

Kent's run-and-gun style offense is what attracts many young players to Oregon. But like in seasons past, this year's crop of Duck freshmen have yet to understand all that goes into running a fast-paced offensive attack.

The Ducks (12-11 overall, 4-10 Pacific-10 Conference) have been running when they see a potential transition bucket.

Kent wants them to run on every possession.

"Typically, it takes them a year to really understand and have the mentality that you run every single time regardless if you have a layup or not, and they don't understand that," Kent said. "They run when they think they have a score, and there's a difference there. They have an opportunity to put the pressure on people constantly for the minutes that they're on the floor and wear teams down like we've done in the past, but they will be able to do that down the road.

"That's the encouraging thing."

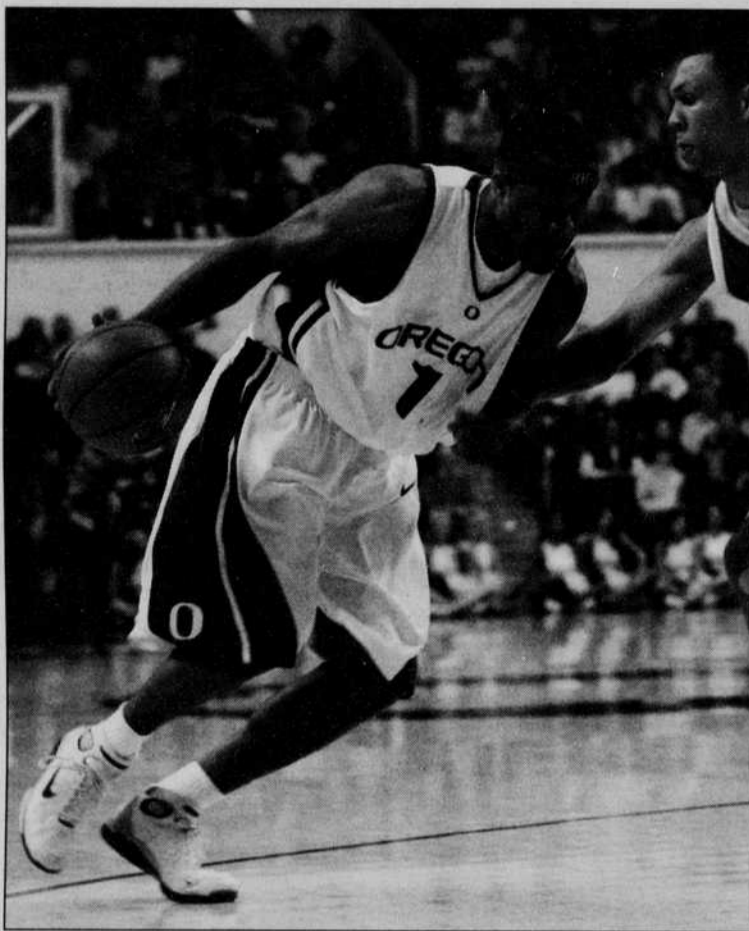
Kent compared the troubles of Malik Hairston and Co., to those of Luke Ridnour during his freshman year.

"Luke Ridnour would never give up the ball his freshman year," Kent said. "He would just dribble, dribble, dribble, dribble, dribble. We couldn't run, he wouldn't hit ahead, he wouldn't be able to go in the lane and finish plays ... and in between his freshman and sophomore year, the offense started flowing and clicking, and he became a great player.

"He just grew and understood the offense."

Hairston said he and the rest of Oregon's young players hear Kent's message — it's just a matter of translating it on the court.

"He wants us to be a little unselfish with (running) and then



DANIELLE HICKEY | PHOTO EDITOR

Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said Malik Hairston, above, and other Duck freshmen need to run the floor more on offense.

tag-team our teammates and let them get in there," Hairston said. "We may not be the ones to get the buckets, but the other team will be real tired."

Entering today's 7:30 p.m. tipoff against California (12-12, 5-9) at McArthur Court, the Ducks are stressing offensive aggressiveness. Oregon has lost eight of its last nine games and has scored 70 points only twice since beating Oregon State 73-64 in early January.

With four games remaining, the Ducks sit in ninth place in the Pac-10. They trail Cal and Washington State

by one game for the eighth and final spot in the conference tournament.

Kent said that while qualifying for the Pac-10 Tournament is important, simply getting another win is the team's priority.

