

Gregory makes 'contenders' from 'pretenders'

By Craig Harris
Emerald Sports Reporter

When Gerry Gregory took over the Oregon volleyball program last year he believed he could field a contender in the Pacific-10 Conference.

Right. Gregory inherited a squad that graduated All-American Sue Harbour, had only one senior, and a starting lineup that included a pair of true freshmen.

So what did Gregory do? He guided a scrappy no-name team to a 22-12 record, claimed a 15 ranking in both national polls, and hosted Stanford in the first round of the NCAA Volleyball Championships.

For his accomplishments Gregory won the honor of Northwest Region Coach of the Year and was named assistant coach for the World University Games that took place in Yugoslavia last July.

But last year's gains didn't seem to grant Oregon any respect, because the 1987 coaches' poll predicted the Ducks to wallow in mediocrity and finish no higher than fifth.

"People have underestimated players at the University of Oregon," Gregory said. "Coaches seem to forget how important experience is. (Oregon returned their whole starting lineup) USC was picked ahead of us and all their talent is in their freshmen and sophomores. Our talent is a little older."

The Ducks started the year losing three straight on the road, but then reeled off nine in a row to receive a 11 and 12 ranking in the coaches' and NCAA polls. Two of the teams they knocked off on their streak were UCLA and USC, both ranked ahead of the Ducks in the national polls.

Does Gregory have a magical touch to turn pretenders into contenders?

"I wouldn't call it magic, but it's something close to that," assistant coach Peg Rees said. "He has excellent knowledge of the game and gets maximum performance from his players."

All-America candidate Teri Kramer agreed.

"He's seen so much international play that he expects more out of us. He expects us to compete with the top 10 teams in the nation. He's excited to play UCLA and teams of that caliber. His confident attitude rubs off on us," Kramer said.

Although the Ducks dropped a pair this weekend to Califor-

nia and Stanford, they're only a game out of first place and still have a shot to win the conference crown.

"We would like to finish in the top three in the conference, ranked in the top 10 and make it past the first round (of the NCAA tournament). I believe the team could accomplish those goals," Gregory said.

Gregory's beliefs also extend off the court.

"My family comes first and then my job after that," Gregory said.

Although volleyball isn't Gregory's number-one priority, it surely is one of his first loves. And his background speaks for itself.

Gregory's seven-year tenure as a major college coach includes a 157-109-3 record with

a .584 winning percentage and not a single losing season. During his playing days, Gregory was a ten-time NCAA and USVBA All-America selection, played on the U.S. National team from 1974-1979 and held the post of captain from 1977-1979.

In 1984 Gregory received what he calls his greatest personal honor by being inducted into the USVBA Hall of Fame.

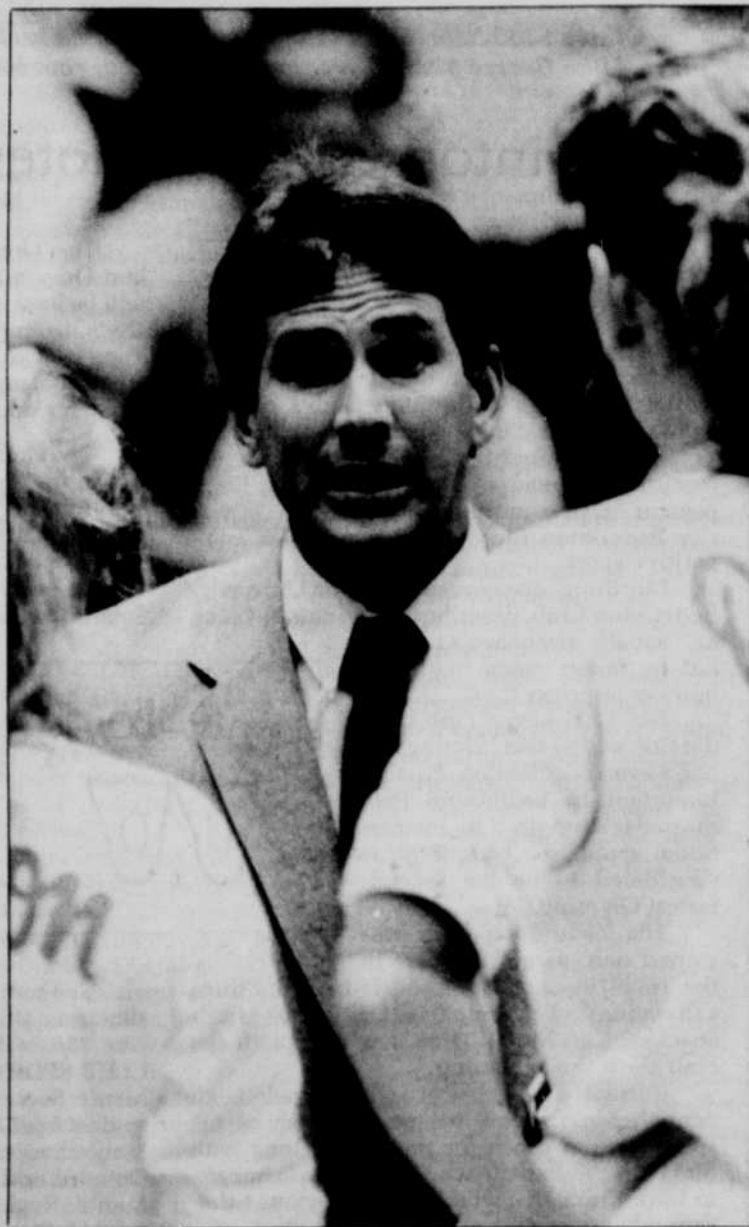
But Oregon would have never had Gregory at the volleyball helm if not for the persistence of Chris Voelz, who gave up the post to take an associate athletic director's position.

Voelz called Gregory three times to persuade him to leave Wyoming, a decision Gregory said wasn't easy.

"I had a good team coming

back at Wyoming and I had recruited well. But, after a lot of prayer and thinking I decided it

was the best place for my family and it would meet my professional goals," Gregory said.



File photo

Oregon volleyball coach Gerry Gregory displays the intensity which has enabled him to produce winners everywhere he has coached. This year is Gregory's second at Oregon after a successful stint at Wyoming.

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