

■ In my opinion



SHAWN MILLER
FULL-COURT PRESS

Duck future hinges on Hairston's leadership

Malik Hairston's role is to be a leader.

He and coach Ernie Kent agree with that sentiment, and following Saturday's embarrassing home loss to Georgetown, Oregon severely needs to step up his leadership.

"His role is our captain; he's our leader," Kent said. "He needs to score the ball, and I've thought he has been doing a great job of it so far."

Hairston scored eight straight points late in the first half for Oregon, a team that had managed only 13 points through the first 15 minutes of the game. Early in the second half Georgetown built a 12-point lead and Hairston answered with a three-pointer on the next possession to cut the deficit back to single digits. Four minutes later Hairston did the same, tipping in a missed free throw. Ironically, he was successful and led the team in everything excluding free throws.

Hairston led the Ducks with 17 points and five rebounds, the second consecutive game to hold that honor in both categories. In fact, he has scored in double figures in all six games this season and leads the Ducks in scoring with 15.8 points per game.

The 6-foot-6 sophomore has seemed to be breaking out solid performances each game highlighted by a career high 25 points during last Wednesday's loss at Vanderbilt.

"I just feel that I am a leader," Hairston said. "That I just need to get done whatever this basketball team needs me to and if they need me to step up and do more I am here to do it. If they need me to sacrifice more, I am here to do it. In times like this I know I need to step up more."

However, the biggest concern for Hairston is that the Ducks have lost two straight games and that the free throws aren't falling.

The Ducks made only seven of 17 free-throw attempts Saturday, including one of seven in the second half. Hairston made two of seven attempts on the afternoon and has struggled this season, connecting on only 13 of 23 free throws.

"We missed a lot of free throws, I take responsibility for that," Hairston said.

However, the free throws will come with practice and Hairston has made most of his shots from all of the other areas of the floor.

While the season isn't even one-quarter complete, comparisons to last season are imminent. In order to reverse the comparisons and end the losing streak, Hairston has to continue to progress as a leader on the court and in the locker room.

Hairston thought about heading to the NBA after high school and initially had thoughts of leading Oregon to a national championship last season. While the words haven't been as strong this season, the leadership has started to form. If success is to follow, Hairston's teammates should do the same.

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Standing TALL

through adversity

Oregon guard Cicely Oaks has followed a trying high school career with continued growth at UO

BY JEFFREY DRANSFELDT
SPORTS REPORTER

Every day last summer, Cicely Oaks ran with a clear purpose of contributing to the Oregon women's basketball team.

Getting to this point, where Oaks enjoyed a career-high 15 points against Drake on Nov. 28, required patience through two years of little playing time and a turbulent high school career.

The attention Oaks has enjoyed with her breakthrough this season is nice, but something she says she is happy to bypass for team success.

The same went for high school. "She was a star who enjoyed the spotlight, but didn't crave it," her high school coach Margaret Calvert said.

That is why now, with the junior Oaks playing regularly, she deflects attention to senior guards Chelsea Wagner and Brandi Davis.

Oaks' play, though, has gotten her noticed with 6.7 points, 2.3 rebounds and 1.7 assists per game. She is second on Oregon (5-1), shooting 54.5 percent from the field and 92.9 from the free throw line.

A prolific scorer in high school, Oaks provides points and all the dirty work on the basketball court: Diving for loose balls, making steals and creating easy baskets for teammates.

Against Drake, Oaks stole the ball under the hoop and fed center Gabrielle Richards for a layup. On another possession, she made a wide open three-pointer on the right wing. Late in the game, Oaks whipped a pass to Kristen Forristall for an open layup.

Oaks also showed she can drive to the hoop and draw fouls with 10 made free throws.

Her strong performance followed an eight point and five rebound showing against a scrappy Arkansas team.

"We play off her energy," Oregon forward Jessie Shetters said. "She just loves the game and loves to get out there and get after it."

Oaks can also be a lockdown defender with a long wingspan and lateral quickness, Oregon coach Bev Smith said.

The only thing holding her back was conditioning, which Smith said Oaks fixed with her summer work.

Oaks' success comes after two seasons of work and her high school career, where success mixed with strife.

Calvert became Grant High's head coach when Oaks joined

varsity as a freshman. In her first two seasons, Oaks helped Grant reach the state tournament twice.

Her junior year came and with it came issues off the court. Oaks struggled with personal problems that extended onto the court. Calvert reportedly suspended Oaks for a pair of games in December and was later dismissed from the team.

Smith attended a game to scout Oaks and realized the 5-foot-7 guard wasn't there. Calvert told Smith that Oaks was talented and a good student but wasn't acting like it.

After the first couple games off, Oaks followed the team as she attended games and maintained relationships.

"What she went through in high school was hard and we shared a lot of that," Calvert said.

Oaks adjusted. She became more positive and outgoing. Oaks maintained relationships with teammates, which helped ease her return as a senior. Calvert supported her the entire time, Oaks said, focusing on helping Oaks get a college education if basketball didn't work out.

