

[Reset](#)
[Increase](#)

- [Story](#)
 - [Slideshow](#)
 - [E-mail](#)
 - [Print](#)
-

George Schroeder: In NCAA's alphabet soup, CBI spells VCU for UO

By GeorgeSchroeder

Register-Guard columnist

Published: *Midnight*, March 31

The idea was to attack at every opportunity, and boy, did they ever.

Malcolm Armstead, E.J. Singler, you name a Duck, and he was driving hard to the hoop Wednesday night for a layup. Heck, even the walk-ons got in on the game plan — see Matt Losli's teeth-bared drive for a layup in the final minute of a 71-58 win.

And after the win over Creighton, we should appreciate the aggressive posture that propelled the Ducks to this strange truth: They're going to play basketball in April.

Which means we should applaud Rob Mullens.

The athletic director is responsible, almost three weeks ago now, for securing a CBI berth when it wasn't a given.

We all understand it's an insignificant tournament, far removed from the spotlight. The Final Four begins Saturday in Houston, which only means that everywhere except here and Omaha, Neb., Friday night's CBI finale will be buried beneath the hype.

But Oregon's run might have significance, for now and later.

"We want to be VCU," said Mullens, referring to last year's CBI champion, this weekend's Final Four participant.

Well, sure. But the Ducks won their 20th game Wednesday. Back in December, Dana Altman said, "we were just hoping for double digits (in wins)."

A fairly young bunch is gaining valuable experience, growing in confidence, getting better.

Also, a loyal senior is still playing. That's important, too.

It's how this came together, by the way. Oregon lost to Washington in the Pac-10 Tournament, and when the Ducks returned to Eugene, Altman asked Joevan Catron if he wanted to keep playing.

"I want to put 'Oregon' on my chest as long as I can," Catron answered.

That was enough for his teammates, and for Altman. The coach told Mullens the Ducks weren't ready for the season to end.

The athletic director saw the value: "first-year coach, and we had some momentum." He made the calls, did the negotiating — understand, there's some back-room dealing in this tournament, kind of like the NIT used to be — and secured a berth. And also, an important guarantee.

"Home games," Mullens said, "were really important to us."

Partly, that was because of final exams, which took place the first week of the tournament. But playing at home also meant Oregon had a better chance of winning — and playing even more home games.

(Another fringe benefit of the CBI: After playing only seven games at Matthew Knight Arena during the regular season, the Ducks will play their fifth postseason game there on Friday).

"It's been interesting," Mullens said, "to watch it build on itself."

Oregon paid \$35,000 for the first round, \$50,000 for the second and \$75,000 each for the semifinals and finals. It's worth the expense — which has almost been offset by tickets sold, Mullens said — and the extra effort.

Which, by the way, is what the Ducks put out Wednesday night, after losing the first game of the best-of-three championship series on Monday in Omaha, Neb.

Another loss would have ended the season. Catron said he and the other Ducks had a "sense of urgency," and a nice crowd of 7,875 watched the results.

The Ducks were aggressive from the outset. Led by Armstead's slashing drives to the basket and a destructive defense — more man-to-man than they'd played in about three months — they took advantage of the slower Bluejays guards, swarmed the bigger Creighton post players, and grabbed and held a big lead.

"We were much more aggressive," Altman said, than in the loss to the Bluejays on Monday in Omaha.

Altman made the point — again — that we shouldn't overdo this, that the CBI is not the NCAA or even the NIT.

"We've got a long ways to go with our program," the coach said. "We're not kidding anybody."

But here comes April. And they're still attacking the opportunity.

E-mail george.schroeder@registerguard.com. Follow at twitter.com/GeorgeSchroeder
