



Photo by Mark Ylen

Freshman second baseman Patty Pyles is one of several Ducks that have shifted positions in an attempt to improve the Oregon defense.

Oregon softball team to host No. 1 UCLA

By Jake Berg
Emerald Sports Reporter

On Sunday, Oregon may face its strongest opponent of the year in UCLA. Heck, the Bruins are probably the toughest opponent anyone will face this year. Top-ranked UCLA brings its 41-3 overall mark to Howe Field Sunday for a noon doubleheader with the Ducks. Oregon travels to Portland State, 20-2, tomorrow afternoon for a doubleheader against the Vikings.

Despite UCLA's national prominence and imposing reputation, Oregon Coach Tami Brown believes the Ducks stand more than just a chance of beating the Bruins.

"We have the potential to beat them," Brown said. "You've got to be precise with these guys, you've got to play solid and you can't make mistakes offensively or defensively."

"The key is making them beat us, making them beat our best stuff — we need to avoid errors," she said.

After an early season dotted by errors from the Ducks' defense, Oregon got sticky Tuesday and committed only one miscue in a home doubleheader against Oregon State. The Ducks won both games easily, 4-1 and 7-1, respectively, improving their record to 19-19.

Brown credits the defense's progress with the players' continuing familiarity at their positions. The coach shuffled her fielders eight games ago and said that move may have hurt in the short run, but now looks promising.

"Now that players are set in positions, there's going to be better communication," Brown said. "Our fans are going to see a little bit different of a temperament out there. We're going to be more aggressive, and we're going to play a good round of ball."

And the Ducks need their best if they hope to contend with the Bruins. Brown calls the UCLA pitching rotation "four-deep in some of the best pitchers in the country," and



Rachelle Taylor

the statistics reflect that statement.

The Bruins' team ERA is an unheard of 0.27, led by Lisa Fernandez (15-1 with a 0.06 ERA), Heather Compton (13-2 with a 0.07 ERA) and D.E. Weiman (13-0 with a 0.73 ERA).

Hitters? UCLA has that covered too. Yvonne Gutierrez, pounding the ball with a .436 average this year, leads the Pac-10 in home runs with seven, and leads her team with 29 RBI and 58 hits.

Brown says Gutierrez is "just incredible." She's "the best hitter I've ever seen."

A pair of Oregon freshmen will take the mound against Gutierrez and the Bruins on Sunday. Rachelle Taylor, 9-9, and Natasha Dumoski, 3-3, both winners in the Oregon State doubleheader, are the Ducks' only pitchers.

"They both have one bad inning," Brown said of her pitchers, "and when they eliminate that one bad inning and our defense picks up and goes from where they left off against Oregon State, we're going to be a much better team."

Freshman catcher Tracy Lynch has been lost for the season with fracture and dislocation of her left ankle. After seeing action in 18 games this season, she was injured in practice Monday and underwent surgery Tuesday.

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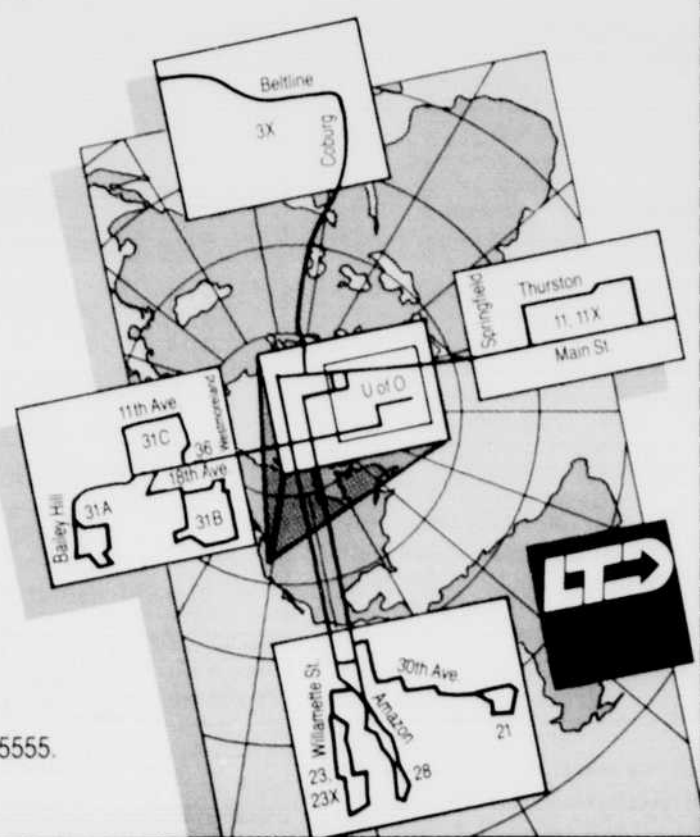
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