'Excited' swimmers face Willamette

Youthful team relies on depth

Oregon swim coach Rich Schleicher says he is excited over his team, and that this excitement has transformed into a successful season.

The 5-2 Ducks take on Willamette University in Salem Saturday, and Schleicher hopes his team will be ready. "Coaching is just like teaching" says Schleicher, "and the student has to be stimulated into performing."

So far this year the Ducks have performed well, with their best showing to date being a 61-52 win over Washington last Friday. It was the first time the Ducks outpaddled the Huskies in 19 years. "Washington was the meet," he says. "It was like Mac Court there — the crowd did not sit down."

Schleicher says the excitement generated by the two teams was not unusual, because of the nature of the races. "Each race was so close and so exciting that the fans screamed the whole time."

"We can get 1,400 people in this thing," says Schleicher, waving toward the grandstands of Leighton Pool. But with what the coach calls a "weird schedule" there is only one more home meet.

Schleicher believes his young team will get better because of hard work. "This is one of the hardest working teams I've ever had the privilege of coaching in may years" he says. "And this team is just a launching pad for teams in the next few years."

Oregon must first get by Willamette, a task Schleicher is taking lightly. "Willamette has some good individuals, but they don't have as much depth as we have," he says.

The second-year coach projects a "definite win" and is juggling his lineup to give his swimmers a little variety. "We're going to give people a chance to swim other events and let those swim who haven't swum a great deal."

Depth is Oregon's greatest asset, says Schleicher, "Our depth in freestyle has made us powerful this year."

Because 75 percent of the events are freestyle, the coach relies on this depth, but he says his team is strong in all areas.

George Koch leads a strong corps of breaststrokers, and he is currently ranked third in the Pacific-10 conference. "George is an Olympic candidate, because most of the Olympic team comes from the Pac-10," says Schleicher.

Jeff Morgan, from Washington, provides strength in the butterfly, as does Sam Glass. Dale Lagergren and Jim Avey add depth to the freestyle events, and Jeff Smith leads the divers.

Photo by Greg Gawlowski

Sam Nixon, one of Oregon's top divers this season, goes through the paces in a practice at Leighton Pool. Nixon, a junior, combines with freshman Jeff Smith and sophomore Jim Skoglund to produce what coach Ron Schleicher calls "a solid diving team that should score a lot in dual meets this season."

Women swimmers hope for a breather this time

The women's swimming team may have an easy time this weekend as it faces Willamette University in Salem Friday night, says head coach Virginia Van Rossen.

"It should be an easy meet for us," says Van Rossen, whose swimmers and divers completed a hectic two-day road trip last week against the University Pacific Lutheran and the University of Washington. "The meet against Willamette will be a breather for some of the better girls," adds Van Rossen"and we will swim them in some of their 'off' events." Van Rossen also plans to swim some of the girls who have competed sparingly this season.

In action last week, the Ducks defeated the University of Hawaii, 87-51 at Leighton Pool, defeated PLU in Tacoma, 58-54, in Seattle.

"The meet was an ego high for us," says Van Rossen. "We expected to get beat by quite a bit. We were leading going into the final relay, so it was quite a morale booster."

Friday's meet, scheduled for 7 p.m., was to be a three-team competition, but the University of Montana was forced to withdraw. Van Rossen also notes that there will be no diving competition at the Willamette meet.

Van Rossen's confidence in her swimmers has been boosted this year by the performance of freshman Tina Helm, who set University records in both the 50- and 100- meter backstroke events (28.19 and 1:00.58) in the dual meet against Hawaii. Helm's performance in the 50-meter event ranks her fifth in he nation this year.

Van Rossen was also impressed by the performance of senior Robin Wheeler, who swam the 50-meter butterfly in 26.8 seconds, a national qualifying time, in the dual against Hawaii. Wheeler qualified for the nationals in eight events last year.

"I'm looking for her to qualify in all three butterfly events," says Van Rossen.

Willamette's Cindy Pemberton and Julie Stamper may give the Ducks some trouble in the backstroke and breaststroke, according to Van Rossen.

"Pemberton qualified for the small college nationals in the 50-meter backstroke last year," says Van Rossen, and Stamper is a small college All-American in the 50- and 100-meter breaststroke.

Van Rossen does have some concern about the team's strength in the freestyle events. "I really need 50- and 100-meter freestylers," she says, "I'm really missing Michelle Menkens right now. However Kelly Peyton has done a good job for us."

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