

Cross country runners compete in Pac-10's

By Darren Foss
Of the Emerald

The Oregon men's and women's cross country teams spent the weekend in Palo Alto, Calif., preparing for today's Pacific-10 championship race on the Stanford University Golf Course.

The Duck women will be trying to make the Pac-10 history books and win the first-ever women's Pac-10 cross country title.

But it won't be easy for the Ducks, who appear to have the youngest lineup there.

Of the seven runners making the trip, only Birgit Petersen is a senior. Junior Penny Graves, the team's top runner, has only one year of cross country experience behind her at any level. Two other juniors, Lisa Johnson and Deanna Schiedler have made the trip, but the other three are underclassmen.

Sophomore Susan Long, who has never competed in a cross country championship meet of any kind, will be getting much needed experience, and freshmen Karen Rayle and Liz

Wilson have made the squad. But Wilson is not just another freshman; she has worked her way up to become the team's number two runner.

Despite their youth, the Ducks are ranked 16th in the nation and should finish in the upper bracket of the Pac-10.

"To the other teams, we are considered the dark horse or the totally unknown factor," said Coach Tom Heinonen. "We're really not sure what we're capable of doing, because we haven't had any competition yet like we usually do."

According to Heinonen, the Ducks may be able to fight for the win, but the team will have to get by two big obstacles (Stanford University and UCLA).

"Stanford is the highest ranked team nationally in our conference, and they have the advantage of running on their home course. But they have only five runners; after that it's two joggers. They'll have to be completely healthy to win," Heinonen said.

Heinonen also added that

UCLA has a deep team, much like the Ducks. They might be able to add Polly Plumber, who is back from abdominal surgery this past summer, to their roster. If completely healthy, Plumber should be the favorite for the individual title.

Other than Plumber, Heinonen thinks Graves has a pretty good chance at winning the individual title.

"Penny has twice as much experience as she did last year at this point and is clearly running better than last fall. I would think that there will be five or six runners capable of winning. Penny is certainly one of them."

The Oregon men's team enters the Pac-10 championship race ready for another showdown for the title with host Stanford.

Last year, Stanford edged the Ducks by 15 points for the team title. But with a veteran team, the Ducks look to have a good chance of bringing the championship trophy back to Oregon.

Like Heinonen, men's coach

Bill Dellinger, whose team has competed in only two meets, feels the Pac-10 competition is what the team needs after competing mainly against small local colleges.

"I look at the Pac-10 as helping us with our regional competition," Dellinger said. "We're at the stage where we do need the competition."

Although the team has not been tested so far this season, the polls have confidence in the Ducks and rank the Oregon men seventh in the nation.

The Ducks' seven-man lineup contains four fifth-year seniors — Will Kimball, Matt McGuirk, Dub Myers, and Shemi Sabag — along with two sophomores (Chad Bennion, Charleton Jones), and freshman sensation Brad Hudson.

Sabag, a native of Israel, has been the Ducks' number one runner all season and has the best shot on the squad to win the individual title.

But the Ducks have even more experience in McGuirk and Myers. McGuirk is used to running in big meets, and this will

be his fourth-straight time as a Duck in the lineup for a major cross country meet. He is second on the team in NCAA meet experience, behind Kuphaldt.

Seniors aside, it should be interesting to see how Hudson does at the Pac-10's. He has already surpassed all of Dellinger's expectations and has made his presence felt.

"I thought he would make our team," Dellinger said. "But he's run better than I thought he would. He's a real gutsy, tough runner. He's likely to go out at a fast pace and push it all the way."

In the team's two races, Hudson finished fourth for the Ducks at the Tokatee Invitational and ran at a furious pace to finish second for the Ducks at the Portland Open. Hudson now enters his first Pac-10 championship race as the team's number two runner.

Like the Oregon women, the Ducks will have to hold off UCLA and WSU, as well as Stanford, to come home triumphant.

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