

Women's College Basketball

Pac-12 women's title race likely in for a close finish

By ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

Stanford's loss at home to UCLA on Monday night signaled that the Pac-12 women could be in for a wild finish to the regular season.

The Bruins' 85-76 victory over the Cardinal popped Oregon State into sole possession of the top spot in the league standings at 11-1 in conference. Washington and Stanford each have just two league losses, while UCLA has three.

"Wow, this conference is really, really good," UCLA coach Cori Close said after the win at Maples Pavilion.

The Pac-12's prowess is reflected in the polls: Five conference teams are ranked in the AP Top 25. The Cardinal are ranked No. 8, while Oregon State is No. 9 — its highest ranking of the season — and the Bruins are at No. 15.

Washington is at No. 10, while Arizona State is No. 23.

UCLA's victory on Monday was its first at Maples since 1999. The Beavers also beat Stanford there 72-69 in double overtime earlier this season. Oregon State had never won on the Cardinals' home court.

Stanford's latest loss came just two days after longtime coach Tara VanDerveer won her 1,000th career game, becoming just the second women's coach to reach the mark.

UCLA was also the only team to beat Oregon State in the conference



In this Jan. 29, 2017, file photo, Oregon State guard Sydney Wiesene (24) breaks through Oregon defense to score during an NCAA college basketball game in Corvallis.

Anibal Ortiz/The Gazette-Times via AP, file

Pac-12 Standings

Team	Conf.	Ovr.
1) Oregon State	11-1	22-2
2) Washington	10-2	22-3
3) Stanford	10-2	20-4
4) UCLA	9-3	18-5
5) Arizona State	6-6	15-8
6) California	5-7	17-7
7) Oregon	5-7	15-9
8) Wash. State	5-7	10-13
9) Utah	3-9	14-9
10) Colorado	3-9	13-10
11) USC	3-9	12-11
12) Arizona	2-10	11-12

season: The Bruins won at Pauley Pavilion 66-56 on Jan. 13.

"Six more games," VanDerveer said about the remaining conference slate. "Any more, the conference race is about seeding for the Pac-12 tournament. That's the team that gets the automatic bid. (And) you're not playing a balanced schedule. For UCLA, they go on the road again next weekend. You've got to come out and play every game and be aggressive."

The Bruins and Beavers will face

off at Gill Coliseum on Sunday, one of the key games in the final three weekends of the regular season.

Oregon State has won seven straight, certainly showing no drop off from the team that went to the Final Four last season. Before the Bruins, the Beavers will face USC on Friday night.

Oregon State is projected as a No. 2 seed in the latest NCAA Tournament selection committee rankings that were released Monday before UCLA's victory over Stanford. The

committee will do one final top 16 reveal on Feb. 20 and the bracket will be unveiled on March 13.

The Pac-12 is boosted because by the nation's most difficult strength of schedule. Based on RPI, Oregon State has the country's sixth-toughest season.

The Beavers, who won a share of the Pac-12's regular-season title last year before winning the conference tournament, get four of their last six games at home. They'll host Stanford the final weekend of

the regular season.

Because of the unbalanced schedule, the Beavers faced Washington only once this season, a 73-70 victory at Gill on Jan. 1. The Huskies' only other loss in conference came against Stanford, 72-68 on Jan. 29.

Washington plays in Sunday's other matchup between ranked teams when it hosts Arizona State.

UCLA has the toughest schedule down the stretch, in Oregon this weekend before hosting the Washington schools and closing at Arizona. But they're boosted by the win against Stanford on the road.

"A win like this pays dividends for us," Close said. "It's a big hurdle."

The conference tournament is March 2-5 at KeyArena in Seattle. The winner gets an automatic berth to the NCAA Tournament.

NASCAR

NASCAR announces rules updates, damaged cars not allowed back on track

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

CONCORD, N.C. — NASCAR will not permit damaged race cars to return to the track this season unless the repairs can be made on pit road within a tight window.

The ban on wrecked race cars continuing to compete was announced Wednesday in a series of a rule updates for the 2017 season.

Beginning later this month at Daytona, if a car receives enough damage during an on-track incident that it must go to the garage for repairs,

the team will not be allowed to repair it in an effort to get back on track. Damaged vehicles can be repaired on pit road during a five-minute cumulative time limit.

Under the new process:

- Body repairs are limited to the removal or reattachment of original parts with fasteners and tape.
- Rods and supports may be used to reinforce original panels.
- New or previously unused body panels are prohibited.

NASCAR said the new rule prevents severely damaged

race cars from returning to the track and creating a safety hazard for other teams. Under NASCAR's new format of running races in stages, it also means a car that wrecks in an early stage won't be eligible to return for the final race-winning stage.

Not allowing teams to repair cars in the garage should be a significant saving on costs for teams.

It also could have cost Jimmie Johnson the 2009 title. He was involved in an early accident at Texas Motor Speedway, and his crew worked feverishly in

the garage to make enough repairs to get Johnson back on the track. That effort by the Hendrick Motorsports crew is widely considered to have saved his title chances.

NASCAR also announced that it will have a traveling safety crew starting this season, creating a consistent medical staff that drivers have been pushing for the last several years.

The safety crew will come from American Medical Response and ensure that a physician and paramedics are in the safety vehicle at all Monster Energy Cup events. AMR will also provide a

small group that will travel to each race, and a physician who will serve as NASCAR's primary doctor.

NASCAR had long relied on local emergency crews to treat drivers while rival series have dedicated teams. IndyCar's team is lauded as the best in the business, and is credited with saving James Hinchcliff's life when he crashed during a 2015 practice for the Indianapolis 500. That accident raised another round of calls from NASCAR drivers for a consistent and regular crew.

"This partnership further

strengthens NASCAR's medical response capability, making our well-established, medical response system even better," said Steve O'Donnell, NASCAR executive vice president and chief racing development officer. "AMR is a leader in the emergency services sector, and its doctors and paramedics add another layer of expertise to the immediate response team."

AMR will position doctors and paramedics in a chase vehicle along with two NASCAR Track Services team members for on-track incidents.

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