

Men's volleyball team works hard to build a program

By Michael Egan
Emerald Contributor

Believe it or not, there is a men's volleyball team at the University.

And if preseason scrimmages are any indication of the future, the Club Sports program has a pretty good team.

At OSU on Saturday, the Ducks dumped the Beavers, taking three out of four games. And on Sunday, after a gritty performance against one of the top teams in the league, they lost to Eugene's Downtown Athletic Club (DAC), three games to two.

"We didn't know what we had 'til tonight (Sunday). I think we thought we could win. To even win one game, I was happy — and we won two," said Oregon men's player-coach Chris Wells, who coached the Ducks two years ago.

The Ducks will field two A-level teams this season in the Northwest region of the United States Volleyball Association (USVBA). The league consists of club sports teams from Oregon and Washington, and their first regular season action is Saturday in a 10-team tournament at OSU.

Besides Team DAC, Team Mizuno presents the stiffest challenge in the region. "I think it's (the league) strong all around, anybody can win. Mizuno is pretty much the outright strongest team," Wells said.

Last year the team didn't fare well, and much of the failure was blamed on lack of organization and commitment, two problems Wells is determined to overcome this year.

"In the past years I've had problems with consistent attendance for practice, but not this year; it's impressive. The players get along a lot better, there's respect for each other as players. We each have a role to fill and we each take that role," he said.

Included in that role is serious practice four days a week. And most of the team's practice is devoted to the basics



Photo by Bobbie Lo

Dan Grimes of the men's volleyball team reaches high in a game against the Downtown Athletic Club team.

of passing, hitting and conditioning.

The team is tall. Only two of the team's players are under 6 feet, and they run what is called a 6-0 offense to take advantage of this height.

This attack sets up two setters, which leaves three hitters in the front row. Wells believes this strengthens their already tough strong-side blocking.

"We have two designated setters, which are like quarterbacks. We get the ball to the setter and he sets things up," said 6-foot-3 freshman middle blocker Todd Robertson. "It's the most unappreciated spot on the team."

Wells has goals for his team and the future of Oregon men's volleyball. This season he's stressing the basics, trying to

build some respect for the program. He said he wants "error-free ball."

"If you can play the basics you can play with a lot of people — you don't have to be flashy to beat the good teams," he said. "We want to let all the teams know we're for real."

If his team plays errorless ball, they will progress to the region's postseason tournament, and if they finish in the tournament's top three, they may get an invitation to play at USVBA AA.

At this level, competition moves south to California, where the nation's best players dig and spike in volleyball heaven.

Although Wells isn't optimistic about reaching the promised land this year, he believes the future of Oregon men's volleyball is bright because most of the team will return next year.

"We have a mixed blend of young players and old players, guys who have 10 years experience playing volleyball and young guys who are freshmen just starting out. The veterans are really helping the young guys," Wells said.

"We're a young team, and if we can get the same nucleus back we could be unbeatable," Robertson said.

Coming to Oregon from Berkeley, Calif., where he coached high school volleyball for four years, Wells watched interest in the men's side of the sport grow to new heights in Oregon.

Like many other teams in the league, financial help is scarce for the Ducks. The team hopes to stage a tournament in Eugene and combined with other fund raisers, reach a goal of \$400 to \$500.

CLUB SPORTS SCOREBOARD

Women's bowling defeated Portland Community College 23-5. High scorers were Virginia Olson, 174, and Tami

Nelson, 236.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov. 19, Women's bowling vs. Mt. Hood Community College at EMU Lanes

Nov. 19-21, Oregon Karate Club martial arts clinic featur-

ing Teruo Chinen from Spokane.

Nov. 21, Men's rugby vs. OSU, 11:00 a.m. at Southbank field.

Lacrosse, 8:00 a.m. at Southbank field

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