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SPORTS

Cross country teams out for regional titles

By Jake Berg
Emerald Contributor

Oregon's cross country teams will be confronting the ghosts of last year's performance when they go to the Region VIII meet in Fresno, Calif., on Saturday.

Even with a national ranking of fifth and the Pacific-10 Conference title in hand, the men's team will find it impossible to improve on the Region VIII finish of the 1989 club.

Although the Ducks will be favored to again take the team title, there is no way they can better last year's performance when they scored only 15 points in sweeping the top five individual spots.

"It was a dream come true," Dellinger said of the five-man sweep. A second place Oregon finish at the NCAA finals later that November added to the coach's dream.

Unfortunately for the Ducks, only junior Pat Haller returned this season from those five runners of a year ago. Haller finished third at last year's regional meet.

Dellinger believes that Haller, who placed sixth at the Pac-10 meet two weeks ago, has the ability to repeat Saturday with a run similar to last year's regional performance.

"Pat is doing really well," Dellinger said. "He should be right up there."

Junior Colin Dalton will be an individual favorite Saturday after his overall runner-up finish at the Pac-10 meet. Dalton missed last November's regionals and is in danger of an absence again Saturday.

A sore leg, which limited the practice of the Ducks' top runner this week, may force Dalton to sit out the regionals, Dellinger said.

Oregon's number four man, Rick Mestler, did not compete at the Pac-10 meet because of a

sore arch, and Dellinger also lists him as "questionable" for Fresno.

With these injuries in mind, "we're just hoping to get qualified (for the NCAA Championships)," Dellinger said.

Oregon must place in the top three of the 25 regional teams to earn a trip to the NCAA finals at the University of Tennessee. The Ducks' two main regional adversaries will be Pac-10 runner-up Arizona and 11th-ranked Washington.

The women's squad will find themselves in a situation opposite of the men's team Saturday. With the powerful runners that Coach Tom Heinonen has this year, the seventh-ranked women should easily top last year's fourth-place finish.

Last fall marked the first time in Heinonen's 15-year tenure as the Ducks' coach that he failed to send his team to the NCAAs. Heinonen is ready for a return to form, and his 1990 Pac-10 champions are just the team do it, he says.

"We want to get back to nationals," Heinonen said. "We're intent on getting back there."

Oregon's first and second runners, seniors Liz Wilson and Stephanie Wessell, are conference champion and runner-up, respectively, and both have yet to lose to a collegiate competitor this fall.

Buffy Rabbitt, the defending regional winner from fifth-ranked Cal-Irvine, will give the two Ducks their biggest challenge yet this season at the Fresno meet. Cal-Irvine also appears to be the Ducks' largest barrier to a regional first place finish.

On the injury front, Lucy Nusrala, who sat out the Pac-10 meet due to illness, is expected to run this weekend. However, redshirt freshman Julia Saul is suffering from a sore arch and may not run at Fresno.

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