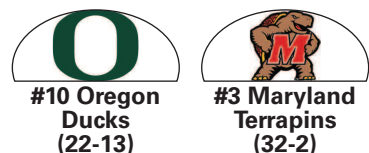


NCAA Women's Basketball

Three freshman starters help Oregon to Sweet 16

By ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

Sweet 16



- Today, 8:36 a.m. (ESPN)
- at Bridgeport, Connecticut

Back before the start of Pac-12 conference play, Oregon freshman Ruthy Hebard made the bold prediction that the Ducks would surprise the league.

Turns out, they've surprised the nation.

Oregon, the only team in the NCAA Tournament with three freshmen in its starting lineup, is in the Sweet 16 field for the first time in program history. The Ducks join a record five Pac-12 schools to advance to the round.

Tenth-seeded Oregon (22-13) heads to Connecticut for the Bridgeport Regional where the team will face third-seeded Maryland (32-2) on Saturday.

Oregon advanced with a dramatic 74-65 upset of second-seeded Duke in the second round. Hebard led the Ducks — making their first appearance in the tournament since 2005 — with 20 points and 15 rebounds.

Hebard, who is from Fairbanks, Alaska, was part of a recruiting class that was ranked among the best in the nation. She currently leads the Ducks with an average of 14.9 points and 8.7 rebounds overall.

In two tournament games, she is averaging 21.5 points and 11 rebounds, and shooting 58.1 percent from the field.

Earlier this season, Oregon popped into the rankings for the first time since 2003. But the Ducks were challenged in the tough Pac-12,

which had a record seven teams make the NCAA Tournament field this season. Oregon also struggled for a time with injuries to freshman Sabrina Ionescu and sophomore point guard Maite Cazorla.

But Hebard was undeterred back in December. She said she thought the Ducks were underrated.

"Like coach Kelly (Graves) always says, it doesn't matter what the rankings are," she said, "we just have to keep doing us."

Following the victory over Duke, Hebard noted that now it doesn't matter what the seeds are.

"Seeds don't really mean anything. We are all going to come out and play our hardest and hopefully we will keep winning," she said.

Hebard is joined in the starting lineup by Ionescu, who was considered one of the top prospects in the nation when she committed to Oregon by simply showing up on campus and surprising Graves and his staff.

Named the Pac-12's Freshman of the Year, Ionescu made a splash with four triple-doubles. She leads the nation in the category and is just two shy of the NCAA record.

Overall, she's averaging 14.4 points, 6.6 rebounds and 5.5 assists for the Ducks.

Ionescu made six free throws in the final 24.5 seconds to help put away Duke. She finished with 13 points, eight rebounds and six assists. In the second half she was headed into a timeout huddle when she was knocked to the ground by Duke forward Kendall Cooper, but officials didn't see it as intentional.

Back in Eugene for two days following the game for final exams, Ionescu posted video of the knock on Twitter joking: "Finals hit me like ..."

With all their tests taken, the Ducks headed to Bridgeport on Thursday.

Coach Graves, in his third season with the Ducks, said the team never set goals for the season because the coaches simply didn't know what they had with all the new faces. In addition to Hebard and Ionescu, freshman Mallory McGwire starts for the Ducks.

McGwire, a 6-foot-5 forward from Reno, Nevada, is averaging 7.5 points and 4.2 rebounds this season.

Together, the freshmen have accounted for 63 percent of Oregon's points in the tournament.

"We've kind of attacked the entire season as just a work in progress, let's get better today than we were yesterday and continue to improve. I think with a young team you have to do that," Graves said. "That's all that they can really focus on and that's what we've done. We continue to get better."



AP Photo/Gerry Broome, File

In this March 18, 2017, file photo, Oregon's Sabrina Ionescu, right, jumps into the arms of teammate Ruthy Hebard following Hebard's late shot to put Oregon ahead in the second half of a first-round game against Temple in the NCAA women's college basketball tournament in Durham, N.C.

MLB



AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin, File

In this March 10, 2017, file photo, Seattle's Kyle Seager looks to throw during spring training, in Peoria, Ariz.

Seager no longer just young gun for M's

By STEPHEN HAWKINS
Associated Press

PEORIA, Ariz. — Kyle Seager is starting to feel like one of the old guys in the Seattle Mariners clubhouse.

That really has nothing to do with his age — the third baseman is only 29. It's just that he's been such a constant with the Mariners, now going into his seventh major league season with the team that drafted him.

"I think from when I got here, it's just me and Felix ... the only two that are left basically," Seager said.

Six-time All-Star right-hander Felix Hernandez is the only other player that was on the roster then — in 2011, Seager's rookie season — and now. King Felix and Seager are also among only eight players still on the Mariners' 40-man roster that were there when Jerry Dipoto took over as general manager only 18 months ago.

