



Bruins, Matadors enjoy big weekend

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The real first-weekend "winners" in Pacific-10 and Big West conference basketball play were UCLA, Oregon, Washington State and Cal State Northridge.

That's because road victories are precious in college basketball, and each of those collected biggies.

The Bruins' Bay Area (Stanford and California) sweep could prove to be as impressive a set of conference road wins as any team in the country collects this season on one trip.

Washington State is probably the only other team capable of beating both the Cardinal and Golden Bears on their home floor.

And the Cougars picked up something bordering on a "must win" if they are going to dethrone the

Bruins for the conference title when they rallied in Seattle on Saturday night to knock off the Washington Huskies.

And the Ducks, two days after losing at Arizona State, beat a short-handed Arizona team (playing its third game without freshman guard Jerryd Bayless) in Tucson on Saturday.

As for Cal State Northridge, the Matadors etched their Big West Conference championship candidacy in stone by blowing out Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo (by 21 points) on Thursday night and then coming from 10 points behind in the second half to edge host UC Santa Barbara, 88-84.

The Gauchos were a near-unanimous choice to win the conference going into the season and did little to impact that status by losing only at Stanford and North Carolina in November and December.

Coach Bobby Braswell's CSN team, sitting at 10-3 after its road sweep, should now be considered at least a co-favorite with UCSB.

USC, after dropping both of its Bay Area games, needs a home sweep of Washington State (Thursday) and Washington (Saturday) to keep its Pac-10 title hopes from petering out just two weekends into conference play.

The significance, both nationally and regionally, of WSU visiting Pauley Pavilion on Saturday morning, regardless of what happens Thursday night (when the Bruins play host to the Washington Huskies), is obvious.



The No. 4-ranked (via the Associated Press) Cougars and No. 5 Bruins not only appear to be the best two teams in the Pac-10 but they're also the Western-based teams with the best opportunities to earn one of the NCAA Tournament's four No. 1 seeds.

If Ben Howland's UCLA team gets that tag, the Bruins would open tournament play in the Honda Center. And two wins in Anaheim would move them to Phoenix for the West Regional semifinals.

The most significant Big West games this week will be played Saturday when the Matadors play host to the Pacific Tigers - who are in the Walter Pyramid to play Long Beach State on Thursday night - and the UCSB Gauchos play at Cal State Fullerton.

At this stage of the season, those are easy choices as the four best teams in the conference.

Cool college games alert

Arizona State has a solid chance to improve to 3-0 tonight in the Pac-10, especially if Bayless is a no-can-do for Arizona tonight in Tempe. He suffered a sprained right knee in practice the day before the Wildcats' Dec. 29 game at Memphis.

Assuming you've got access to the DirecTV package (at home, a pal's or a sports bar), check out that game on Fox Sports Arizona (6:30 p.m.).

The best game in the country tonight, though, could be the Atlantic 10 opener between 14-1 Rhode Island and 12-1 (and host) Dayton.

The College Sports TV network (CSTV) will broadcast it at 4 o'clock our time.

Barring collapse, both of those teams will be in the NCAA Tournament, regardless of what happens in the A-10 postseason tourney.

And look for Mississippi to fall from the ranks (currently at six) of unbeaten teams when it plays a Southeastern Conference opener at Tennessee (5 o'clock our time and you can watch it if you have the ESPN/Full Court premium package).

Saturday should be an all-day TV (or in person) affair for the devout among the college basketball followers.

The best of the bunch: Washington State at UCLA (Fox Sports, 11:30 a.m.), North Carolina State at North Carolina (ESPN, 9 a.m.) and Notre Dame at Marquette (ESPN Full Court, 11 a.m.).

Stanford at Oregon (Channel 2, 1:30 p.m.) is the "don't miss it" for Sunday.

High school hoopla

OK, I promised it, so here it comes.

And the caveat (I haven't seen unbeaten Mater Dei or Etiwanda yet) continues.

My Top 15 Southern California team ratings: 1.

The logo for dailynews.com is displayed in white lowercase letters on a red rectangular background.

Taft; 2. Westchester; 3. Dominguez; 4. Mater Dei; 5. Simi Valley; 6. Santa Margarita; 7. Fairfax; 8. Campbell Hall; 9. Compton; 10. Gahr; 11. Riverside Martin Luther King; 12. JSerra; 13. Etiwanda; 14. Bishop Montgomery; 15. Eisenhower.

Really Big Games, Tonight's Version (all of these are in Southern Section I-AA leagues): Lakewood at Compton and Poly at Jordan (both Moore), Gahr at Dominguez (San Gabriel Valley), Dana Hills at Capistrano Valley (South Coast) and JSerra at Mater Dei (Trinity).

