

Duck men to concentrate on individual marks Saturday

By Aaron Knox
Of the Emerald

Despite unparalleled success this season, Oregon's commitment to dual-meet excellence has had its downside.

Several Duck runners have had to sacrifice personal goals in the interest of the team. The result has been that the best athletes have found themselves running two or more events to

maximize team scoring.

That will change beginning tomorrow.

For the first time this season, the emphasis will be on individual performance when the Oregon men's track team hosts the Oregon Invitational on Saturday at Hayward Field.

Among those who have sublimated themselves for the team, coach Bill Dellinger's

distance corps has suffered the most. The Ducks have produced NCAA champions at 800 or 1,500 meters four times since 1982, but no one has qualified at either distance to date.

Transfers Mark Dunbar (1,500) and Dave Anderton (800) could change that on Saturday, according to Dellinger. "These guys have been making a team effort, but now

it's time to look for some individual effort," he said.

Dellinger was optimistic about potential qualifiers in every distance event coming into Saturday's action. Fifth-year senior Harold Kuphaldt will run in his first 5,000 meter race this season, after qualifying for the NCAA's at that distance a year ago. Shemi Sabag and Chad Bennion, both cross country

stalwarts who have yet to make a serious impact on the track, will run at 10,000 meters. Sabag was the Pacific 10 Conference runner-up at that distance last season.

The Ducks got some good news when it was learned that J.J. Birden, who was injured during the high hurdles last week, would miss no action because of the spill. The junior hyperextended his left knee after colliding with California's Rod Jett going over the final hurdle, but emerged relatively intact, said assistant coach John Gillespie. "Fortunately he is a football player, so he is used to taking falls like that. A normal hurdler could have been out for weeks," he said.

Gillespie indicated that Birden would join Pedro Chimulera and Pat Lanning in the intermediate hurdles on Saturday, to minimize to impact on his knee. It will be the first time this season that Birden has attempted the 400-meter hurdle event. "We had promised to let him run one a little later this year, but right now is really the ideal time for it," said Gillespie.

This week's Invitational has not attracted as much attention as either the Twilight meet or the Prefontaine Classic, but that is because appearances can be deceptive, according to Gillespie. The perception has largely been that the Invitational draws only local athletes and Ducks trying to qualify for the NCAA championships in June.

"To talk about this as 'local' talent is a misnomer," said Gillespie. "Just because they all train here doesn't necessarily mean they are small potatoes. You are talking about some of the finest athletes in the world," he said.

Oregon's NCAA hopefuls will benefit from the presence of several world-class athletes to spur them on, thanks to Brazilian coach Luiz de Olivera.

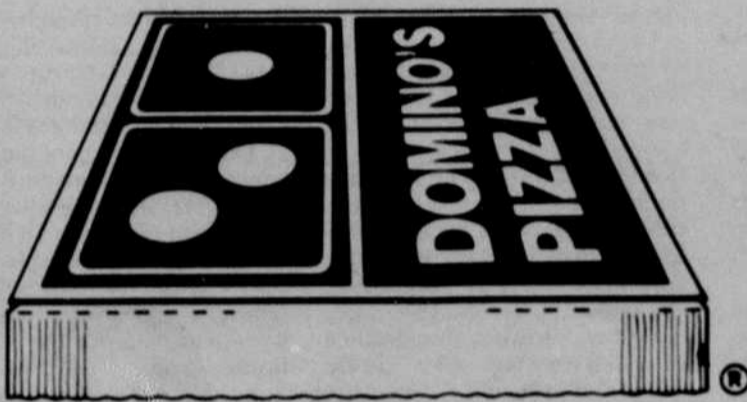
De Olivera runs a training program based in Eugene, and entries from his stable include world indoor 800-meter champion Jose Barbosa, Olympic 800-meter gold-medalist Joaquim Cruz and veteran miler Mike Boit, among others.

Other former Oregon athletes expected to compete include sprinter George Waldcott, NCAA 10,000-meter runner-up Mark McMonigal, horizontal jumper Uchenna Agu, and collegiate record holder Ken Flax. Flax, a hammer specialist, is expected to try his hand at the discus this weekend. Additionally, Alberto Salazar may compete in the 5,000, but his entry has not yet been confirmed.

Those athletes whose progress this season has been slowed by injury will also be given an opportunity to work their way back into competitive shape.

Some members of Dellinger's squad will take advantage of the weekend to rest, either from nagging injuries or fatigue. "One of the best things about this week is that we don't have to use or abuse our people," Dellinger said.

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