"It was a growth year," Oaks' mom Beryl McNair said. "I appreciate the way she came through it."

Colleges cooled on Oaks during her junior year absence. When she returned as a senior, Calvert said she was confident in Oaks and interest returned with numerous schools including Washington State, UTEP and San Francisco taking notice. Oregon remained supportive and stood by her, Oaks said.

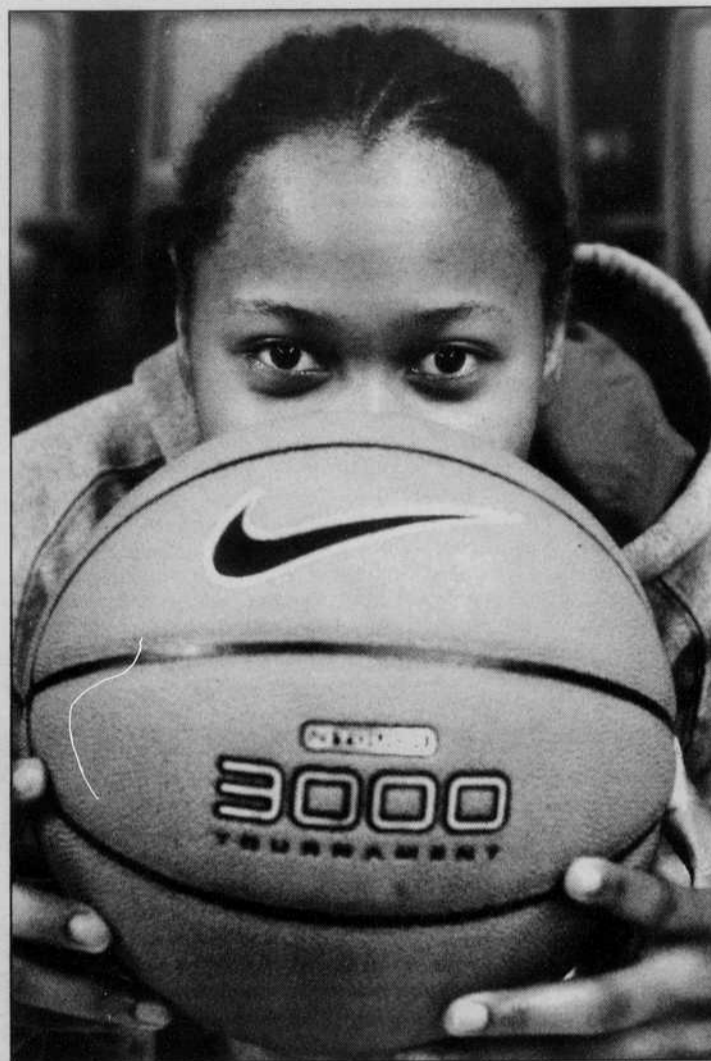
"(Smith) asked me why she should consider bringing me here, and I just told her it was a good learning experience and something like that would never happen again," Oaks said.

Smith received numerous letters of support from Grant and the surrounding community.

Even though they are now apart, the bond Calvert and Oaks created continues as they talk regularly on everything from basketball to living in Eugene.

"I feel like she cared about me more as a person than a basketball player," Oaks said.

Next Saturday, Calvert and players on the Grant basketball team will visit the Rose Garden to see Oaks and Oregon play against Prairie View A&M. McNair and family and friends will be there as well. Saturday's game is Oregon's first in a month-long road trip which includes games at UCLA and



TIM BOBOSKY | PHOTO EDITOR

Oregon guard Cicely Oaks is having a breakthrough junior year. The 5-foot-7 Portland native is averaging 6.7 points, 2.3 rebounds and 1.7 assists per game.



ZANE RITT | PHOTOGRAPHER

Oregon guard Cicely Oaks defends Drake's 6-foot-1 center, Jill Martin while fellow Duck Carolyn Ganes looks on.

USC before returning to McArthur Court on Jan. 5 to play California.

With Oaks, it's important to get to know her and get past her sometimes tough exterior, Calvert says. Teammate Shetters played against Oaks with Wilson High. Both said they didn't like the other as competitors in high school, whereas now the two are best friends.

"We were both ... just judging each other from what we saw, and we didn't really dig in any deeper than that," Oaks said.

Relationships developed between Oaks and Shetters and other teammates during stays in residence halls as freshmen. Smith gained tips from Calvert on how to get to know Oaks, how to speak to her and get the most out of the Portland native.

"We both had to take a step in the right direction and come

towards each other," Smith said.

Smith and Oaks sat down before the season and discussed expectations. The mutual understanding has helped Oregon and Oaks to a successful early season start.

When Calvert and Grant players see Oaks play, they see a role model and what is possible with work, Calvert said.

"She shies away from really saying I'm going to motivate other people — tries to downplay it," Calvert said. "(But) she offers a very concrete example of what's possible."

Personally, college has provided Oaks with opportunity, McNair said.

"If nothing else she does in this life, God has given her a wonderful gift ... of a degree to carry her on," McNair said.

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