



STEVE TANNEN
Feature Writer
DUCKS ILLUSTRATED

Bad For The Bubble

It's admirable to remain upbeat and see the positive but let's get real. Oregon's letting a 19-point lead slip away at home to Stanford could cost them a ticket to the Big Dance. The fact is they haven't beaten a tournament team. Arizona State and Cal are at .500 or below. Santa Clara sits 3rd in the WCC at 4 & 3, 12 & 10 overall and just got it handed to them by 2nd place San Francisco, so that win packs no punch. Fresno State is playing well at 6 & 3 in the WAC but just 10 & 8 on the season, so the computers and selection committee will ignore that victory. Incidentally, the Bulldogs lost to Santa Clara. If the Ducks repeat their first half

of conference play they'll end at 15 & 10 which means win the Pac-10 tourney or pack for the N.I.T. They must go 7 & 2. I think a 3rd place finish in the conference and a 17 & 8 overall record heading into the league tournament will get them in. I honestly believe Ernie Kent has put this program in the national picture to a point where they get the benefit of the doubt.

Mark down the 12th and 19th of February. Those two Thursdays will decide if this team makes the field of 65 for an unprecedented 3rd consecutive time. Following the Civil War on Saturday, Oregon plays at Washington. The Huskies just took out both Arizona schools, winning each going away. Their win streak has now hit four, the offense is clicking and the U of O always has a tough time in Seattle. A week later the Wildcats make their annual visit. This has become a must win. Oregon has to have that quality win to justify the selection committee posting their name over the

half dozen or so schools who get the cold shoulder.

The good news this is all totally doable. The Ducks inside game has become a force. I don't recall a big guy during my 14 years following the program who has made such an immediate impact as Mitch Platt. Consider this. 13 games ago he was battling high school kids in Henderson, Nevada and now he's doing a number for an outstanding Division I team. Ian Crosswhite has begun to assert himself and coach Kent mentioned they've made a concentrated effort to get him more shots. He was averaging about 8 a game until getting 16 in the Cal win then 12 versus the Cardinal. The guy has a sweet low post game. Here's my read on why all this is vital. When the opponent goes on a run, calling a time out is one option. Knocking down a three is another. Hammering the ball inside and getting a lay-up or drawing a foul has not been

there on a consistent basis for the Ducks, but it sure is now. It slows the pace, allows you to regroup and sends a strong message. Forcing the defense to pack it inside which opens up the perimeter against a lethal shooting team like the Ducks is an obvious benefit.

Let's wrap with an observation. The Pit Crew at Mac Court can be quite creative and entertaining. The "Stanford Sucks" chant is classless, cheap and desperate. If you can't compete on a clever level with the Dukes & Stanfords of the world, put a lid on it and just cheer for your team. Ernie Kent is class all the way, try to represent! Sylvan Engel said "It is better to be silent, and be thought a fool, than to speak and remove all doubt". **O**

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