

Oregon track concludes busy spring break schedule

By Aaron Knox
Of the Emerald

The Oregon men's track team overcame field event obstacles by pouring it on in the middle distances to post a 95-66 dual-meet victory over host Fresno State on Saturday.

The Ducks also overwhelmed Boise State 116-39 in a three-way meet. It was the first scored competition of the year for the Ducks, who are seeking to defend their Pac-10 championship and improve on last year's seventh-place NCAA finish.

The wins culminated a hectic spring break schedule for Coach Bill Dellinger's squad, which began March 21 at Hayward Field with the Oregon Preview. The schedule included a non-scoring meet with Sacramento State on March 25 and ended with the victories in Fresno on Saturday. Dellinger had no regrets about the demanding pace, however.

"Sacramento State was really just a workout," he said. "We were at a stage where we needed to compete."

Oregon handed the Bulldogs only their fourth home loss in the last 10 years and extended its own winning streak to nine consecutive meets over parts of the last three years. Oregon has not dropped a regular season dual meet since California edged the Ducks 89-74 in 1985.

J.J. Birden, a junior who traded in football cleats for track spikes this spring, established himself as a consistent triple threat, winning the long jump with a personal record of 25-2, the 110-meter high hurdles with a hand-timed PR of 14.3, and running a leg on the Ducks' victorious 400-meter relay team.

In Oregon's three meets to date, Birden has tallied first-place finishes eight times, including relay results.

Another Duck who had been providing consistency in two events was sophomore Jose deSouza. DeSouza, the South American record holder in the discus, is in his first year of competition for the Ducks. He swept both the discus and shot put events at the Oregon Preview and at Sacramento State and was favored to win the discus against FSU. There he tossed a PR of 60-8 to place third in the shot, but failed to get of a legal throw in his specialty event.

Fresno State also swept the high jump, placed 1-2 in the pole vault and won the javelin, while redshirt freshman Latin Berry, Oregon's top triple jumper, scratched from the triple and long jumps.

The unexpected shortage of field-event scoring set the stage for Dellinger's middle-distance contingent to clinch the win, and they seized the opportunity with a vengeance.

The Ducks swept all scoring positions in the steeplechase, 1,500 and 5,000 meter, and placed 1-2 in the 800 to easily outdistance the Bulldogs.

Dan Nelson led a parade of Ducks to the tape in the steeple, as his time of 8:46.70 placed him well ahead of teammates Chad Bennion and Will Kimball. Harold Kupholdt added a first place in the 1,500 to his second-place finish in the 800, edging junior transfer Mark Dunbar by just .04 to win in 3:46.31 as Mark Bailey ran third.

Dave Anderson won the 800 with a time of 1:49.28. The Ducks added icing to the cake by sweeping the 5,000 in the final event of the day, with Matt McGuirk (14:21.77) nipping Carleton Jones by just over one second, followed by senior Shemi Sabag.

Oregon prepared for their dual-meet win by traveling to California early to

participate in a non-scoring meet with Sacramento State on March 25.

Birden was again the individual star, winning the long jump and high hurdles, and running the first leg on Oregon's winning 400-meter relay team. Birden crossed the line in the hurdles in 14:33, snapping a 2-year-old PR in the event and narrowly edging fellow football crossover Rod Green, who was timed at 14:34.

It was sophomore high jumper Andy Young, however, who shocked the field. He cleared 7-0 to eclipse his PR of 6-11 and soared more than 7 inches higher than he had just four days earlier in the Oregon Preview.

Dellinger also got top production from his weight men, with transfer Eric Finch (212-5) and sophomore Eric Pfeiffer (203-3) adding about 3 feet each to their initial hammer throw marks, and deSouza claiming victories in the shot and the discus.

The Sacramento State meet was pared to just 13 events, with no pole vault or triple-jump competition and no running event longer than 1,500 meters. Several Duck distance men dropped to the 800, with 1,500 specialist Dunbar winning the event in a PR clocking of 1:51.4.

Three Oregon men took advantage of unseasonably mild weather and other factors to qualify for the NCAA championships in June during the Oregon Preview, which introduced the 1987 version of the Ducks to 3,367 Hayward Field loyalists on March 21.

Hammer throwers Finch and Pfeiffer proved quick studies of Oregon assistant coach Stewart Togher, surpassing the NCAA standard despite finishing in fifth

and eighth places, respectively.

The event was dominated by former University and NCAA champion thrower Ken Flax. The collegiate record holder won with a toss off 247-6, easily defeating a field which included five of America's top 10 hammer men.

Senior Rick Bergesen was the third Duck to guarantee himself a trip to Baton Rouge, La., where this year's NCAA meet will be held. Bergesen's qualification at 10,000 meters marked the third year in four that he has earned NCAA admission, but the first at that distance.

The 10,000 is not run during dual meets, so Bergesen, who normally competes at 1,500 or 5,000, capitalized on the opportunity that clear skies and temperatures near 60 degrees provided, slipping under the NCAA requirement by less than two seconds with a time of 29:15.78. Bergesen is not expected to compete at that distance if he qualifies at 1,500 or 5,000.

Nagging injuries continue to concern Dellinger as his team prepares to defend its Pac-10 title. Pole vaulters Tim Canfield (hamstring) and Jay Davis (wrist) have yet to taste competition this season after finishing 1-2 in last year's Pac-10 meet.

Davis made a token appearance at the Oregon Preview, failing both his attempts to clear 18-9. Horizontal jumper Berry has been hampered by leg injuries and did not compete against Fresno State. Brazilian hurdler Pedro Chiamulera, whose PR's in the highs and intermediates rank first on this year's squad, has a severe hamstring pull and is not expected to contribute until mid-season.

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