

Facing a degree of obscurity

Diving team scores big despite bigger lack of campus exposure

So far, no news of the success or failure of the Oregon women's diving team has caused anyone any anguish.

And it's doubtful that the names Debbie Sill, Cindy Light and Laura McNaught will ever rival the popularity of Reggie Ogburn, Vince Goldsmith and Mike Clark.

The lack of publicity certainly isn't due to lack of success, though. The team has had plenty of that.

Senior Sill, junior Light and sophomore McNaught form the nucleus of a group which includes two other sophomores, Staci Voorhees and Colleen Meagher. Despite the loss of Voorhees to a back injury, the divers are expected to dominate at the regionals Feb. 26-28 in Pullman, continuing Oregon's Northwest domination of the sport.

"I see Sill, Light and McNaught coming in first, second and third on both the one- and three-meter boards," says women's swimming coach Virginia Van Rossen.

Should the women score well at sectionals, they will get a chance at the nationals, March 17-21 at the University of South Carolina. So the lack of campus exposure can't be blamed on poor performance, either.

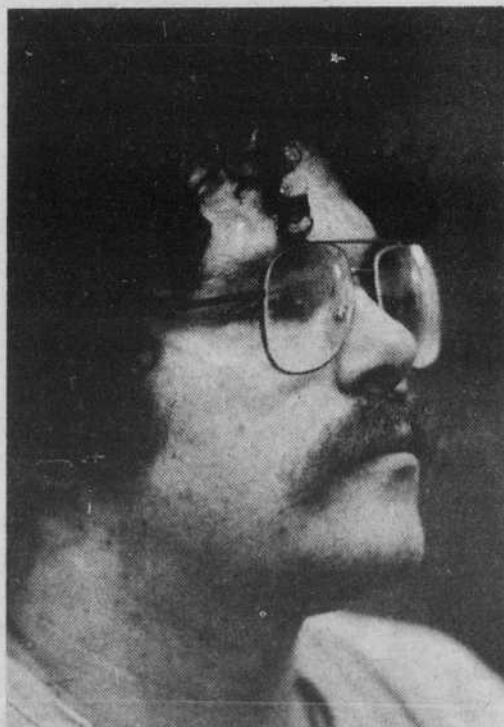
Quentin Hogan, Oregon's diving coach, says all three women have a good chance to qualify for the national finals. "And they may make the top 20 when they get there."

Sill, a senior from Bellevue, Wash., is the most talented of the group, Hogan says. She competed in the nationals last year, finishing 32nd in a field of 44.

Hogan tabs sophomore McNaught as the most competitive member of the team.

"But Cindy's come the longest way to get there," he says. Light, a junior from Tigard, has been diving competitively for only three years.

"Being a diver involves 80 percent talent and 80 percent motivation," says Hogan. "It takes a perfectionist to be a good diver, someone who's bothered by little things. Most of my coaching is oral. It's not really teaching, but correcting."



Light finds that her high school gymnastics training aids her diving. "The technique for somersaulting and twisting is the same, but the approach is different," she says. "Gymnastics help me in the air."

"We're just polishing our dives, working out the way we have been all year," says McNaught, a former state diving champ from South Eugene High School.

The women practice two hours daily, working on the 11 required dives for both the one- and three-meter boards.

Of the 11 dives they practice, five are compulsories — required in every competition. The dives include a front, back, reverse, inward and another front with a one-and-a-half twist.

The optional dives are made up by the divers, but must include one in a forward direction, one in a backward direction, one reverse, one inward, one twister, and one "potpourri" dive of the diver's own creation.

Each dive is scored by seven judges on a scale of one to 10, with the high and low scores thrown out. The averaged scores are then multiplied by the dive's degree of difficulty to get the net result.

Those results could add up to a visit to South Carolina and the nationals. But even if the women don't qualify, they feel it will have been a successful season.

"It's neat when you've learned something you can do well," says McNaught. "It's fun to learn something which requires concentration."

Despite the tangible success, the diving program is in trouble. Hogan is the third coach in three years, and the entire aquatics program faces the danger of elimination next year.

