

Freshman duo gives Oregon pitching promise

By Brent Paz
Of the Emerald

When Oregon softball coach P.J. Harlin went recruiting last year, she wanted a top-notch pitcher and a catcher who could give her pitching corps some direction.

She didn't have to look far. In fact, the second-year coach found pitcher Sony Schroeder and catcher Christi Long right in her own backyard at Churchill High School.

There was one minor hitch, though, with the Schroeder-Long pitching and catching combination: Schroeder had never pitched in high school.

"It was a big transition," says Schroeder of her switch from

third base to the pitching mound.

But the transition was made, and Oregon is collecting the dividends.

The Ducks are 15-25, a vast improvement from last season's 6-21 mark, and Schroeder has played a part in half of those victories. She has a 7-12 record, which is an insult to her 1.30 ERA.

You want to talk heartbreak? Schroeder pitched a three-hitter against Oregon State March 9, but lost. She gave up five hits to Chico State March 26, but lost 1-0 on an unearned run. And last Friday, she threw a three-hitter and walked none, but University of San Francisco beat the

Ducks, 1-0.

"It kind of brings you down a little bit," says Schroeder. Harlin is more blunt.

"She has gone head to head with some of the toughest teams," says Harlin, "and her record doesn't reflect the job she's done this year."

Schroeder's record does include a no-hit gem against Lewis & Clark College April 13, but Harlin insists her freshman star is more of a jewel than 7-12 can explain.

Schroeder's emergence stems partly from the other half of Harlin's recruiting effort, Long.

"I didn't know what to expect," says Schroeder, and she talks about someone who did — Long. "She is the brains of the whole thing," says Schroeder.

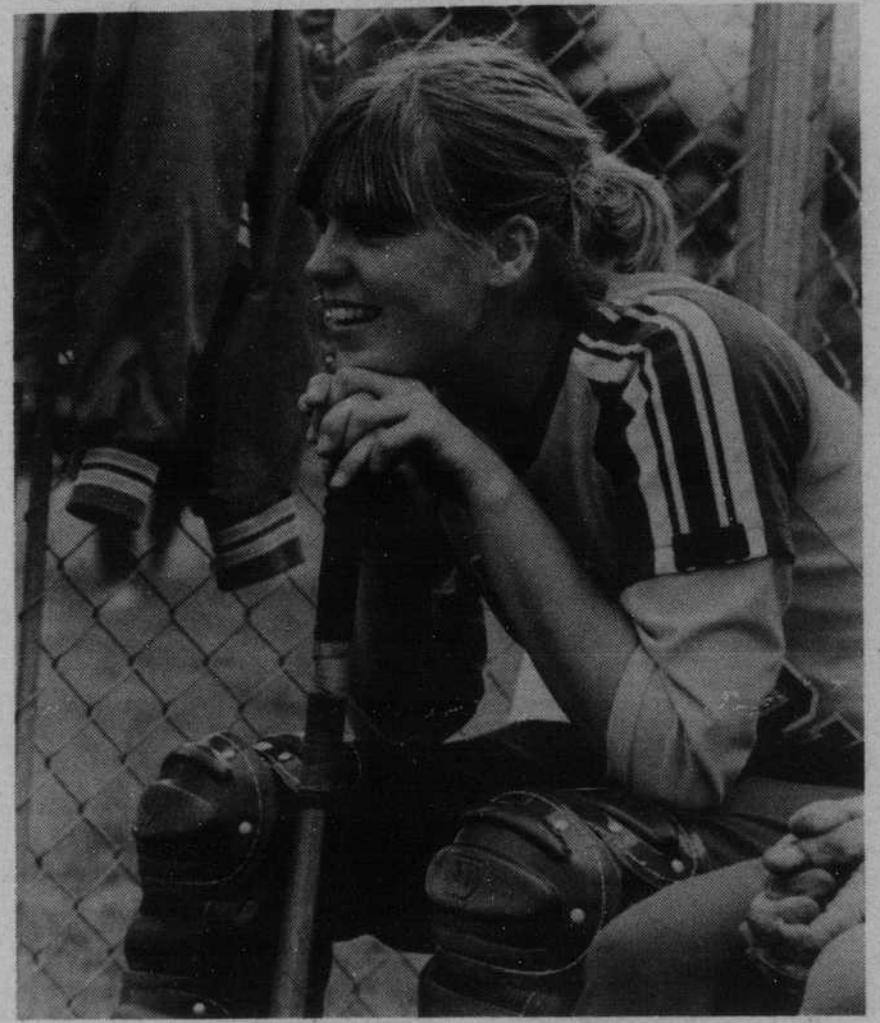
Long, Schroeder's teammate at Churchill, is hitting only .115 this year. That is a poor average even at Oregon, where Harlin's team is batting .158 as a group.

But when the talk turns to pitching, Long gets much of the credit for the Ducks' 1.19 team ERA. Harlin says her skills behind the plate and her throwing accuracy make Long one of the best catchers in the NorPac Conference.

"I don't think there is any arm as strong as hers in the league," says Harlin. "Her bat is not as active as I would like it, but I know she will put it all together."

Long's ability to work with pitchers has simplified things for Harlin.

"I don't have to worry about call selection for the pitchers," says Harlin, who lets Long run the show.



...and fellow frosh Christi Long, a teammate of Schroeder's at Churchill, is a strong arm behind the plate.



Photos by Kirk Hirota

Ex-Churchill High freshman Sony Schroeder has given Oregon a dependable arm on the mound...

Oregon's catcher is most renowned for a cannon of an arm which keeps opposing baserunners flat-footed.

"Not very many people steal on me," says Long.

When they do, they start to wonder why. Fourth-ranked University of Pacific tried to steal on Long three times when the teams met last Saturday. Long threw out two of three,

and the Tigers got the idea. Harlin thinks Long is only a year away from all-star status in the NorPac.

"All she needs is time before it all comes together for her," says Harlin.

Schroeder and Long will come together today, as the Ducks travel to Portland State for a pair of games beginning at 2:30 p.m.

Sports shorts

Oregon's golf team is in 7th place after 36 holes of the Pac-10 Golf Championships at Tucson, Ariz.

Mike Hegarty and Gerry Norquist are in a tie for 10th and 19th place to lead the Ducks with a team score of 730, 18 strokes behind the tournament leader, Stanford (712).

Hegarty shot a pair of 71's for a 36 hole total of 142. He is five strokes off the pace for individual medalist honors. Norquist finished with a 70 and 75 for a 145 total. 18 holes will be

played today and tomorrow to decide the Pac-10 championship.

Oregon's Club Sports women's crew team finished second to Oregon State Saturday in Pasco, Wash. The Ducks won the Lightweight-8 race and took seconds in Varsity-8 and Novice-8. OSU, a varsity program, had nine points to Oregon's eight. Washington State was third with five points.

Oregon's Club Sports men's lacrosse team won the Pacific Northwest Lacrosse Association B Division trophy at Delta Park in Portland Saturday. The Ducks beat University of Washington 9-5, Whitworth 7-2, and Western Washington, 8-6, to win the title and improve to 5-1 in league.

The Eugene Sports Program needs volunteer baseball coaches. Those who can give 6-10 hours of their time a week should call 683-2373.

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