

Runners qualify for NCAA

Both Wessell, Wilson surpass mark

By Cam Sivesind
Emerald Sports Reporter

Oregon women's track coach Tom Heinonen now has half of his predicted six NCAA automatic qualifiers thanks to a fast-paced 5,000-meter race Saturday at the Oregon Twilight Meet.

Junior Stephanie Wessell and senior Liz Wilson took advantage of a blistering pace by former Duck and 1988 NCAA champion Annette Peters.

Wessell overtook Wilson in the last 100 meters of the race to grab third place. Wessell's time of 16:08.87 is the third-fastest time in the brief history of Pacific-10 Conference women's track competition and is the sixth-best in school history.

More importantly, her time easily broke the NCAA automatic standard of 16:16.00.

"I knew I could do it," said Wessell, who broke her personal record by more than 17 seconds. "The last 5,000 (at the Pepsi Team Invitational) felt so easy, I knew I could go harder."

Wilson clocked in at 16:10.42 to qualify for the NCAA meet as well. Her time surpassed an old PR of 16:17.58 and marked the seventh-fastest 5,000 in school history. Last year's seventh-place finisher at the NCAA meet in both the 5,000 and 3,000, Wilson was just glad to have qualified again.

"It's nice to get this monkey off our backs," Wilson said.

The race did not surprise Heinonen at all.

"It was sort of a characteristic race with Liz going for the gusto and Stephanie running more conservative," Heinonen said.

It's tough to overshadow two NCAA qualifying performances, but Peters may have done it. Peters turned in the fastest U.S. 5,000-meter this year with her time of 15:22.16.

The time eclipsed the old meet record of 15:38.03 set by Lynn Nelson in 1987 and set a new personal best for Peters by 12 seconds. The clocking was 16 seconds faster than the time Peters had in her winning NCAA effort in 1988.

The fact that Peters went out so fast, taking a substantial lead on the first lap, worked out well for the Oregon runners, Heinonen said.

"Annette going out so fast broke apart the potential group of Wilson, (Eryn) Forbes, (Callie) Calhoun and Wessell," Heinonen said, noting that each runner could then run her own race.

Two other Oregon runners had impressive performances in the race. Nicole Woodward, a freshman who looks to carry on the great distance tradition at Oregon, clocked in at 16:44.80. Her time was impressive considering it was Woodward's first-ever 5,000 race.

Julia Saul, another freshman,

turned in a great time of her own (16:54.16), knocking more than 12 seconds off her old PR.

After a disappointing home meet against Nebraska last Saturday, Heinonen was elated with many of the performances he witnessed.

The return of Rosie Williams was a welcomed sight to fans and coaches alike. The junior sprinter, who had been recovering from a strained hamstring, ran a respectable 24.55 in the 200.

Setting a rapid pace in the 400, Williams ran a time good enough to qualify her for the Pac-10 meet (55.55). The problem is that she will not run that event, and the runners she was trying to pull along didn't break the conference standard.

"Rosie got through two races in fine shape, and we need her at Pac-10s. That's vital for us," Heinonen said.

Laurie Williams, who ran a season-best 24.79 in the 200, failed to qualify in either the 200 or 400. Her season-best time of 56.78 was still more than a second off the league standard.

Laurel Roberts conquered the 5-10 1/4 height in the high jump once again despite the wet runway. But the NCAA automatic standard of 6-0 1/4 escaped the sophomore for the second consecutive week.

"It's great for Laurel to know she can jump well in wet con-

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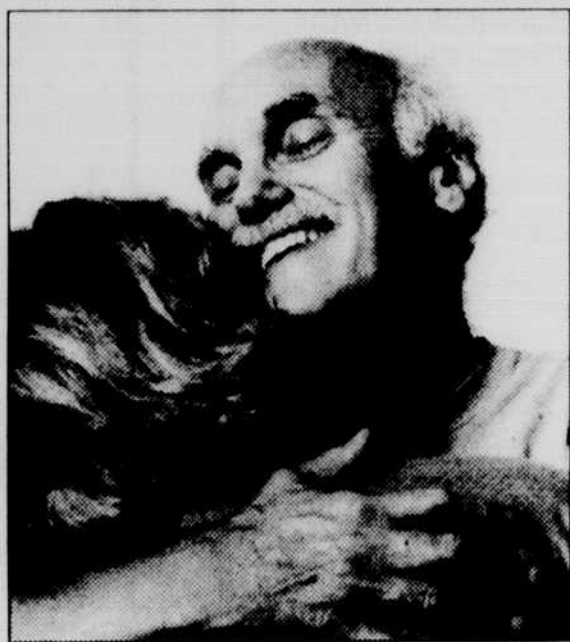
Photo by Steve Card

Oregon junior Stephanie Wessell finished third in the 5,000 meters at the Oregon Twilight Meet Saturday. Wessell's time of 16:08.87 qualified her for the NCAA meet next month.

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