

No. 3 Blue Devils reclaim status as ACC champions

BY DAVID GINSBURG
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WASHINGTON — They came in as underdogs, a No. 3 seed that was supposed to have too little depth to compete against the new powerhouse teams in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

When the final buzzer sounded at the 52nd ACC tournament on Sunday, the Duke Blue Devils celebrated a 69-64 victory over Georgia Tech and reclaimed their customary perch as league champions.

Tournament MVP J.J. Redick scored 26 points, Shelden Williams had 16 points and 13 rebounds, and the fifth-ranked Blue Devils held off a late charge to squeeze past the fifth-seeded Yellow Jackets.

Duke has won 15 ACC tournaments, tying archrival North Carolina for most in league history. But while the Tar Heels haven't added to their ledger since 1998, the Blue Devils have won six of seven — the lone exception being last year, when they fell in overtime to Maryland in the title game.

Duke (25-5) led by four points early in the second half before Redick hit a jumper, Williams scored on a dunk, Redick made a layup and Daniel Ewing hit a three-pointer to make it 50-37. It became 52-39 on a layup by Shavlik Randolph with 11:15 to go, but the Blue Devils didn't make another basket until Williams tipped in a missed foul shot just before the buzzer.

Duke, which never trailed, went 15-for-20 at the free throw line over the final 9 minutes.

The Yellow Jackets (19-11) used an 8-0 run to close to 56-51 with 4:56 left. A three-pointer by Tech's Anthony Morrow cut the margin to three with 1:54 left, and two free throws by teammate Will Bynum made it 64-62 with 1:27 to go.

After a miss by Redick, Bynum missed a jumper in the lane and Lee

Melchionni made one of two foul shots for a three-point lead. Jeremis Smith then misfired for the Yellow Jackets, but Tech got the ball back with 34 seconds remaining.

A basket by Morrow got Tech within one, but Redick was fouled on the inbounds and made two free throws to make it 67-64. After Bynum was off target on a three-pointer, Duke's David McClure missed two foul shots, but Williams tipped in the second one to clinch it.

Minutes later, the Blue Devils cut down the nets at the MCI Center, where the tournament was held for the first time.

Jarrett Jack scored 19 points for the Yellow Jackets, who fell short in their bid to win the ACC championship for the first time since 1993 but erased any doubt regarding their worthiness in the NCAA tournament.

Bynum, who scored a career-high 35 in Georgia Tech's semifinal win over top-seeded North Carolina, was limited to 14 points on 4-for-17 shooting.

The Blue Devils have won 19 of 20 against the Yellow Jackets, including three this season.

The Duke dynasty took a hit last year, and after second-ranked North Carolina won the regular season title and the Blue Devils finished third behind third-ranked Wake Forest, it appeared as if a change at the top was in order.

But Georgia Tech disposed of North Carolina in the semifinals and North Carolina State eliminated Wake Forest in the second round, paving the way for the Blue Devils to win the league crown.

Duke has won 77 games in the ACC tournament, one more than runner-up North Carolina. The Blue Devils have played in eight straight title games, by far the longest streak in league history.

Review: Two freshmen earn Pac-10 honors

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Ducks' second-leading scorer and rebounder, averaging 13.1 points and 5.0 boards per game.

While he showed flashes of brilliance throughout the season, the former McDonald's High School All-American came under scrutiny for not being aggressive enough on the offensive end. Though his numbers weren't high enough for some, they were good enough to earn him Pac-10 All-Freshman Team honors.

Joining Hairston on the All-Freshman team was Taylor. The fuzzy-haired sharpshooter helped carry the offensive load as Hairston was trying to get on track. The 6-foot-5 guard had a tremendous three-game stretch early in the Pac-10 season where he led the team in scoring during games against Washington, Washington State and Arizona. His best performance of the season came against the Cougars when he scored 26 points to lead the Ducks to a big road win in Pullman, Wash., on Jan. 15.

Taylor hit the dreaded "freshman wall," shortly thereafter, however, and his production took a hit. After consecutive 20-plus-point performances against Washington State and Arizona in mid January, the Encino, Calif., native experienced a 6-of-37 shooting slump during his next four games and connected on only 38 of 119 field goals (32 percent) during the final 12 games of the season.