Seager hit .278 with 30 home runs and 99 RBIs last season, all career highs. He has averaged 158 games over the past five seasons, and that is how many he played last year.

"He's one of the more underrated players in the league," second-year Mariners manager Scott Servais said. "I've come to appreciate him maybe more than anybody, just the ability you can write his name in the lineup every day and you're going to get a great effort. He's into the game, he's a great teammate, he does everything the right way."

After all the changes in team leadership and the roster, Seager senses a much different vibe for the team that has MLB's longest current postseason drought. The Mariners, who finished second in the AL West last season, haven't been to the playoffs since making it to the 2001 AL Championship Series.

"We have a good presence between older guys that have done it and established themselves, and young guys that are bringing a lot of energy and upside," Seager said. "I think we're as a whole in a

very good position."

Seager also has a willingness to be a resource for the younger players, who Servais said can learn from the third baseman's consistency and how he has fun playing the game.

"Kyle's very down to earth, he's easy to talk to him," Servais said.

And, yes, Seager's younger brother is 22-year-old Los Angeles Dodgers shortstop Corey Seager, the unanimous NL Rookie of the Year last season after hitting .308 with 26 homers.

"He's earned it," the older Seager said. "I couldn't be prouder of him."

A Gold Glove winner in 2014, Seager made defense a priority after making a career-high 22 errors last season, the most by an AL third baseman. Many of those were on groundballs to his left, and he has spent plenty of time this spring focusing on his footwork with Mariners bench coach Tim Bogar.

"I do feel like I got to balls that I hadn't gotten to in the past, but at the same time I had errors that I shouldn't have had. It was a very strange season in that regard," he said. "Ideally, hopefully this year I put it all together. ... It doesn't get as much glamour as going and hitting and doing other stuff, but you look at the teams that are playing in the postseason, you've got to be able to catch the ball."

Seager said he's not afraid to make adjustments or be uncomfortable when trying to improve any aspect of his game.

While acknowledging that it wasn't a typical season for Seager on defense, Servais said there were plenty of great plays. One that stands out was a game-saving diving backhanded stab with the bases loaded, when Seager then got up and threw across the diamond for the final out in a 4-3 win over the Los Angeles Angels.

"He's awesome going to his right," Servais said. "I think he just wants to get more efficient going the other way."

NCAA Men's Basketball

Florida wins with overtime buzzer-beater

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Chris Chiozza went end to end and made a 3-pointer at the buzzer to give Florida an 84-83 victory against Wisconsin on Friday night in the first overtime game of this NCAA Tournament.

Nigel Hayes had given the Badgers (27-10) a 2-point lead with 4 seconds left on two free throws. With no timeouts left, the Gators inbounded to Chiozza and the point guard stopped right the arc and dropped in the winner for Florida (27-8).

Wisconsin's Zak Showalter forced overtime with a leaning 3-pointer off one leg with 2.1 seconds left in regulation as the Badgers wiped out a 12-point deficit in the last 4:15.

The fourth-seeded Gators (27-8) will play South Carolina on Sunday in an all-Southeastern Conference regional final at Madison Square Garden. Florida is in the Elite Eight for the first time since 2014, and for the first time with second-year coach Mike White — the man who replaced Billy Donovan in Gainesville.

SOUTH CAROLINA 70, BAYLOR 50 — At New York, Sindarius Thornwell scored 24 points and seventh-seeded South Carolina cruised past third-seeded Baylor 70-50 on Friday night in the East Regional semifinals, the Bears' worst NCAA Tournament loss.

The Gamecocks (25-10) were in control from the middle of the first half on, mixing defenses and hustling all over the Madison Square Garden court to advance to the Elite Eight for the first time.

South Carolina will meet the winner of the Wisconsin-Florida game on Sunday with a trip to the Final Four at stake.

DJ Dozier and Chris Silva had 12 points each and Duane Notice added 11 for the Gamecocks.

Johnathan Motley had 18 points, 12 in the second half, for Baylor (27-8), which just couldn't get any offense going. The Bears missed 11 of their first 13 shots from the field and it didn't get a whole lot better the entire game. They finished 17

for 56 from the field (30.4 percent), including 3 for 13 from 3-point range.

KENTUCKY 86, UCLA 75 — At Memphis, Tenn., De'Aaron Fox scored a career-high 39 points as the Kentucky Wildcats beat UCLA 86-75 Friday night in a showdown between two of college basketball's goliaths for a spot in the South Regional final.

