

OREGON SPORTS NEWS

A One Seed?! Just Who Are These Oregon Ducks?

By Trevor Nees on March 18, 2016 at 5:58 AM

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If you haven't watched much college basketball this season, you may have been surprised when the NCAA announced this year's NCAA tournament bracket on Sunday and awarded the University of Oregon a one seed in the West Region. Few, if any, expected the Ducks to garner such a high seed in the

NCAA tournament at the beginning of the season. They received just one 1st place vote in the Pac-12 preseason media poll, and were predicted to finish in fourth place in the conference. Questions abounded regarding how the Ducks would replace current Indiana Pacer and former Duck guard Joseph Young, the team's leading scorer last year. Villanova transfer G Dylan Ennis was expected to help ease the burden, but he appeared in only two games near the beginning of the season before being ruled out for the remainder of the year with a foot injury.

As it turns out, the Ducks didn't need any one player to replace Young, instead becoming one of the most balanced scoring

teams in the country, emphasizing the execution of Dana Altman's high post/spread offense (a natural complement to the football team's spread offense) rather than feeding any one individual player. Seven players averaged at least twenty minutes a game, with four players (F Dillon Brooks, F Elgin Cook, Dorsey, and Boucher) averaging double figure points per game on the season. Oregon prefers to attack its opponents from all over the court, with screen action taking place on the front and back side of nearly every play. Ball-handlers and cutters read defenders and adjust their actions accordingly, leading to countless good looks every game.

The de facto alpha dog of the team is Brooks. His 16.8 PPG and 3.1 assists per game paced the rest of the Ducks, while Brooks was second on the team in rebounds per game, steals per game, and free throw percentage. After a decent if not spectacular freshman year, the six foot seven, 225 pound Brooks had an impressive showing this summer for Team Canada, displaying a versatile game of bullying drives coupled with outside shooting. At the U19 FIBA World Championships, Brooks averaged 18.8 PPG (second in the tournament), along with 5.2 RPG and 2.2 APG, and at the Pan-Am Games, Brooks helped Canada's Senior National Team reach the Gold Medal game. A projected early-second round pick in the 2017 draft according to Draft Express, Brooks has a chance to climb even higher on draft boards as he improves his outside shooting and playmaking abilities.

Late in the season, however, freshman Tyler Dorsey began to come on strong. The Ducks closed the season on an eight game winning streak, with Dorsey averaging 17.3 PPG and close to 5

RPG during the streak. Dorsey has shot an outstanding 43% on threes on the year, leading the team. It's a remarkable number in terms of efficiency, considering Dorsey also attempted the most threes on the team this season, 144. Dorsey's emergence as another reliable wing option has allowed the Ducks to attack the entire floor more easily, as defenses generally have to account for Dorsey on one side of the floor and Brooks on the opposite side.

And then there's the walking mismatch that is Chris Boucher. The lanky junior, who was recently granted an eligibility waiver for next season and is likely to return, stands six feet ten inches with a seven foot four inch wingspan and loves to run the floor. Boucher didn't start playing organized basketball until he was nineteen, and his rapid development has allowed him to become a defensive force with an emerging offensive skill set. Boucher was second in the NCAA this season in averaging 3.1 blocks per game, possessing the uncanny ability to time his leap to make the most of his huge wingspan. He provides a solid anchor and rim protector on the defensive end of the floor, erasing many of his teammates mistakes with an emphatic swat of the ball. Offensively, Boucher has little to no post moves to speak of, but he has a soft shooting touch that is still developing, and he has the range to step outside the arc, where he shot 36% on the year, third on the team. He's able to generate easy put-back chances around the basket with his length and athleticism, a trait that is sorely needed in often closely-contested NCAA tournament games. Opposing teams will have tremendous difficulty matching up with Boucher.

Sophomores Jordan Bell and Casey Benson and seniors Elgin Cook and Dwayne Benjamin are the remaining key contributors. Bell, who set the school record for blocks in a season last year while starting at center, has moved to the bench this year and watched Boucher shatter his record. But Bell is a true team player, never publicly complaining, instead providing the muscle around the rim that Boucher lacks. If Oregon faces a team like Texas A&M that possesses some serious size up front, Bell and Boucher could be a workable C/PF combo, both offensively and defensively.

PG Casey Benson, thrust into the starting role due to the injuries to Ennis, has performed admirably. His assist to turnover ratio is a superb 4.29:1, and he's done an excellent job spreading the wealth and getting all the key pieces for Oregon involved on the offensive end of the floor. Benson won't wow you with flashy plays or superior athleticism, but he has the basketball IQ to help put he and his teammates in positions to succeed.

By contrast, Benjamin has had a couple of wow moments this year, with a few memorable slams throughout the season mixed in with some torrid shooting streaks. Benjamin's jumper is certainly streaky, as evidenced by his field goal percentage of 40%, but his athleticism allows him to sneak in and grab offensive boards when the shots aren't falling. Benjamin is excellent at providing a spark as the first player off Altman's bench, and he meshes well with any of the regular units that Altman employs.

Finally, Cook, the Pac-12 Tournament MVP, has averaged 14.5 PPG, 4.9 RPG, 2.2 APG, and 1.5 steals per game, all top three figures on the team. His all-around game allows him to pick and choose when he affects each game and in what way; put simply, he's the ultimate glue guy, a solid offensive and defensive player who can be a leader to the younger players. He can be a dominate player at times, and seeing as how this will be Cook's third straight trip to the NCAA tournament, his experience may lead him to take on more responsibilities on the court as Oregon progresses through the tournament.

Oregon's first game of the tournament is against the sixteenth-seeded Holy Cross on March 18th at 4:30, with Oregon listed as a twenty three point favorite. Oregon should be able to impose its will against Holy Cross and play exactly how it wants to. And now when you turn it on, you'll know exactly what to look for. You've got to love March Madness.