

PAC Season Finale this Weekend in Arizona

Written by RUGBYMag Staff
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Four teams from the PAC converge on the state of Arizona this week to conclude the conference's pilot season. On Friday night, No. 6 UCLA plays at No. 15 Arizona and No. 17 Arizona State hosts Oregon State. Sunday, OSU and UCLA swap, with the Bruins playing the Sun Devils and the Wildcats playing the Beavers.

Arizona is coming off a big weekend, beating rival ASU on the road and returning home with its first-ever PAC Conference victory. The match was hard fought the entire way for Arizona. The Sun Devils led early with a nifty score after a quick line out, but the Wildcats' Jack Arnold hit a penalty and Arizona trailed just 7-3 at halftime.

ASU struck first in the second half with a Sione Latoi penalty, lifting the Sun Devils to a 10-3 lead. After a back and forth half, the Wildcats finally broke open some offense, scoring 13-straight points, coming away with the 16-10 victory.

Replacement wing Jared Wellman touched down in the corner to bring Arizona within one at 16-15. With four minutes remaining, Arnold hit a 30-meter penalty to give Arizona a one-point edge. After the restart kick, Arizona fullback Ryan Matyas placed a difficult-to-field kick into the middle of the pitch. After a second kick and ensuing ruck, reserve flanker Matt Tomassetti dove

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on the ball in the try zone to give Arizona the six point margin.

“This was a great team effort,” said Arizona Coach Dave Sitton. “We played heartfelt defense all night and our bench was spectacular with five coming onto the pitch and all performing very well.”

UCLA has also found recent success on the pitch, heading into weekend coming off of a remarkable upset over sixth-ranked Utah. The Bruins beat the Utes 50-38 on their home pitch midway through March and have had time off since then. UCLA should be well rested as they battle with Arizona for position in the PAC Conference standings.

“UCLA is tough and deserve the recognition,” remarked Sitton. “Their tight five have performed well, complementing a very talented back line which plays hard running rugby on both sides of the ball.”

The Oregon State takes on Arizona State Friday, it will be a battle of teams that are still looking for their first PAC Conference victory. Oregon State is also looking for its first point in the PAC Conference standings. Arizona State earned its lone point by losing by less than seven to the Wildcats.

The Beavers have faced tough tests this season. They were beaten by UCLA in early March, 35-12, and lost to PAC Conference Champion and top-ranked California 62-7. Oregon State did beat Washington and Washington State earlier this season, shutting out both and scoring a combined 132 points in both games.

“The Beavers prove the point that this PAC Conference is the best in the country,” said Sitton. “They have done well outside the conference but have yet to win in a league match.”

On the line this weekend could be an at-large berth to the DI-AA playoffs. Since the PAC doesn't have the minimum seven teams required for an automatic bid, and UCLA and Cal are destined for the Varsity Cup, whoever finishes highest amongst Arizona, Arizona State and Oregon State could get an at-large bid to the Sweet 16, should they apply. With a win over

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Arizona State, the Wildcats are the frontrunners, and coach Sitton has expressed interest in participating in the DI-AA postseason. However, if Arizona State or Oregon State sweep the weekend, they could surpass Arizona.