The only No. 2 seed to survive and advance, the Wildcats (32-5) won their 14th straight game. Now the NCAA's winningest program will play another of basketball's titans Sunday in top-seeded North Carolina with a trip to yet another Final Four on the line.

The third-seeded Bruins (31-5) still have the most national titles. Yet they leave their third Sweet 16 under coach Steve Alford short of the Elite Eight.

Fans lustily booed Kentucky coach John Calipari in his first game in Memphis since leaving in April 2009 for the Wildcats. Calipari's latest crop of talented freshmen put Kentucky into a regional

final for the sixth time in seven years.

NORTH CAROLINA 92, BUTLER 80 — At Memphis, Tenn., Joel Berry II scored 26 points and Justin Jackson added 24 as top-seeded North Carolina moved to the Elite Eight with a 92-80 victory over Butler in the NCAA South Region on Friday night.

Luke Maye recorded his first career double-double with 16 points and 12 rebounds, helping fuel a quick start for Carolina (30-7). The Tar Heels never let their lead get under double digits in the second half.

Andrew Chrabaszcz led the fourth-seeded Bulldogs (25-9) with 21 points and seven rebounds, while Kelan Martin finished with 16 points for Butler, which struggled shooting early and did not recover.

Carolina, which reached the Elite Eight for the 27th time, will face the winner of Friday's second game between UCLA and Kentucky. The Tar Heels connected on 54.4 percent of their shots, while Butler was at 43.5 percent.

ELITE 8: Teams use nearly identical tactics

Continued from 3B

(31-5) roared into the Midwest Regional final with an average margin of victory of 30 points, dusting aside Big Ten champion Purdue on Thursday night. They played at such a high level in the second half that Boilermakers coach Matt Painter, always willing to give credit where it's due, stopped just short of calling the Jayhawks invincible.

Frank Mason III has become the front-runner for national player of the year. Devonte Graham has poured in 3-pointers at a record-setting rate. And star freshman Josh Jackson has brushed off his many off-the-court issues to send his NBA draft stock soaring.

Oh, and the Jayhawks get to play No. 3 seed Oregon at Sprint Center, the glass-enclosed downtown arena that happens to sit about 40 minutes from their campus in Lawrence.

"We know we have a tough game ahead of us," Oregon guard Tyler Dorsey said Friday. "They're going to have a homecourt advantage. We just have to be ready, keep taking it game by game."

The Ducks (32-5) have done a sublime job of that so far.

Whereas Kansas has run roughshod through the first



AP Photo/Orlin Wagner

Kansas coach Bill Self applauds his team during the first half of a regional semifinal against Purdue in the NCAA men's college basketball tournament, Thursday, March 23, 2017, in Kansas City, Mo.



AP Photo/Charlie Riedel

Oregon coach Dana Altman shouts to his team during the second half of a regional semifinal against Michigan in the NCAA men's college basketball tournament, Thursday, March 23, 2017, in Kansas City, Mo.

three rounds, the Ducks cruised past Iona before running into trouble. It took a heart-stopping final few minutes to put away Rhode Island last weekend, and a missed 3-pointer by Michigan at the buzzer to survive Thursday night.

But now, they sit on the precipice of their first Final Four since winning the 1939 title, and Altman sits one game away from reaching the first national semifinal of his career.

"Dana and I have known each other a long time," Self said. "We know that (Saturday) is going to be a highly competitive game. We've been fortunate we've played consistently well, but it's going to take another effort like that to advance."

As the Jayhawks and Ducks prepare to meet, and

Self and Altman match wits with more at stake than ever before, here are some of the key story lines:

MIRROR IMAGES: Kansas and Oregon both prefer to play at a quick tempo, utilizing three or four guards without a true center, and have an abundance of experience. The Ducks even have a stretch four-man in Dillon Brooks, just like the Jayhawks have in Jackson, and it's possible the two stars will be going at each other one-on-one much of the night.

BEEHIVE THERE BEFORE: Kansas lost to Villanova in the Elite Eight a year ago, while Oregon fell in the same round to Oklahoma. Both teams have used those losses as motivation. "It was tough, trying to get over that game," Graham said, "but

we're back here again and excited to be here."

TOUGH SCOUT: The 48 hours between semifinals and finals means a condensed scouting period, and that could be to Oregon's benefit. The Ducks play a variety of defenses, sometimes switching between zones and man-to-man every trip down floor. "We can't let that affect us," Mason said. "It can kind of confuse us sometimes, but Coach always says, 'Let the mismatches come naturally.'"

THE SERIES: The Jayhawks are 4-3 against the Ducks and, more importantly, beat them in their only NCAA Tournament meeting. That was in the 2002 regional finals in Madison, Wisconsin. Kansas went on to lose to eventual champion Maryland at the Final Four in Atlanta.