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Krieger & Co. return to the links — and the road



Believe it or not, the spring golf season has arrived. Despite the adverse elements and the fact that it is still (technically) "winter," the University golf squad, under second-year coach Scott Krieger, is hard at work preparing for its upcoming slate of tournaments. Rain or shine, the Ducks practice three days a week, slogging their way from driving range to putting green.

Due to Oregon's inclement weather, it might seem fortunate that many of the Ducks' tournaments will be taking place in California. The Rancho Murieta Invitational in Sacramento on March 7-8 will be the team's first trip outside of Oregon this spring season.

However, many of their tournaments, and all of their "important" ones, take place on the road. This could cause problems for individual golfers, and for the program as a whole.

"You're not going to get many good teams to come up here and play. Most of the major tournaments are down in California," explains Krieger, who at 26 is the youngest head coach in any of the University's 16 sports. "The traveling hurts our budget more than it does other schools."

"We have to be a lot more selective on the tournaments we go to. But where it hurts us the most is preparing for the type of environment we're going to be playing in," Krieger says. "It's hard to prepare in Eugene for the environment you're going to be playing in in Fresno, or L.A., or Phoenix."

The rigors of the road are a well-known component in most sports. Golf is no exception. Case in point: Intercollegiate golf is divided into fall and spring seasons. The Ducks were on the road for all four 1984 fall tournaments — and in Krieger's mind, did not do particularly well, due to so much road time and lack of familiarity with the courses.

"We played poorly," Krieger says. "We were inconsistent."

Of the four fall tournaments, the Ducks' highest finish was a second place (out of seven teams) in the Oregon State University Fall Invitational. In the remaining three tournaments, the Ducks placed fifth (out of 16), 15th (out of 18) and 12th (out of 15).

Golf is a temperamental game by nature. Tournaments are rarely dominated by the same players from week to week. As Krieger points out, the disadvantages of having to play on an unfamiliar course can be negated by a player's mental preparation and physical abilities. These factors are just as important, perhaps more so, than the golfer's knowledge of course conditions and layout, Krieger says.

That the University squad did not do well during the fall does not mean such will be the case this spring, at home or on the road. Krieger is emphatically optimistic and, so far, the results bear him out.

Over the weekend of February 3-4, the Ducks hosted OSU for what Krieger termed a "preparatory" meet. The results were a solid 28-stroke victory for the University golf squad. Oregon's Rob Huff won the individual title.

The Ducks have only one more home meet, the Pacific Northwest Invitational February 25-26. They will be on the road for their remaining eight tournaments, leading up to the Pac-10 Championships April 29-May 1 in Walla Walla, Wash. The NCAA Championship follows, in Winter Haven, Fla. May 22-25.

With that kind of a schedule, the Ducks have to be able to perform well on the road if they are to have a successful year.

The University golf team is a young one. Of Krieger's top five players, only one, John DeLong, is a senior. The remainder of the squad consists of a

junior, two sophomores and a freshman.

"We're definitely a team of the future," Krieger says.

At this point, the Ducks' top man looks to be junior George Daves. Daves is coming off a strong fall season in which he placed in the top 10 in three of the Ducks' four tournaments. Daves also won the individual title at the Oregon State Fall Invitational.

Krieger holds Daves in high regard. "I think he has a good shot at making one of the top three teams in the All-American this year," the coach says. "He's our most consistent player. He just knows how to score when he's on the golf course. I really believe that he'll make it to the NCAA's even if the team doesn't. He's that good of a player."

A tight battle is emerging for the team's number two spot, between Oregon Amateur Champion Delong, and Huff, a sophomore.

"Rob (Huff) is probably our most improved player," Krieger says. "He didn't play much last year, but he showed drastic improvement over the summer."

Croy Cochran is the Ducks' number four man. Only a freshman, Cochran is representative of the abundant youth that Krieger feels the team is blessed with.

"Croy's a great young player. He's going to help us out a lot as time goes on," Krieger says.

Filling the team's fifth spot is third year sophomore Tony Joynor.

"He's another one of the guys that's going to be around for two or three more years," says Krieger.

The Ducks will be taking along a sixth man on many of their road trips. Sophomore Tam Bronkey, senior Gerry Norquist, and freshman Gregg Patterson are the top contenders for that last open spot.

With such a young squad, Krieger realizes that the team needs to take things one step at a time.

"We like to think we can become a nationally-ranked team again. We were in the middle 70's. I think we'll get back to that," Krieger predicts. "This year, realistically, is kind of a rebuilding year for us. We're really trying to get ourselves ready for next year, because we're going to be very good."

By no means, though, does Krieger rule out the possibility that the Ducks could qualify and do well as a team at this year's NCAA championships.

"I'd like to see us make it as a team," Krieger says. "Five or six will make it out of our district. I think

we're running ninth right now, so we have a long way to go. But 75 percent of the schedule is still left."

Although golf is considered a "minor sport" at the University, its budget has almost doubled in the past year. Because it generates all of its own money, Krieger explains, the golf program is more independent than some of the other minor sports. Krieger says he'd like to show his thanks to the squad's many local supporters by striving to re-establish the Ducks as a Northwest and national power.

"We were (a Northwest power) for years. Oregon State didn't beat us for over a decade. Then last year they really improved and so did the University of Washington," says Krieger. "At this moment the three of us are fairly equal. I think we're going to improve a lot within the next year and hopefully move out ahead of them."

Story by Tim Davis



Scott Krieger



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