And on Friday: Jordan at Wilson (Moore), Gahr at Lynwood (SGVL), Mayfair at Cerritos (Suburban), and JSerra at St. John Bosco, and Santa Margarita at Mater Dei (both Trinity).

The outcome of the Gahr-Dominguez and Santa Margarita-Mater Dei games should have significant impact on the first official I-AA ratings to come out of the Southern Section's Los Alamitos office Monday.

And Los Alamitos, a member of the I-A-designated Sunset League, has two league biggies in Huntington Beach tonight (at Marina) and Friday (at Edison).

After many years of consideration and exposure to just about every pop, rock and hip hop song recorded, I've decided that my two favorite "songs played during warmups" are "Jump Around" (House of Pain) and "Let's Get It Started" (Black-Eyed Peas).

If you've got your own favorites, tell me what they are, and why (via e-mail), and I'll drop them into my column next week.

We're all about reader input here, folks.

College Sports

LEAGUE RACES ARE WIDE OPEN

BIG WEST COACHES SEE FEAR, EXCITEMENT AHEAD

By **Jason Anderson**

January 09, 2008

Record Staff Writer

STOCKTON - There was a little news, a lot of flattery and no clear consensus on which teams would prevail in the Big West Conference during a three-hour conference call with basketball coaches Tuesday.

Men's coaches marveled at UC Santa Barbara's 12-2 start and declared Cal State Northridge a contender less than 72 hours after the Matadors upset the Gauchos on their home floor. Cal State Fullerton evoked a certain fear factor, and a healthy respect remained for a Pacific program seeking its fourth championship in five years after finishing seventh in 2006-07.

"I don't see a lot of chinks in the armor there, and I think they'll be contending for the Big West title," said first-year Long Beach State coach Dan Monson, who will see the Tigers on Thursday at The Pyramid. "I think they'll be right there in the top three."

Pacific coach Bob Thomason said his team must be more consistent in terms of toughness and intensity.

"We have made some great strides as the season's gone on," Thomason said. "There are just more that we have to make to compete for a championship, but that's what we're working on."

Pacific women's coach Lynne Roberts said freshman Andrea Swanson will miss the rest of the season with a stress fracture in her right leg. Swanson, a 6-foot-2 forward, averaged 10.7 points and 3.8 rebounds in nine games. She will apply for a medical redshirt.

"She's a really talented player," Roberts said. "She just understood the game. We'll miss her."

Pacific previously lost sophomore guard Jake Kelly. Roberts said Kelly also will seek a medical redshirt after taking a leave of absence for health reasons. The Tigers were not expected to contend with Cal Poly, UC Santa Barbara and UC Davis, all of which remain in the hunt, despite having their own injury issues.

The men's race could feature as many as six teams, if UC Irvine and Cal Poly overcome early struggles. Coaches pointed to UC Irvine, in particular, as a team that could contend, including Anteaters coach Pat Douglass.

"We've improved and stayed resilient," Douglass said. "Even though our record is not as impressive as some other teams in our conference, I think we're going to be a team to be reckoned with."

Thomason said the top spots are up for grabs.

"It'll be exciting all the way through," he said. "And then whoever wins it is going to have to do it all over again in the Big West Tournament."

UC Davis is not expected to vie for the conference title in its first year in the Big West. Coach Gary Stewart said three redshirts will make an immediate impact next season, including Joe Harden, a former St. Mary's High star who transferred from Notre Dame.

"A lot of kids look a little better in their redshirt year than when the lights come on," Stewart said. "Having said that, Joe Harden's been our best player clearly in practice and a guy that's going to be at the center of what we are going to do as we move forward."

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THURSDAY'S GAMES

[VISIT HIS BLOG](#)

MEN

Pacific at Long Beach State

Tipoff: 7 p.m., The Pyramid (Long Beach)

Broadcast: pacifictigers.cstv.com,

1420-AM

WOMEN

Long Beach State at Pacific

Tipoff: 7 p.m., Spanos Center

Broadcast: pacifictigers.cstv.com

Big west standings

men

Overall League

Cal State Northridge 10-3 2-0

Cal State Fullerton 9-4 2-0

Pacific 10-4 1-0

UC Davis 7-7 1-0

UC Santa Barbara 12-3 1-1

Cal Poly 6-8 1-1

UC Irvine 5-9 0-1

Long Beach State 3-10 0-2

UC Riverside 3-11 0-3

Women

Overall League

UC Santa Barbara 7-6 2-0

Cal Poly 5-9 2-0

UC Riverside 4-9 2-0

Cal State Fullerton 2-10 1-0

Pacific 5-9 0-1

UC Davis 6-7 0-1

UC Irvine 4-11 0-1

Long Beach State 2-11 0-2