"You can't keep switching coaches and have continuity," Sill says. "Right now the program lacks support from all angles."

Hogan hopes to improve this situation. He plans to establish an off-season for the women, involving trampoline work and a weight program.

"The big key I'm looking for is the kids to be diving during the summer," he says. The team will probably continue working out three days a week until the end of school.

But a question still exists as to whether diving will continue to exist next year.

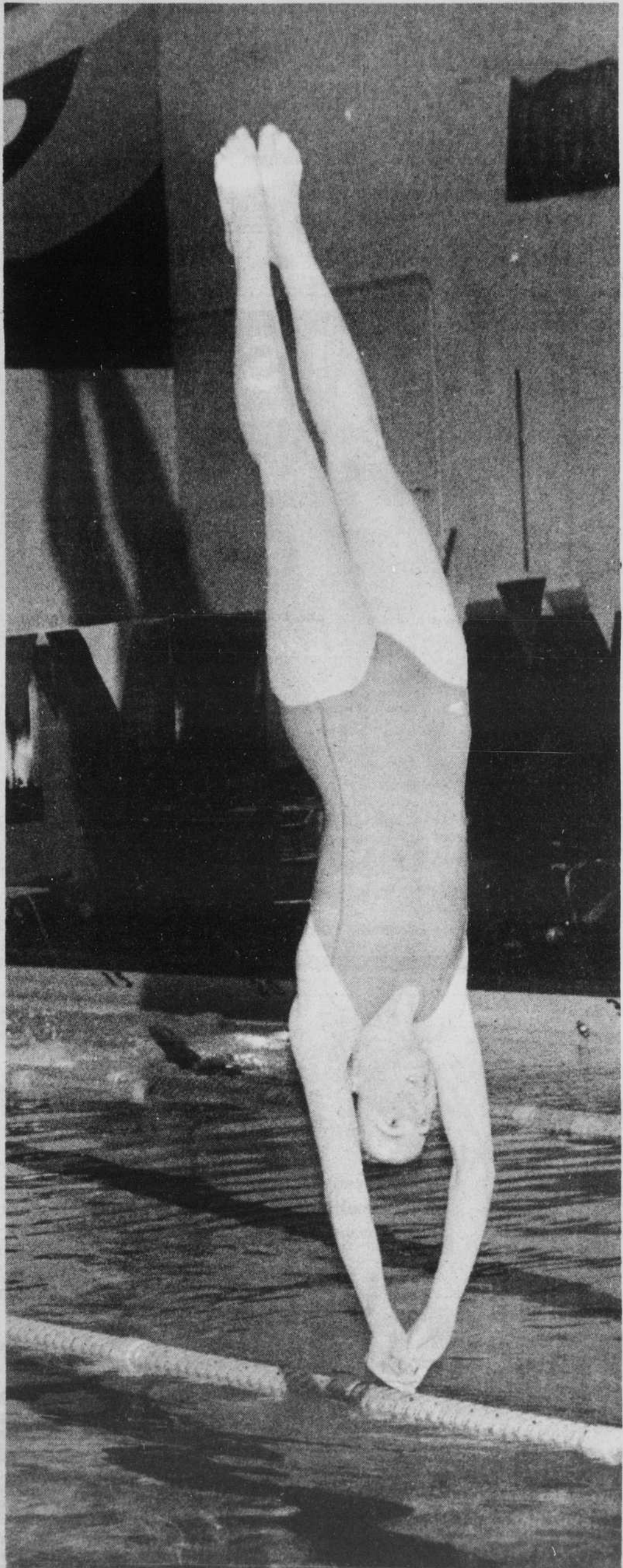
"If swimming's here, we'll be here," Hogan says. "However, cuts have to be made, and they'll probably pick on the people with the least resistance."

If there is a program next year, Hogan expects the squad to do very well. Light, McNaught and Meagher return, along with freshman Carry Hancock.

If diving continues next year, so will the divers probably continue to dominate the Northwest in obscurity, piling up points and capturing awards.

But if it doesn't, no one will know.

Story by Adam Worcester
Photos by David W. Zahn



Coach Quentin Hogan (left) watches Carry Hancock do her thing.