



Leann Warren will spearhead an Oregon squad that is looking for its first national title.

The women are shooting for a NCAA national title . . .

By Debbie Howlett
Of the Emerald

Tom Heinonen's office is filled with pictures and magazine covers and awards. The memorabilia pertains to the University's women's cross country squad with few exceptions. A framed portrait of Leann Warren, one arm cradling a bouquet of yellow roses, the other waving to an admiring crowd. A running magazine cover fetes a past team, led by Molly Morton-Salazar, striding across a green, grassy knoll in the Oregon green and yellow.

The pictures and such are testament to the head coach's accomplishments, but one thing has eluded him thus far. "It" is the one thing Heinonen speaks about first, with an air of confidence. Among the awards, there is no national championship trophy.

Lest you think this is merely pre-season hype — a lot like last year's Rose Bowl predictions from the football end — Heinonen has some statistics to reinforce his goal.

His top seven runners, including four All-Americans, are returning. The team that took the University to its sixth regional title and then went on to claim second place at last year's NCAA national meet is intact and in the coach's words, "improved" and "experienced."

"The team race this year should be among Oregon, Stanford and Virginia," Heinonen says. "We've got as good a shot as anyone and we're

setting our goal as winning nationals."

Heinonen adds that while the entire Duck team is returning and the prospects are good, Stanford and national champion, Virginia are in identical situations.

Being a national power is nothing new to the Ducks and Heinonen. As coach the past seven years, Heinonen's team has never finished lower than seventh at a national championship meet and he's guided his team to the regional title for the last six years in a row.

But, last year was, without a doubt, the best the Ducks have had. Led by Warren's second place finish at the NCAA national meet, Oregon kicked past Stanford for second place. Virginia, with five runners in the top 19, (something Heinonen, and many others only refer to as "amazing") easily outdistanced the rest of the pack.

"Amazing" as Virginia was last year, Heinonen claims that this squad can do what no other Oregon women's team, no other Northwest women's team and very few Oregon men's teams have ever done.

Claim a NCAA national title.

After an overview of the competition, Heinonen eventually gets around to speaking about the good signs he's seen from his runners; very good signs indeed.

Last spring at the NCAA track and field championships, Heinonen's distance corp "scored more points in the running events, from the 800 meter race

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. . .the men are looking for some youthful help

"I don't see us being a great power in cross country this fall," candidly predicts Oregon men's coach Bill Dellinger, the Ducks mentor who's starting his 15th season as coach.

"We're going to be a young team, but if our newcomers come along and Greg Erwin and Mike Blackmore come back healthy, we could be pretty good."

Dellinger gives no promises of a conference title, or even a NCAA berth. But he does push one point across; his 1982 squad will have three talented veterans and a stable of new and untested talent.

However, inexperienced talent takes time to develop reminds Dellinger.

"We're building for the future," he says. "Jim Hill and John Zishka along with Erwin and Blackmore will provide a good backbone for the team. But five runners score in a meet and you need two or three more for good depth."

Hill, a sophomore in cross country eligibility, is coming off an impressive spring track season and fifth place finish in the NCAA 1,500-meters.

"He's our best and has the potential for a top-ten finish at nationals," Dellinger says.

Leading the pack along with Hill will be Zishka, who becomes eligible this fall after transferring from Penn State.

"A very talented runner with good

potential," Dellinger says of Zishka. "I expect him and Hill to be the leaders in our races."

Erwin, a senior coming off a successful summer of road racing in the Northwest, was bothered last year with a cartilage problem in his knee. He declined surgery during the spring and continued running good distance races during the spring and summer.

"Greg has been a consistent runner for us the past three years and we expect good things out of him again this fall. He had a very good summer."

Both Hill and Erwin are former Pac-10, top-10 finishers and NCAA qualifiers.

Dellinger is also hopeful that senior John Brauer, sophomore Cory Randall as well as touted freshman Harold Kuphaldt and Dub Meyers can contribute to Oregon success this fall.

"As far as newcomers are concerned, John Zishka will definitely help us," Dellinger adds. "Kuphaldt was second in the junior nationals last year and Matt McGuirk could contribute."

"Cory Randall has good ability and we're looking for him to help. Also Dave Harding, Garth Morrisette and Will Kimball might surprise us."

"But we have a long way to go to catch up with teams like Washington State (the Nor-Pac champion)."

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