

softball

Oregon's Lesh keeps cool at the hot corner

By MIKE GRADY
Of the Emerald

Luck has never been a trait that Vicki Lesh has had to worry about. After all, she only gets one kind — the worst.

Now in her second year at Oregon, Lesh has participated in three different sports over the span of four separate seasons. Of those, she has managed to finish only one in good health. Tendonitis in her right shoulder and torn ankle ligaments can be blamed for the other three.

Latest reports indicate that Lesh has been moving around campus lately without any noticeable limps or bandages. And if that's the case, head softball coach Becky Sisley can afford to breathe easy.

You see, softball is the only sport the 5-3, 125 pounder Lesh has played as a Duck that she has gotten to know the coach better than the athletic trainer. It also happens to be the one she is most proficient at.

As a freshman, Lesh started at third base for Oregon and even helped out on the mound a little. While her offensive statistics were good — a batting average of .267 along with 21 runs scored — her defensive stats were phenomenal, as witnessed by a fielding average of .975.

Perhaps the number .975 doesn't say much standing all by itself and so some clarification is called for. In fast-pitch softball, the third baseman and home plate are separated by only 60 feet of uneven dirt and half-hidden rocks.

The ball, which is by no means soft, is traveling at over 50 miles

per hour before it reaches the bat and usually speeds up after being hit.

Standing at her position, Lesh must field this ricocheting missile sure-handedly, right herself and make an accurate throw in the time it takes to blink twice. She did just that roughly 98 out of 100 times last season.

This year, the graduate of Neah-Kah-Nie high school in Rockaway, Ore. is also being asked to help from the mound as well as her corner at third. While throwing 19 innings last season Lesh won one game, lost another and finished with a 1.50 earned run average.

Admitting that pitching is neither her favorite or best position, Lesh said there are still good reasons why she finds time to practice it along with her third base duties.

"I like to pitch and I know that we need me to pitch," she said. "I think I've improved at it quite a bit. I was able to work out before the season started and that really helped. Because of my ankle I was able to throw and that's about all."

The ligaments she tore while practicing with the junior varsity basketball team earlier this year wasn't anything she hadn't experienced before, but it did mean quite a bit to her at the time.

"I don't know how I did it," she complained while thinking back to the incident that put her foot into a cast for over a month. "I hardly even jumped up."

"I really love basketball too. I really never got the chance to play it the way I'd have liked to in high school. I'd really like to get coached in basketball."



Photo courtesy WIA

Injuries have put a damper into all of Vicki Lesh's athletic endeavors at Oregon except softball, where she fielded .975 last season.

Although the ankle problems came at a very inopportune time, it wasn't the first time Lesh had to cut the basketball season short and prepare for softball. While playing junior varsity volleyball in the fall of her freshman year, Lesh developed tendonitis in her shoulder.

She tried to struggle through the following basketball season in pain, hoping to make the varsity, but decided to call it quits and try to heal.

"I thought I had a real good chance at playing varsity," Lesh said, "but my shoulder was just hurting too much. I could hardly lift my arm at times."

Her recovery seems miraculous when looking at the 1977 softball statistics, especially considering the fact that tendonitis just doesn't go away like the flu; it sticks around and nags you as much as possible. Like whenever you want to breathe.

"I haven't had too many problems with it when I'm throwing," said Lesh, acknowledging the fact that she still has to be careful with the shoulder.

"Sometimes when I'm swinging the bat I'll feel it, but other than that it doesn't bug me. I try to ignore it."

One thing that Lesh doesn't ignore while speaking on the subject of softball is this year's squad has its work cut out for them.

"I feel that this team can really be good," she said. "We've got some people up from the JV's pushing some of the regulars for positions and that really helps. I think we know that we've got to try hard this year."

Lesh pointed to defending league champion Oregon State, as well as Portland State, as the teams the Ducks would be fighting for a national berth. "We just need to get outside and start playing," she said, looking out at the unusual appearance of the sun. "We're the best indoor team around right now."

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