

Women's College Basketball

Beavers celebrate, but UConn looms

Associated Press

CORVALLIS — They’ve still got at least one more game left this season, but the Oregon State Beavers are already celebrating.

The team arrived on campus on Tuesday afternoon fresh off an NCAA Tournament Elite Eight upset of Baylor in Dallas on Monday night. The Beavers get a few days at home before heading off to Indiana to face Connecticut on Sunday.

The top-seeded and undefeated Huskies are considered a clear favorite to win the title this year, but Oregon State took the moment to revel a bit in the program’s first-ever trip to the Final Four.

The Oregon State marching band played “Don’t Stop Believin’” when the players arrived at a campus rally Tuesday.

University President Ed Ray likened the team’s turnaround over the past six years under coach Scott Rueck and his coaching staff to rebuilding a home.

“They built it stronger, they built it better and they built it to make history,” Ray told the cheering crowd of orange-clad fans.

Junior Sydney Wiese scored 18 points, including three free throws in the final 33 seconds, giving the second-

seeded Beavers (32-4) a 60-57 victory over Baylor in the Dallas Regional final.

Oregon State has won 22 of its past 23 games and has already set a school record for victories this season. The Beavers won the Pac-12 Tournament and shared the regular-season title. Their No. 2 seed was the highest in program history.

At the rally, senior Ruth Hamblin grasped the regional trophy, the cut-down net draped over her shoulders.

The program has seen a resurgence under Rueck, an Oregon State alum who had to hold open tryouts his first season to build a roster.

“We don’t do this just for us. We understand who we represent and we take that seriously,” Rueck told the cheering crowd at Parker Plaza.

But first the Beavers have to face undefeated UConn, the overwhelming favorite to win a fourth straight NCAA championship this season. The Huskies, who have been to nine straight Final Fours — have lost just one of their last 120 games.

Ray noted UConn has beaten a lot of teams in the last 2½ years.

“You know who they haven’t beaten?” Ray asked the crowd. “The Beavers!”

Washington, OSU new faces in Final Four

By TIM BOOTH
Associated Press

SEATTLE — For three decades, any chatter about women’s basketball on the West Coast has usually started and ended with Stanford.

While the Cardinal are still among the elite programs in the country — as evidenced by their run to the Elite Eight — it’s Oregon State and Washington that are headed to the Final Four in Indianapolis and providing validation that women’s basketball out West is more than just what is happening at Stanford.

“We’re all seeing how good the Pac-12 is. It surprises me a bit how surprised I think people are across the country,” Oregon State coach Scott Rueck said over the weekend. “You listen to just the general narrative of the Pac-12 and people are surprised, surprised Washington could beat Maryland. We’re not. We’ve played against them.”

The runs by Oregon State and Washington to the Final Four mark the latest evolution of West Coast women’s basketball.

USC was one of the dominant programs in the country when the women’s Final Four first started back in 1982 and thanks to Cheryl Miller USC won consecutive titles in 1983-84. But then no one else in the



Oregon State center Ruth Hamblin carries the regional championship trophy as the team is greeted by fans in Corvallis on Tuesday.

Pac-10 at the time — now Pac-12 — emerged as a powerhouse program other than Stanford. Nearly every school in the conference took a turn being good for a year or two, but no one else could put together a team and an NCAA run good enough to reach the Final Four.

Between USC’s losing in the title game in 1986 and the Beavers and Huskies both reaching the national semifinals this year, the only other Pac-12 school to advance to the Final Four other than Stanford was California in 2013. The only other West Coast school to reach the Final Four was Long Beach State in 1987 and 1988.

“I think for a number of years people were trying to get everybody to listen that the Pac-12 was really good, but they could never

really prove it because there was always one team in the Final Four and that was Stanford. ... Even though people were saying it, you couldn’t really back it up,” Washington coach Mike Neighbors said Tuesday. “Now we’re saying it all year long, we’ve been saying it since Christmas and everybody is looking at us like ‘The Boy Who Cried Wolf.’ We’ve heard this before. But now you get three teams in the Elite Eight, four in the Sweet 16 and two in the Final Four. That is that validation.”

Oregon State and Washington will bring stories of redemption to Indianapolis. Rueck inherited a shattered program when he returned to his alma mater in 2010 and most of his current roster went 10-21 in the 2012-13

season. But they followed up with 24 and 27 wins the following two seasons and this year earned a share of the Pac-12 regular-season title, won the Pac-12 tournament and upset Baylor to reach the Final Four.

Washington’s run as a No. 7 seed is among the more unlikely in tournament history and included wins on the home floors of Maryland and Kentucky just to reach the regional final against Stanford. The Huskies had not won two games against the Cardinal in the same season since 1987 before beating them in the Pac-12 tournament and again for a Final Four berth.

For Neighbors, one of the biggest impacts he hopes the runs by Oregon State and Washington provides is proof that top players don’t have to leave the West Coast to find success. Washington’s roster includes six in-state players, five from California, one from Arizona and one international. Oregon State is equally West-centric with 11 of its 13 players coming from Oregon, Washington, California, Arizona or British Columbia.

“It validates these players staying home,” Neighbors said. “I hope sends a clear message to all these players out here that you can stay close to home ... and you don’t have to leave to get to this stage.”

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