"Every meeting, every walk-through session, every practice and obviously every ball game is extremely important for this team," Kent said. "We have not and will continue to not waste one minute of this season."

jonroetman@dailyemerald.com

Stelly: Guard swept Mac Court hardcourt before playing on it

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and varsity teams his junior year. That season he was voted the varsity team's most improved player.

The problem for Stelly was that Benson had great players ahead of him, such as J.R. Moore, who now plays at Rhode Island, and Darren Cooper, who now plays at the University of Portland.

Don Emery, former Benson head coach and current athletic director at De La Salle North Catholic High School, said Stelly understood his role on the team.

"In high school, he was never a star player,"

Emery said.

"He was a hard worker and has always been able to play a role. That's what coaches like to see."

"Stelly gives me fits every time in practice. He comes in and makes guys work real hard, and he's a great player. I think he's the No. 1 walk-on in the country."

AARON BROOKS | Oregon guard

Emery said Stelly didn't start a game in high school but showed what he could do when he had time on the floor, especially in his senior season. For the second year in a row, Stelly was named the team's most improved player.

Stelly said getting playing time with the highly ranked Benson basketball program was tough.

"Practice was more competitive than any of our games, besides the Jefferson games," Stelly said. "Everybody was going at each other, and coach would say whoever wins would start."

Those experiences helped Stelly as he was deciding to come to Oregon. He felt the educational experience gained at Oregon outweighed going to a smaller school to play basketball.

He was part of a work study program his freshman year at the University when he decided to take the

maintenance crew job. Stelly said he really didn't do much at the arena.

"The people here are pretty cool," Stelly said. "I really just hung out and walked around for a couple hours. It was cool to see the players, and when no one was (at Mac Court), I would come in and shoot."

Spring term of his freshman year, Stelly caught wind of a tryout for a walk-on spot on the men's team and felt he had nothing to lose.

In fall term of his academic sophomore year, Stelly received a call from the coaching staff saying he was on the team and that he needed to talk to head coach Ernie Kent.

He explained how it would work and how it wouldn't call for big minutes or

media attention," Stelly said. "But he told me I was on the team and that I should make what I could of the opportunity."

He made his Oregon debut on the floor at the Papé Jam in 2002 and said he was surprisingly not nervous.

"I didn't get a chance to get nervous," Stelly said. "He called me in, and I was like, 'Uh.'"

"You're surprised once you get in the game how easy it is ... because it's just basketball."

And that's what this experience is about for Stelly — just basketball. Basketball is something he works hard on, but it's just something he does while he finishes school instead of the other way around.

"I want to get into teaching and coaching," Stelly said. "I just want to spread knowledge of not just the game, but life knowledge as well."

claytonjones@dailyemerald.com

Women: Stanford top in Pac-10, Oregon sits right behind in second

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all that we can to secure a spot in the (NCAA) tournament."

Meanwhile, Stanford has already clinched its fifth-straight Pac-10 title and an invitation to the Big Dance.

"They really are firing on all pistons," Smith said of Stanford, which now has senior guard Susan Borchardt back from injury. "They are better than they were earlier in the season."

"I think Susan Borchardt gives them that third point guard on the floor. Her and Candice Wiggins seem to really fuel off of each other."

Wiggins is another story.

She is the only freshman to be nominated for the Naismith Trophy this season, which honors the top male and female collegiate basketball players in the country. The 5-foot-11 guard has been recognized as the Pac-10 Player of the Week twice, leads her team in scoring and is second in the conference, averaging 17.4 points per game.

As a team, Stanford owns the best scoring offense, field goal percentage and rebounding average in the Pac-10. It is second in scoring defense and three-point field goal percentage.

"They're a very structured team, and they do exactly what they're supposed to do," Oregon senior forward Cathrine Kraayeveld said. "But we play like that too."

Smith said her team's style of play matches up well to Stanford's because both teams have an emphasized inside-outside game.

"We like to use the skill of our players and have our players be in control of the game," Smith said.

For Oregon senior point guard Corrie Mizusawa, a native of Lafayette, Calif., two wins for Oregon in the Bay Area will be a sweet finish to her final season.

"We want to win both games this week and go into the Pac-10 Tournament confident with that second seed," Mizusawa said.

As the season nears its end, Richards looked back on the final months of a winning team.

"I think it's flown by, especially the past two months," she said. "We're very excited to get to the end of the season, but we don't want to stop playing — it's kind of bittersweet."

stephenmiller@dailyemerald.com

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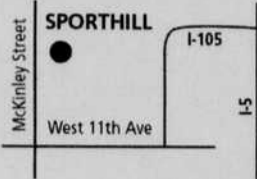


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