



Photo by Steve Crowell

Things are looking up for three of Oregon's freshman volleyball players, (l to r) Susan Payne, Andrea Kent and Heidi Eakin. Each has started for the Ducks at one time or another.

Striding into the limelight

Freshman net trio hears starting call

By Brent Paz
Of the Emerald

Because of injuries, Oregon's volleyball team has resembled a kiddie corps this season.

Freshmen have been thrown into the limelight — not by choice, but by necessity. Senior Cathy Hill, junior Lisa Gemoya and sophomores Connie Riel and Shaunna Koenig have fallen prey to injuries, with Riel and Koenig out for the season.

Without some of her top players, Oregon coach Chris Voelz has started three freshmen at one time or another. A situation like that often spells doom for volleyball squads.

Not for the Ducks. Heidi Eakin, Andrea Kent and Susan Payne are the rookies that have kept the Ducks swimming instead of sinking.

Oregon has survived and flourished with freshmen. The Ducks are 22-15 on the season, 5-2 in the NorPac conference, and in prime contention to nab a spot in the league tournament Nov. 18-19.

"Every single one of our freshmen have kept learning and kept getting better during the season," Voelz says. "They are less intimidated... although they still do things that are transition-like."

Transition from high school to college ball can be rough. These three made the switch quickly and under fire.

"I figured I would probably go in on the looser games or games we got ahead more," Eakin says. "Then when we started out with fourteen (players)..."

And then thirteen, twelve and eleven, until Oregon had nobody else to go with except inexperienced and untested first-year players.

Eakin, from LaGrande, had a modest goal at the beginning of the season — making the traveling squad. Eakin has surpassed that objective and more. A starter most of the year, she is third on the team in kills with 172 and plays an integral part in the Ducks' front-line play.

Voelz feels Eakin has fit well into Oregon's program despite the pressure of playing against older and more experienced players.

"She is very coachable and very smart," Voelz says. "We tell her where to put the ball, and she puts the ball there. She is pretty tough-minded."

Kent has been another key participant for the Ducks. The Colorado Springs, Colo., native has come off the bench to fill a big injury gap.

"At first I was making mistakes right and left every time I touched the ball," Kent says. "I wanted to perform well, but I was trying too hard. Now it has gotten better, but I still make mistakes."

The last of the trio to gain valuable playing time and assume a starting position at times is Payne, a walk-on from Pacific Palisades, Calif.

"On the court, you don't realize you are a freshman," Payne says. "She (Voelz) said I wouldn't be playing that much because I was behind in pre-season workouts."

But Payne started against San Francisco and helped the Ducks defeat the Dons.

Voelz didn't plan on having any of the three on the team except Eakin when she went recruiting last year.

"Heidi is the only one I recruited in terms of scholarship," Voelz says. "Susan, Andrea, Monica (Beemer) and Wendy (Hammer) are all walk-ons. I looked at them as depth players, but all the freshman have been able to contribute."

Voelz says none of her rookie players are outstanding physical talents.

"None of them are awesome physically. They aren't coming in like a Sue Harbour when she was a freshman."

Still, the Oregon coach says their abilities will pay dividends for the Ducks in the future.

"It can't but help them," Voelz says. "They will have well-defined goals on what to work on in the off-season to contribute next year."

Netters meet Cal in 'match of the year'

The fourth and final spot in the NorPac Conference will be at stake when Oregon's volleyball team visits 16th-ranked University of California Friday night in Berkeley, Calif.

The Ducks, who received honorable mention in last week's top 20 poll, face 13th-ranked San Jose State University in San Jose, Calif., Saturday, their last conference outing of the season.

But the big game for Oregon is

its 7:30 p.m. date with Cal Friday. The Ducks, 22-15 and 5-2, are tied with the Bears for fourth in the league race. The winner takes the inside lane to the league tourna-

ment Nov. 18-19.

"It is the match of the year," says Oregon coach Chris Voelz of the test against Cal. "We watched

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