



Photo by Jake Berg

Liz Wilson is back with a vengeance after suffering two stress fractures last year, having won two of the first three races she entered and finishing second in the other.

Wilson rebounds from injuries

By Mark Baker
Emerald Contributor

After a series of nagging injuries, Liz Wilson has returned to the form that made her the Pacific-10 cross country champion in 1988.

The senior all-American has finished first in two of Oregon's three meets this season and second in the other meet after redshirting last fall because of a stress fracture in her foot.

"She doesn't feel like she's in that strong of shape, so her running has been a surprise," Coach Tom Heinonen said.

In fact, Wilson's entire career at Oregon has been a surprise.

Having grown up in a military family, Wilson graduated from high school in The Netherlands. She came to Oregon on the advice of her high school coach, Ron Smith, a former Oregonian.

"She's been an inspiration to a lot of people on our team because she came from an obscure background, being an American student in a foreign country," Heinonen said.

Wilson ran good, but not great times in high school, Heinonen said. She came from an underdeveloped running program and made great strides quickly, he said.

"I knew a bit about the European program," Heinonen said. "It's like living in North Dakota. There aren't many athletes and the competition isn't very good. Anybody who excels in that setting may be a diamond in the rough and Liz was."

Wilson wrote several American colleges during her senior year in high school to inquire about competing in their track and cross country programs. She was particularly impressed by an encouraging letter from Heinonen.

"She came in as a walk-on and worked her way up to a large scholarship," Heinonen said. "And she's done that with a considerable amount of stress."

After recovering from the stress fracture in her

foot last fall, Wilson, who ranks among Oregon's top 10 all-time performers at four different track distances, developed another stress fracture during track season last spring. This one was in her hip.

"I feel like a doctor's nightmare," she said. "I think some people are just more susceptible to this."

Wilson spent the summer rehabilitating her hip by running in water and using ultrasound, a deep heating machine. She wasn't able to start running until August and was concerned about being ready for the start of the season.

"You can't help but doubt," Wilson said.

Those doubts have been removed by an outstanding season thus far.

Wilson won the Emerald City Invitational in Seattle on Sept. 22 and then captured the Minnesota/GBS Invitational in Minneapolis, Minn. Oct. 6. Last week she finished second to teammate Stephanie Wessell in the Jeff Drenth Memorial in Eugene.

Her performances are a big reason why the Ducks are undefeated and ranked seventh in the country this season and the team favorite to win the Pac-10 Conference Championships Oct. 27 in Stanford, Calif.

"I think we're a good team," Wilson said. "Tom says we can only get better."

The two early-season wins and last Saturday's performance have given Wilson her confidence back from the injury problems and she's hoping for big things to finish out her college career.

She finished 15th in the NCAA cross country meet her sophomore year and 17th her junior season. This year she has her sights set on a top 10 finish.

Wilson, who will graduate after winter or spring term with a double major in marketing and management, plans to run on the NCAA indoor circuit beginning in March, something few other Oregon athletes have ever done. She completed her outdoor eligibility last season.



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