

# New league a step up for women's teams

By Paul Danzer  
Of the Emerald

It may not be the big-time, but moving into the newly formed Northern Pacific Athletic Conference (NorPac) is a step in the right direction for women's athletics at Oregon.

The women have set their sights on becoming a part of the Pac-10, according to Chris Voelz, women's athletic director and volleyball coach. But Voelz and other coaches at Oregon see the NorPac as the place to be today.

"I think that we're in the study stages and we will never give up that vision of being Pac-10," said Voelz. "It would be good for our track and field program, good for basketball, good for volleyball — good for everyone. But, we don't want to lose scheduling commitments for all of our sports. And we can't afford to fly our teams all over the nation, or all up and down the

west coast."

So Oregon has settled into a league with its neighbors at Oregon State, Washington and Washington State from the Northwest, and Fresno State, Pacific, San Francisco, California, San Jose State and Santa Clara from northern California.

The NorPac offers competition in nine NCAA Division I sports: basketball, cross country, field hockey, gymnastics, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, and volleyball.

On the financial side of the ledger, participating in the NorPac allows Oregon's women's teams to participate at a competitive level without having to spend bundles of money on high travel costs. Also, it means they don't have to compete on the field or court with teams that are in another league financially.

Voelz said she has heard

through the grapevine that Oregon would have been 10th in funding in the conference, had the Pac-10 schools been able to get together and form a woman's league.

The formation of the NorPac on July 1 of this year ended a search by Oregon for a place to play. That search began when the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (IAIW) became insignificant in the shadow of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which offered a full

with football.

Finally, the Northwest schools linked up with the Northern California Athletic Conference, which was losing Stanford. "All of the Northwest schools were very important in terms of approaching the NorCal," said NorPac executive director Deanna Sciaraffa.

"It's interesting, in less than a year the NorCal grew into a team conference. What they (the athletic directors) accomplished is really impressive," said Sciaraffa of the quick for-

make one trip to California.

"It isn't totally fair," Heiny said of the point system. "Obviously they need some kind of system. I would prefer a double round-robin."

But Heiny is looking forward to competing in the NorPac. One advantage he cited is having a set schedule of top-quality teams. "Playing California teams is also attractive, especially for our location. The players would rather travel to California than to Montana and Idaho," he said.

"It costs me less, really, to fly to the Bay Area than it does to fly to Montana," said Voelz. But one thing that does cost more is the dues Oregon must pay as a member of the conference.

Those dues are around \$6,000 a year as opposed to several hundred before, according to Voelz. But she and other coaches see it as money well spent. In addition to having a full-time administrator, something they never had in Region 9, the NorPac also employs a full-time information director.

"What has already helped is having an information director," said Tom Heinenon, Oregon's women's cross country and track coach. "They give a lot of awards," he said referring to the naming of "Athlete of the Week" and similar awards. "That kind of publicity is doing us all a favor."

By giving a lot of awards, and publicizing athletes, Heinenon said the conference will help legitimize his program.

"As well as we've done, I've never had an 'athlete of the month' or 'athlete of the year'. And I've never been coach of the year, and in the last four years we've won everything there is to win in the NCWSA (Northwest College Womens Sports Association).

"We're going to look better," "I'm comfortable right now," Voelz said of Oregon's position as a member of the NorPac. "If I found out it wasn't serving us to any level, I would push hard for an alternative. And the only alternative I see is Pac-10. But I

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## NORPAC

Northern Pacific Athletic Conference

slate of women's championships for the first time last year.

Oregon had been a member of the IAIW Region 9, which included teams from Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana, but suddenly found itself out in the cold when the region "shattered" last year.

When the dust settled, a Mountain West conference was formed, which included mostly Division II schools such as Portland State and Montana. Oregon and the other three Pac-10 Northwest schools decided that the Mountain West didn't offer the caliber of competition they were looking for. The next step was to look toward the Pac-10.

"As the Pac-10 athletic directors got together, we couldn't get together," said Voelz. The main problem was that the southern Pac-10 schools saw a women's Pac-10 as offering less opportunity for their athletes than the current Southern Conference. Not surprisingly, the hangups were the added cost of traveling to the northern schools, and the prospect of having an unbalanced schedule, such as the men have

of the new league.

"We knew it would be a competitive conference in basketball and volleyball," said Voelz, who has had to face three of the nation's top 20 teams in conference competition. The third national-level sport is track, where Oregon appears to be way out in front.

One of the major advantages of being in a conference is that the league champions automatically qualify for the NCAA championships. Oregon will host two of the conference championships this year: the basketball tournament and the track and field championships.

The top four teams based on a point system will qualify for the basketball and volleyball tournaments. The point system awards teams two points for league wins and one point for non-conference wins, and no points for a loss.

Oregon's women's basketball coach Elwin Heiny doesn't like the unbalanced schedule which forces the use of a point system, but he thinks it will work to his team's advantage this year, because Oregon will host four of the California teams and only

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