

Core four lead softball squad as women face ...

Problems in a building year

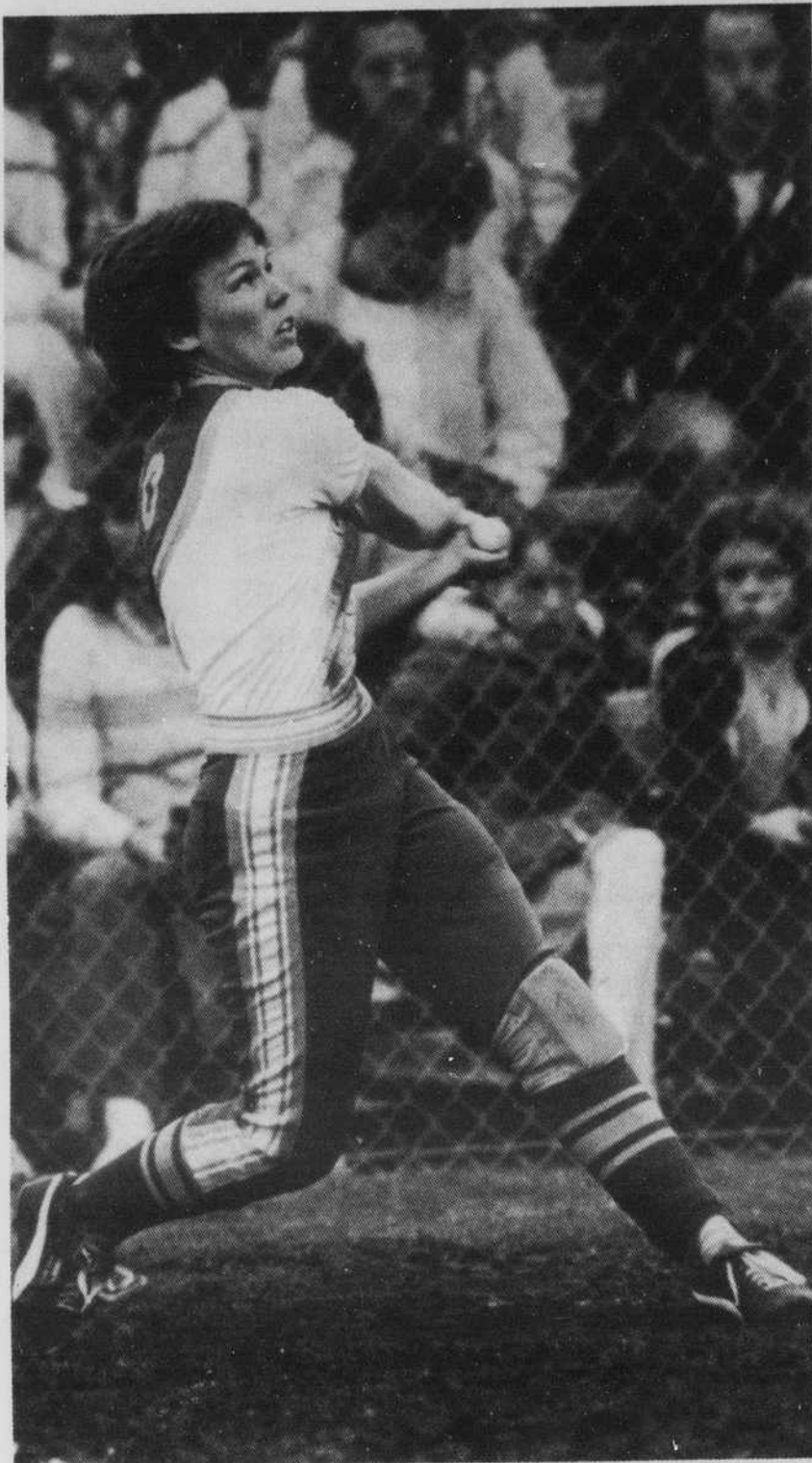


Photo courtesy of the athletic department

Youth is one thing Oregon's softball team has, says coach John Feeney.

"We have two pitchers out with bad knees, only two fulltime pitchers and lots of youth," says first year coach Feeney.

"I think it would be awfully hard for a sports writer to write a story on this team."

It might be, if not for the fact that the softball team won a spot in last year's Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women national softball tournament, finishing seventh.

But that was then and this is now.

The Ducks have an abundant amount of youth and are in trouble in terms of a pitching staff. But Feeney is not really worried.

