

Netters labeled heavy underdog against Pacific

By Brent Paz
Of the Emerald

Odds makers say Oregon will not beat University of Pacific, the second-ranked team in the nation, tonight in the opening round of the NorPac Conference volleyball playoffs in Stockton, Calif.

But then, odds makers didn't think Oregon had a prayer against Portland State University, San Jose State University or Texas — three top-ranked teams that fell to the Ducks this season. Oregon, 24-167, will be looking to add Pacific to that list tonight.

The winner advances to the tournament final Saturday night while the loser plays for third place.

"We are going for the major upset of the year," says Oregon coach Chris Voelz.

Oregon faces a 30-2 Pacific squad that dismantled it earlier in the year. Pacific swept the Ducks in three games, 15-8, 15-8, 15-3 at McArthur Court.

This time, says Voelz, "we will have to play a cat and mouse offense. We will try to put them (shots) where they (the Tigers) are not."

Pacific boasts no less than six All-American candidates. The Tiger attack centers around All-American setter Jan Saunders. Saunders usually feeds outside hitters Robin Burns and Eileen Dempster. Julie Maginot and Lisa Franco also will pose big problems for the Ducks.

"There is not anybody who is that vulnerable," Voelz says of Pacific's starters. "We just hope that they will stay in low enough gear, long enough, so we can sneak up on them."

Oregon counters the Pacific barrage with the trio of Sue Harbour, Lisa Gemoya and Cathy Hill. Harbour finished as the NorPac leader in kills (185) and kills averaged per game (20.6); she comes off a big game against PSU (31 kills). Gemoya sets up most of Harbour's kills, and co-captain Hill is second on the team with 243 kills. All three will have to be at their best if Oregon is to defeat Pacific.

"We are definitely the underdogs," says Hill, but the senior adds that "nobody is unbeatable."

"I think we are definitely capable of taking a couple games off of them, if not winning," says Harbour. "There isn't that much of a difference between first and fourth place."

That remains to be seen, but Pacific has a ghost hanging over its head. The Tigers lost to an unheralded University of California team in last year's tournament final.

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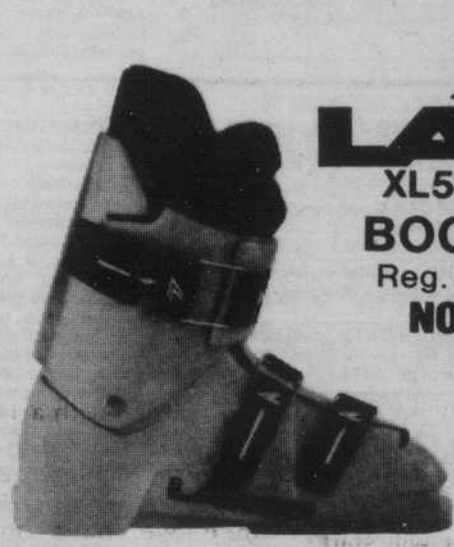
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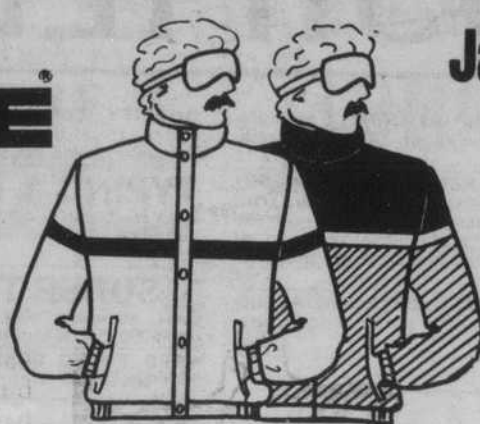
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