

"They like me more when I win, and I don't want to disappoint them."

Oregon wrestler Scott Barker on his hometown crowd in St. Louis, where he will compete in the NCAA Championships

■ In my opinion



CLAYTON JONES
SEVENTH INNING STRETCH

Lowly Ducks don't deserve an NIT bid, despite fans

As all you Oregon men's basketball junkies know, the Ducks still eligible for the post-season with a possible berth in the National Invitational Tournament.

My fellow colleague wrote Thursday that the team deserves a shot at the NIT because the team persevered through some adversity (i.e. the Ian Crosswhite situation), leaned on underclassmen for their production and hung around in some tough games.

I have to disagree. The team doesn't deserve a berth in the NIT.

While Oregon did deal with all those issues and had the chance to win some pivotal games, the key factor is that the Ducks didn't win those games. They couldn't even make the Pacific-10 Tournament and finished in a very disappointing ninth place in the conference.

The Ducks didn't earn a postseason. It's not that they didn't work hard or give the effort, they just couldn't figure out how to win the close games during the conference season. It would have taken just one free throw against Washington.

The Ducks lost late leads to UCLA, Arizona State and Stanford in games against Arizona and Oregon State.

Arguably the team's best win of the season came at McArthur Court against a New Mexico team that finished 23-6 on the season, but that was in Oregon's second game of the season.

Another argument I hear about why Oregon should get an NIT bid is that Eugene draws well for the NIT and that the NIT can bring in a big profit from having Oregon host a game at historic Mac Court.

Am I the only one that is troubled by this rationale?

And why is there no talk (other than my colleague's) about the team actually deserving a bid? Because they don't.

Yes, the excuse can be made that the Ducks are young and inexperienced, but it doesn't give them a free pass into the tournament.

The NIT shouldn't be a tournament with teams that barely eclipsed the .500 mark and finished at the bottom of their conference.

There is also a lesson these young players need to learn. How much does a team really take away from a season when they perform below expectations and still get an NIT berth because of where they play, not for what they did on the court?

This young Duck squad should just pack up its lockers and have Ernie Kent give the team a nice inspirational speech about learning from this year's experiences and continuing to work hard on its game.

This team knows it is talented enough to at least be in the NIT tournament, and Oregon could probably make a serious run if it does get in.

But if that opportunity does come, the Ducks should thank their loyal fan base, because the fans will have earned the bid, not the team.

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ERIK R. BISHOFF | PHOTOGRAPHER

Oregon's Scott Barker, seen here against Arizona State's Ryan Bader, finished second in his weight division at the 2003 NCAA Championships. After a year away to nurse a knee injury, Barker came to Oregon for the 2004-05 season and will return to the championships this week.

Matching potential

Senior Scott Barker has won a team-best 31 matches since coming to wrestle at Oregon

BY SCOTT J. ADAMS
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

When you're talented at every sport you play as a youth, how do you decide which one to pursue in college?

For Scott Barker, a senior wrestler who has left the mark of a franchise player on Oregon's team in just one season, he addressed the dilemma before he was 10 years old.

"I was good at everything I did," Barker recalls. "When I was four, I started wrestling and

liked it most, so I stuck with it thinking it would do a lot for me."

Barker is now 22 and finishing his senior year majoring in sociology. Barker's collegiate career started at the University of Missouri; while there, Barker won a Big 12 Conference title and finished second at the 2003 NCAA Championships. He aims to earn his fourth All-American honor next weekend at the NCAA Championships in St. Louis — Barker's hometown.

"I'll hopefully have a big crowd on hand to watch me," Barker said. "They like me more when I win, and I don't want to disappoint them."

In 2002, Barker wrestled Cael Sanderson of Iowa State — one of the biggest names in the history of college wrestling. Sanderson

never lost a match in his entire collegiate career and took home in his entire collegiate titles. When the two wrestled, Sanderson defeated Barker by way of a 21-4 technical fall at the Big 12 Championships.

"He (Sanderson) was unbeatable, because he was so conditioned," Barker said. "He didn't have to deal with knee injuries like I did. If we wrestled today, I like my chances, honestly."

Barker was born in 1982 in Cheyenne, Wyo., but never had the chance to grow accustomed to it or any other city he lived in because his father and role model, Mitchell Barker, was in the Air Force and moved the family to wherever he was stationed. Barker

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■ Women's basketball

Ducks expect to snatch NCAA bid

BY BRIAN SMITH
SPORTS REPORTER

Oregon senior Cathrine Kraayeveld said the team's preparation this week is no different than any other.

"Same stuff," Kraayeveld said. "We just need to focus on what we need to do as a team to continue to get better, so that we are playing well going into our first game. We're excited about it."

But with a possible bid to the NCAA tournament to be announced Sunday, the mood of the Oregon women's basketball team couldn't be calm.

Could it?
"I think there is a certain

amount of anxiety because we've done everything we can do to make our claim on being a tournament team," Oregon head coach Bev Smith said. "But now what we are trying to do is to avoid all the speculation and getting back into our practice gear and getting back to our fundamentals."

Oregon finished the 2004-05 season with a 20-9 overall record and tied for second in the conference at 12-6. The last time the Ducks made the tournament was in 2001.

While receiving the actual tournament bid is the most worrisome element for the Ducks, geography

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ERIK R. BISHOFF | PHOTOGRAPHER

Oregon head coach Bev Smith and the women's basketball team prepare for this week's possible bid to the NCAA Women's Basketball tournament, which begins March 19.