"I guess you could call this a building year," says Feeney, a New Zealand native. "We only have five out of 16 players back for this year."

"This is definitely a young team, but this team is better than its 3-5 record."

This year's squad has a nucleus in four veteran players — Veronica Green, Vicki Hogan, team captain June Liu and Krista Parent. All four play vital roles in the Ducks' campaign plan.

"Vicki Hogan has played excellent defensively so far this year," says Feeney. "But not too hot at the plate." She is

Junior Vicki Hogan returns to the Duck softball squad this season to form one corner of the core four leading the young squad.

getting getting under the ball and popping it up, he adds.

Hogan, the Duck shortstop, is the key to the infield, he says. Being a lefthander makes it difficult to field the ball, "but she does a great job," Feeney says.

"She handles it well. Already, she has three double plays to her credit."

The Ducks opened their 1981 season with a tournament in California, playing three schools — Sacramento State, Chico State and Butte College. But Feeney pointed towards the Pony Tourney as the toughest part of the season so far.

"We finished third at the Pony and I think that is a very good finish for us," Feeney said. "There are some top teams there. Our girls did well. But errors did hurt us. We also lost some balls in the sun, other than that, though, we played very well."

The second member of the Duck core, junior Veronica Green, has led the Ducks at the plate so far this season and will be counted on throughout the season, Feeney says.

"She is a good hitter and also a good field player. We'll be counting on her bat this year."

A third person in the Duck nucleus is being counted on to head up the outfield.

"June (Liu) is very good with the younger players," he says. "And that's good because of the youth we have on this team."

The final segment of the softball four — Parent — could possibly be the key which could

unlock the door to the Ducks' season.

"We've had to call on our second baseman, Krista Parent, to become our number one pitcher," says Feeney, assessing his pitching situation. "It has really been tough for her."

"We recruited Terry Anderson from Southern Oregon to pitch, but we are still hurting for pitching. Terry has only played once so far and is lacking experience but I think she'll be a good one."

Two Duck hurlers — freshmen Stephanie Heisler and Tammy Caldwell — were expected to be the main pitching staff, but knee injuries sidelined the pair.

Other members of the Oregon squad also are hurting. Parent has injured her shoulder, and first baseman Yogi Johnson is operating on a sore knee.

But Feeney hopes to have his unit at full strength soon.

Offensively, Feeney thinks the Ducks are strong hitters and could still be a factor this season, regardless of injuries and youth.

"We are looking for a singles hitting team," he says. "We want ground balls, line drives and good bunts to move the runners along."

"We will hit-and-run a lot."

Some people on the team can hit the ball well, Feeney says, and they should be able to hit well during games.

Even though Oregon is the only Division I softball team in the state and automatically qualifies for a berth at national championships, to be held this year at the University of Oklahoma, Feeney says the Ducks may not go to the national tournament.

"It really depends on the decision of the school to spend money to send the team to nationals," he says. "I don't think we would see anything better at nationals than we saw at the Pony Tournament."

"But it's really up to the budget committee and everyone knows we are hurting for money."

Despite the problems faced by the softball team, Feeney is optimistic about the team's future.

"Next year we will have almost everyone back and also our two injured pitchers," he says. "We will be very tough next year."

"But even though this year is a rebuilding year, we still have things to do."

By Steve Turcotte

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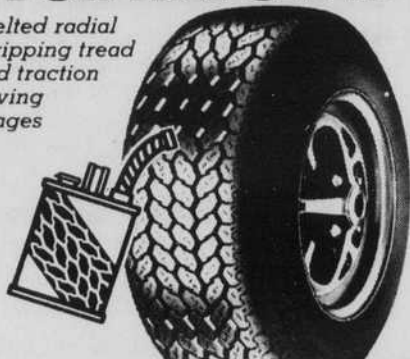
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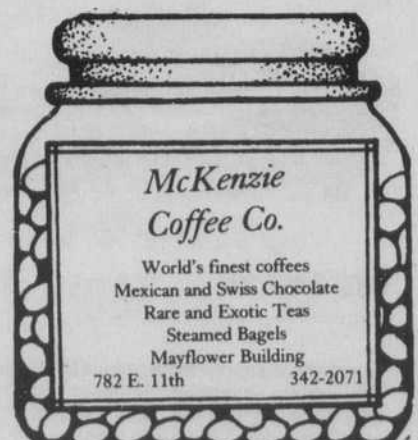
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