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SPORTS



Stephanie Wessell (left) and Liz Wilson return this year to anchor a strong women's cross country team.

Wilson, Wessell lead strong running corps after conference title

By Paul Morgan **Emerald Sports Reporter**

Last year the women's cross country team failed to win the Pacific-10 titleand qualify for the NCAA meet for the first time since 1976.

It was not a good season for the Ducks. Their top runner Pac-10 crosscountry champion, Liz Wilson, was unable to compete due to a leg injury sustained during the summer. Wilson redshirted, ending Oregon's streak of three conference titles.

we had five freshmen in our top seven competing," Coach

Pac-10, win the Region VIII, and finish in the top five at the NCAA meet," Heinonen said. "We want to re-establish ourselves at the top. We feel the Pac-10 is rightfully ours and we're determined that it's sup-

gon is favored to win the Pac-

good." he said. "We are deep

The Ducks' desire to be one of the best teams in the nation was evident last Saturday in Seattle at the Emerald City Invitational, where Wilson and Wessell posted 1-2 finishes, respectively.

Overall, Oregon finished with five runners in the top ten, including four in the top six, and won the team race with 23 points.

Oregon also returns several other top runners from a year ago, led by transfer Lucy Nusrala, and redshirt freshman Julia Saul, who finished ninth in Seattle.

Sophomore Nicole Wood-ward, from West Linn, picked up where she left off last year as Oregon's No. 3 runner with a fifth-place finish in Seattle. Right behind her was Nusrala, Notre Dame's top runner last year, who also plays big in Heinonen's hopes for this year.

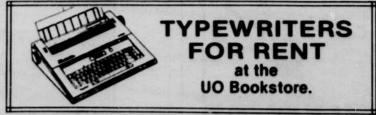
"Lucy was one of our best 1,500-meter runners last year with a 4:31," he said. Nusrala was the fourth Duck to cross the finish line at the invitational, and the sixth overall.

Although Saul missed last season because of medical problems, she had a strong showing last spring in the conference track and field meet with a third place finish in the

10,000.

Erika Klein was Oregon's seventh finisher in Seattle and 32nd overall.

"We are older and more mature than we were last year,' Heinonen said. "Not as talented as we have been in the past. but now we have the fire power and we just have to keep them healthy.



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