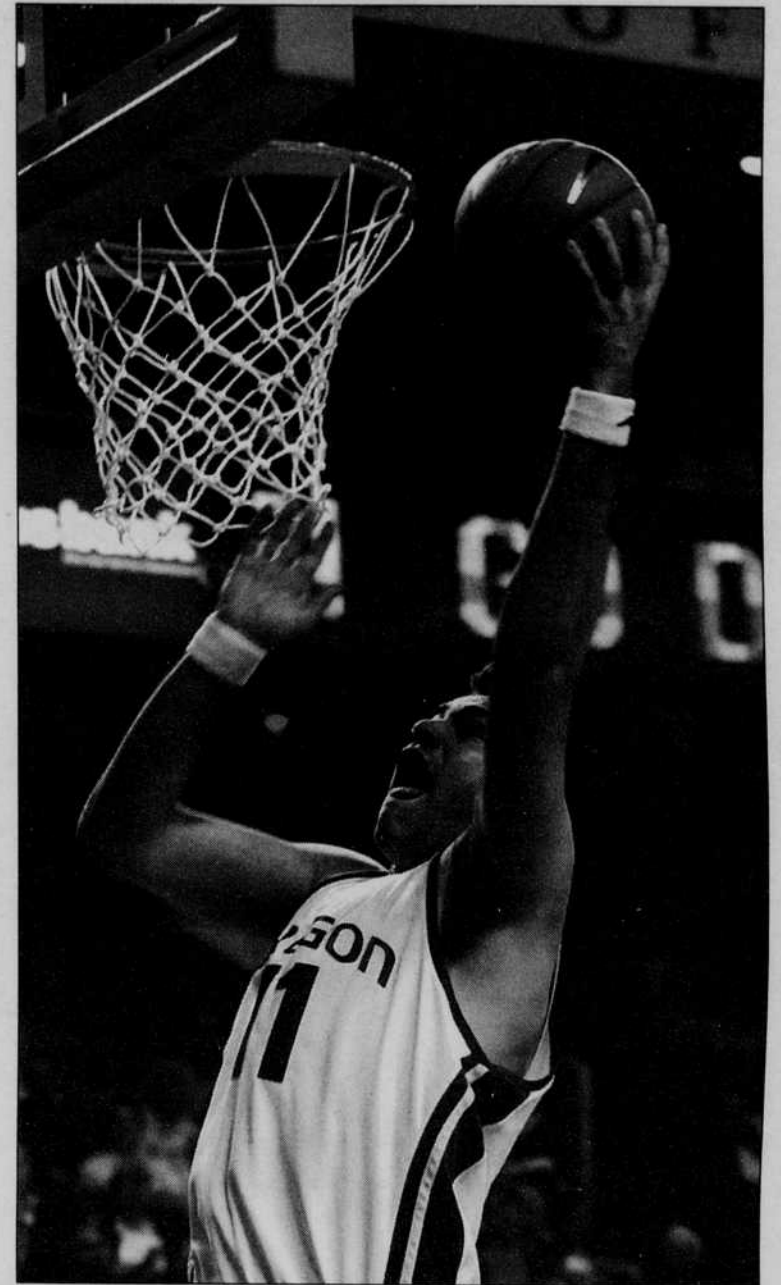
One of the team's best perimeter shooters early in the season, Taylor struggled especially with his three-point shooting during Oregon's final 12 contests, knocking down only 14 of 53 (26 percent) from behind the arc.

Taylor ended the season as one of only three Ducks to average double figures in scoring with 11.6 points per game.

Oguchi provided an offensive spark off the bench, and his game greatly improved as the season progressed. Leunen stepped in immediately and gave the Ducks a rebounding presence in the middle.

Lacking leadership

Brooks and Crosswhite were depended on to be leaders this season



ERIK R. BISHOFF | PHOTOGRAPHER

Australian native Ian Crosswhite was dismissed from the Oregon men's basketball team in February because of unspecified violations of Athletics Department policy.

and never quite grew into the role. Brooks finished as the team's leading scorer at 14.7 points per game, but struggled when the team leaned on him for big baskets. Other than a 34-point performance against USC, Brooks' season could be viewed as

a disappointment. Crosswhite may have been the biggest underachiever in the country and will have his roster spot filled by new recruit next season.

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