

Ducks enter 'toughest' tourney of year

By MIKE RIPLINGER
Of the Emerald

The Oregon volleyball team heads for the UCLA Invitational this weekend, the toughest tournament of the year this side of the national championships.

"Without a doubt, this is the most prestigious tournament of the year," says Oregon coach Chris Voelz, whose team will be making its first appearance ever at the tourney. "Everyone wants to play, and it's an honor to be

UCLA Invitational features nation's best squads

The Ducks will be taking a 14-22-2 record to California to face the top teams in the nation. There will be 24 teams involved, with teams divided into pools of six each. Round-robin competition will determine each pool winner, who will then advance into the championship round. Oregon faces stiff competition in their pool, with

host UCLA ranked 2nd in the nation leading the way. It doesn't get much easier with 4th ranked San Luis Obispo, 9th ranked Stanford, California State-Fullerton and the University of Kentucky rounding out the field.

Voelz is realistic about her team's chances against what some feel is even a more difficult tournament than nationals.

Because of the new format that will be used to qualify for the national tournament, many top teams will be left out because of the high quality of play in their region. Many highly ranked teams in California — the undisputed hot spot for volleyball — will never make it to nationals and this could be their

last big tournament for the year.

"We're not of the depth and skill level needed to beat some of the top teams, but we feel if they aren't performing too well, we have the ability to nip them. If they are awesome though, well, it will be hard to upset them," says Voelz.

Oregon's goal, according to Voelz, will be to beat Kentucky and Cal-State Fullerton — the winner of the Oregon Invitational last weekend.

"If we can beat those two teams and play well against the others, I will consider the tournament a success," says Voelz.

"We want to continue at the same high intensity level that we've reached the last few weeks. We feel that if we do well

down in California, then we can come back to our region against teams like Washington State and Montana State, and cement what we've learned. We feel after this competition, we should really do well in our area."

Oregon has shown much improvement in the last month, but the competition in the UCLA tournament may be a bit much for them. Almost like Daniel entering the den of lions, the Ducks won't be trying to beat them all, but rather just trying to survive.

Regardless of how they do, though, Oregon is in a good-better-best situation according to Voelz.

"It's good for our program just to be invited, it'll be even better if we perform well, and it'll be best if we win a few. We really can't lose."



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"What Rosa does best is force the pace in the third quarter of the race, which is the hardest part," analyzes Heinonen of Gutierrez, who'll run the 1,500 (4:33.7), 3,000 (9:41.6) and 5,000 meters.

"She's capable of pushing herself hardest when everybody else is starting to hurt. That one attribute is any distance runner's greatest asset," adds Heinonen.

"I usually go out pretty hard and stay up with the leaders," says Gutierrez who turned down a place with Oregon State. "I have an average kick so I try to shoot for runners, passing one, then shooting for the next one in sight as my main strategy during a race."

Kathy Hayes, who like Groenendaal turned down a Stanford scholarship, won two state cross country titles at Newberg High School and is finding success at the collegiate level as well.

"She has the perfect distance runner's body," says Heinonen of the 5-5 and 105 pound athlete. "She's lean and

strong and her running style is as efficient as anybody's I've seen.

"Her strength is the final quarter," he adds. "She runs very good over the last half mile."

Hayes, like Gutierrez, will concentrate in the spring on the 1,500 (4:24.54), 3,000 (9:44.59) and 5,000 meter events, mixing in an occasional 10,000.

A big relief for Heinonen and the Oregon program this season has been the successful adjustment the freshmen have made to the college scene.

"They're having a great time and that surprises me," says Heinonen. "Most people have problems when they go away to school for the first time."

"It went really smoothly," says Groenendaal, hinting that the adjustment period for her has expired. "I'm having a lot of fun."

Now that the three freshmen are safe and sound in Oregon's running program, Heinonen sometimes finds himself peeking toward the bright future of his newcomers.

A vision of the situation next season sticks out in his mind: The inexperienced freshmen of this year will be veteran sophomores while superstars Leann Warren and Eryn Forbes will be seniors.

"If we're ever going to be a dynamite team, that's when we're going to have to do it," says Heinonen of the 1982-83

cross country and track team. "The freshmen will be the backbone of that squad."

But that's in the future. At present, the Ducks have a test to pass in sunny Palo Alto, California on Monday, Nov. 9, in the NCAA Region 8 championships.

Also competing will be Arizona State (2nd ranked), Stanford (3rd ranked), and San Diego State (8th ranked) — each scrambling to capture one of the meet's three automatic berths in the national meet.

"I'm planning on all three of them (the freshman), to run well and it's going to be vital they do," says Heinonen of the trio's first pressure test. "I'm not worried though. They're all big meet runners and they perform best when it's most important."

"I'm a little bit nervous," says Hayes. "But I just want to feel like I've given it everything."

"I haven't thought about it much," adds Gutierrez. "We're in a tough league and there's some pressure for everybody on the team, but I just want to run really well and make it to nationals as a team."

As for the individual battle, Oregon's Warren is among the top contenders. "She looks great, and could win it all," says Heinonen of the junior who has defeated some outstanding runners in her only two cross country races this fall.

Other favorites include Stanford's Ceci Hoppe, a freshman, and Arizona's Joan Hansen who is undefeated this season.

As for the rest of the team says Heinonen, "Eryn has a nagging foot injury, but everyone else is healthy. We look ready for our best performance of the season."

And if Oregon's three "special" freshman continue to do things tomorrow like they've done so far this season, the Duck's will very likely pass their test.

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