

Wrestling coach Ron Finley has successfully completed his second recruiting season at Oregon.

Finley, entering his third year as head coach, signed eight state champions and a national champion from Japan.

Now, after two full recruiting seasons, Finley has doubled the size of the squad. He expects a turn-out of 40 for the coming 20-dual meet season.

But, for the first time at Oregon, Finley won't have to rely on his freshmen recruits for a successful wrestling season. He did that last year—starting as many as six freshmen during some meets.

Now they are a year older. Eight starters in ten weights are returning. Among the returnees is Pacific-8 champion Mark Purkey. He is one of Finley's outstanding freshmen of last year. Purkey was the first freshman ever to win the Pac-8 crown.

Also returning is Dave Luke, last year's team leader in wins and falls. Luke, along with another returning sophomore Wes Hines, made the finals of the U.S. Olympic Trials last summer.

Luke was upset by UCLA's John Meikle in the final five seconds to lose the Pac-8 championship last year. In the Olympic Trials, Luke qualified for the finals in freestyle, finishing in the top six.

Wrestlers loaded with talent

Hines was very impressive at the Olympic Trials and was the only alternate to the U.S. Olympic team invited to remain at the training site to train with the Olympic team. The U.S. coaches were obviously impressed with Hines' future Olympic possibilities. He competed in greco-roman.

Mike Oilar will return for his junior year after placing third in the Pac-8 as a sophomore in a surprise performance. Oilar made hearts stop at the Pac-8 tournament when he threw indomitable Larry Owings to his back and nearly beat the former NCAA champion, the only wrestler to beat Olympic Gold Medalist Dan Gable in collegiate wrestling.

Dean Dixon will also return for his sophomore season after spending a year in the National Guard. He won the 1970-71 outstanding freshman award.

Sophomore Duane Stutzman, fourth in the Pac-8 with

NCAA tournament experience behind him, returns at 150 pounds.

Don Evans, Tom Persons and Rick Willoughby will also be back to defend starting spots on last year's squad.

At 118 pounds Willoughby will be pressed for his starting spot by Ralph Davis and five freshman recruits.

At 126 Luke will start his senior season. Already being groomed for replacement of Luke is transfer standout Joe Sade. Sade earned a 22-2 freshman record last year at Michigan after a high school record of 35-0. Sade will lose a year of eligibility this season but will fill the 126 pound hold Luke leaves next year.

At 134 pounds Oilar will have to battle Japanese national champion Shuichi Shoji. However Shoji is recovering from a summer knee operation and may not recover full strength before the season opens.

Dixon holds down the 142 pound bracket.

At 150 Stutzman will face Oregon state high school champion Dennis Jossi and John Scott for the top berth.

Don Evans has little competition at 158 pounds.

At 167 Purkey is recovering from a spring term knee operation but is expected to be ready for the season's opener December 2.

At 177 Hines will be down a weight from the 190 pound class he wrestled at last year to fill the hole left by graduating Dave DeForest. Hines will face senior Jim McIrvin and state greco-roman champ Jim Vasey.

At 190 pounds the battle appears between two freshmen. State greco-roman champion Butch Hogland and second placer in the state high school tournament Larry Ermini are the prime contenders.

At heavyweight Tom Persons returns for his sophomore season. A foot injury stopped him part of the season last year. Ric Reitman, a placer in the state high school tournament, will be Persons' contender for the starting berth.

Sorely missed will be Pac-8 Champion Brent Merrill at 134 pounds, but Dean Dixon's return to the mat at 142 has enabled Oilar to cut down to replace Merrill at 134.

Finley is pleased with the team's better balance and depth this season. Last year injuries greatly depleted the already thin ranks. This year the squad is double in size with seven strong weight classes "that we can depend on rather than five last year," Finley said. The potentially weak classes are 118, 190 and heavyweight.

The team is still very young. Over 75 per cent of the squad is freshmen and sophomores. Only one starter is expected to be a senior (Luke).

But the squad is undoubtedly long on talent although short on experience. The potential is there for a great season. But it's only potential at this point.



Photo by Matt McCormick

There should be more ups than downs this season as coach Ron Finley enters his third year with a veteran squad and some top talent making their debut.

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