

Swimmers minus team aren't Ducks out of water



Photo by Cliff Etzel

Josh Oken, a member of the Swimming Performance team, is one of several University swimmers struggling to keep his head above water without a program.

By Gary Henley
Emerald Sports Reporter

When the University swimming program was cut on May 6, 1986, it left swimmers with athletic scholarships with a big decision.

The University would have honored the scholarships academically, but what do the athletes do and where do they go after their sport and possibly career has been taken away?

When the athletic department drained the pool on the Ducks, it appeared many of the swimmers' careers would disappear with the water.

Kris Doyle, who came to Oregon on a swimming scholarship, left immediately after the program was cut.

Doyle enrolled at Iowa State, competed for the swim team, finished his athletic eligibility, and has since returned to the University to complete his education.

"Basically, I just wanted to

pursue my athletic career," Doyle said. "I didn't want to live with the question 'what if' or 'what might have happened.' I wanted to pursue; it was in my own personal interest to leave."

Others stayed, including junior Mike Pruett. "I didn't understand why they cut the program. We had no indication or warning that it would be cut, but when they dropped it, I decided to stay."

However, Pruett still swims and competes for the "Swimming Performance" team, a non-University-funded team, supported mainly through alumni donations. "Swimming Performance" competes with colleges and universities that still have swimming programs. The swimmers must pay for their own equipment and transportation.

The team stems from a class taught at the University by Dr. Donald Van Rossen, a retired professor and director of aquatics, physical education and human movement studies.

The class, designed in a course sequence, includes an introduction to informal competition in Swim Performance I, an introduction to open competition in the second sequence, and participation in open and collegiate competition in Swim Performance III.

Chris Simpson also is competing with the team, and said more individual responsibility is required than there would be for a University-supported team.

"The main difference is that there's nobody standing over you," he said. "You have to make yourself train and practice. You only get out of it what you put into it."

Simpson added that the open competition at swimming meets is more relaxed.

"The meets are for fun. They're really slack. It doesn't matter if we win or lose."

Van Rossen points out that the Swimming Performance team is not considered a club sport. The difference being that club sports are student-based, using student athletes and student coaches.

Van Rossen refers to the Swimming Performance team as a "melting pot."

"We wondered if it would be possible to set up this type of model. It's a whole new thing, but it's been fantastic. We have people up to 68 years old swimming competitively," he said.

Van Rossen explained about the "cross pollination" that has taken place, mixing novice competitive swimmers, master swimmers, tri-athletes, and collegiate swimmers into the



Dr. Don Van Rossen

"Basically, it's been killing us. We're playing now like I thought we would play in September," Toledo said.

In September, the Ducks were red hot and sneaking into the national polls, a similar situation that happened in 1984 when Oregon started off 4-0 and received a number 20 ranking by Sports Illustrated. But after the Ducks gained that elitist recognition, they dropped four in a row and then, incredibly, upset UCLA on the road.

Will history repeat itself Saturday? "It is a totally different situation," Oregon head coach Rich Brooks said. "When we were 4-0 we did not beat good teams, this year when we were 4-1 we beat very good teams. It's unrelated in totally different ways, right now we are not healthy, unlike when we beat UCLA."

While Brooks isn't counting on history to perform a stroke of magic, he isn't about to rule out another upset. But he reiterated that before that can happen the Ducks need to keep possession of the ball.

"When you have 18 turnovers you take away a lot of opportunities to score, you can't run plays or put the ball in the end zone. It's staring you right in the face," Brooks said.

"melting pot."

Despite being able to compete on a collegiate level, many swimmers were left confused and angered over the decision

to drop the sport.

Doyle, who is helping to coach the team, said, "if you

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"Once I get in the flow I'll be OK; I just wish I could wake up and play. There is a lot of time to think about it," Hargain said.

Hargain, who played quarterback in high school and battled for that spot until Musgrave emerged, is getting a quick brush up on the Duck offense — a system that is not easy to learn.

"I'm getting a lot of reps to make things second hand. I'm taking 85 percent of the reps in practice," Hargain said. "Things are coming back from spring practice."

Even though things are coming back for Hargain, Oregon offensive coordinator Bob Toledo said things have been restricted from the playbook.

"Obviously we've had to simplify our offense and implement stuff that he (Hargain) can do well, like run with the ball," Toledo said.

Besides opening the Sun Devil defense with his running, Hargain also will have to control the turnovers that Oregon quarterbacks have graciously given away during the last three weeks.

Oregon has coughed up the ball 18 times in its last three losses, 16 by the offense and 13 related to the quarterback.

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