Champion Tigers tough to beat

By Ashley Conklin
Emerald Sports Editor

The big question in the women's team race at this week's NCAA Track and Field Championships at Hayward Field is: Can anyone stop Louisiana State?

The Tigers have taken the NCAA title the last four seasons, including the last time the championships were held at Hayward Field, in 1988.

UCLA, which was the team favorite that year, should challenge LSU again this time around, as will Texas, Florida, Nebraska and probably Oregon.

But once again, the Tigers appear too good to beat.

"I have to go with LSU," Oregon Coach Tom Heinonen said. "With Esther Jones, the defending 100 and 200 champion, [Dahlia] Duhaney and all of their hurdlers, they have a lot of points."

However, LSU Coach Pat Henry doesn't buy the notion that there's any pressure on his team to repeat.

"From a coaching standpoint, every year is a new year," said Henry, who has been the head coach for three of those national championships. "You just approach it that way.

"At least we do, and what happens is what happens," he said. "Our goal is to try and have everybody have a good day on the same day."

Like the Tennessee men's team, the Tiger women don't appear to have any weaknesses. If they all have a good day, look out.

Jones, a senior, won the 100 and 200 last season and anchored the Tigers' 4x100-meter relay team to another title. This season, Jones has the fastest time in the 100 and the fourth-best mark in the 200.

LSU's sprint relay team is also awesome — they are the only team to dip below 44 seconds (43.77).

LSU also has four of the top seven 100-meter hurdlers in Mary Cobb, Dawn Bowles, Cinnamon Sheffield and Donalda Duprey. Cobb was the NCAA 55-meter indoor champ in March.

Duhaney will also give the Tigers some points in the 100, 200 and long jump; heptathlete Sharon Jaklofsky has scored 5,969 points this season.

"I think LSU is the team favorite based on the number of people they have ranked in the top five in the total number of events in the NCAA schedule," Texas Coach Terry Crawford said. "And then I think there's a number of other teams that can show very well."

Contenders include UCLA, Texas, Florida and Oregon, but

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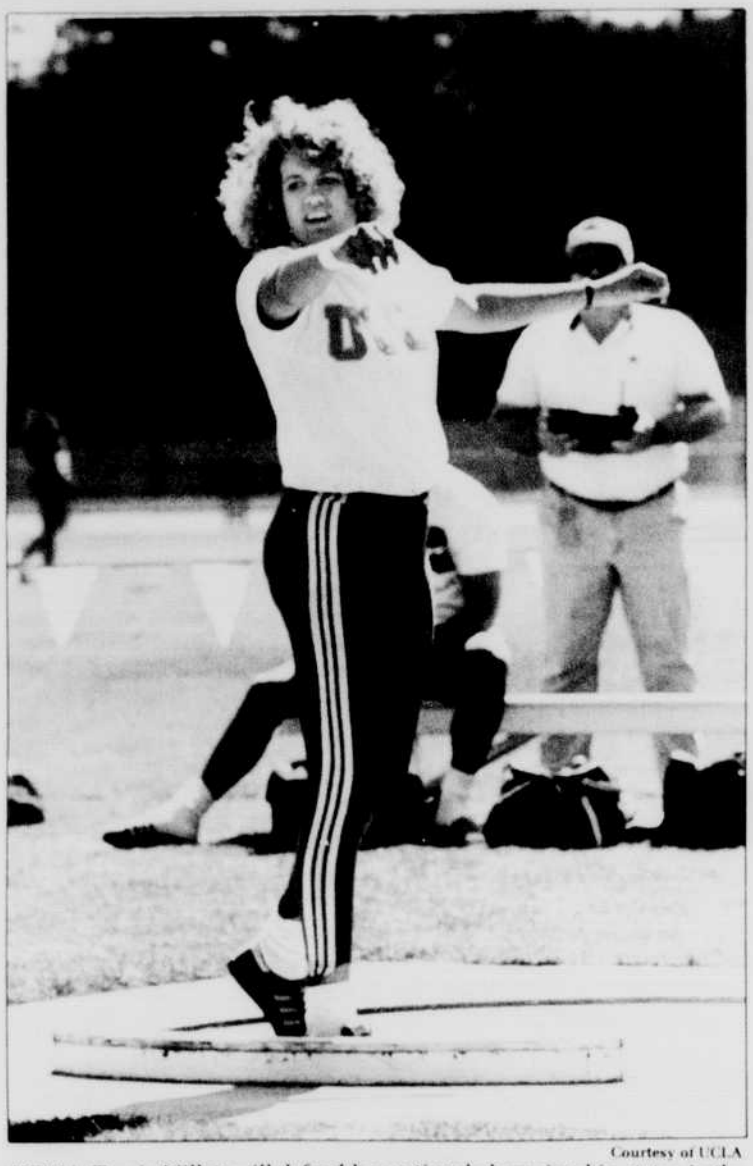

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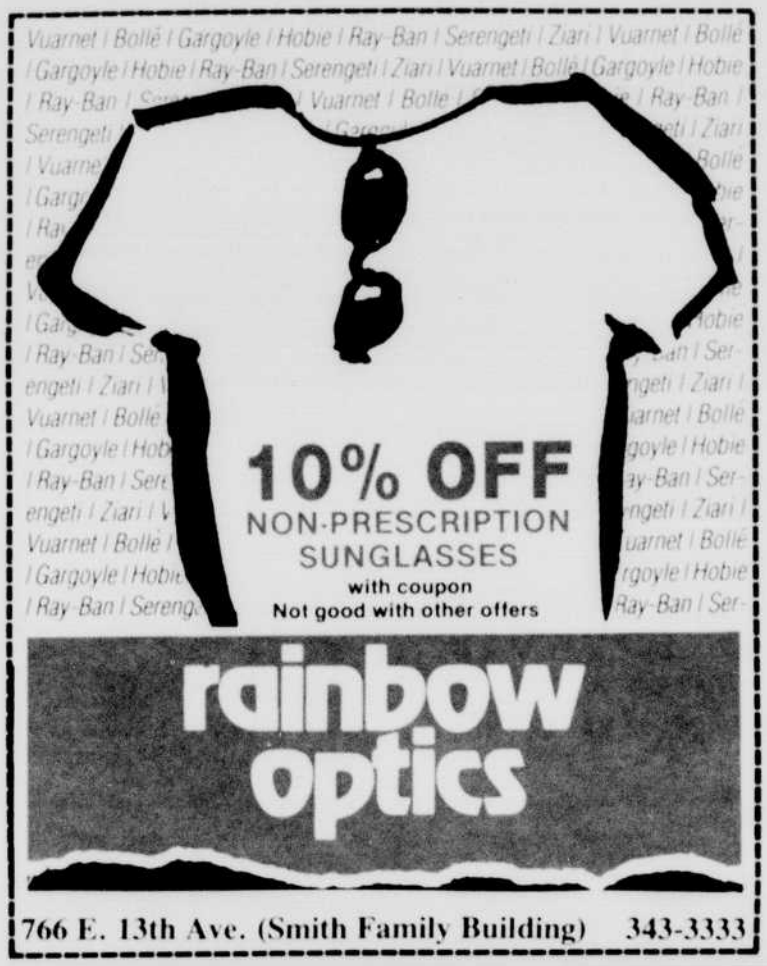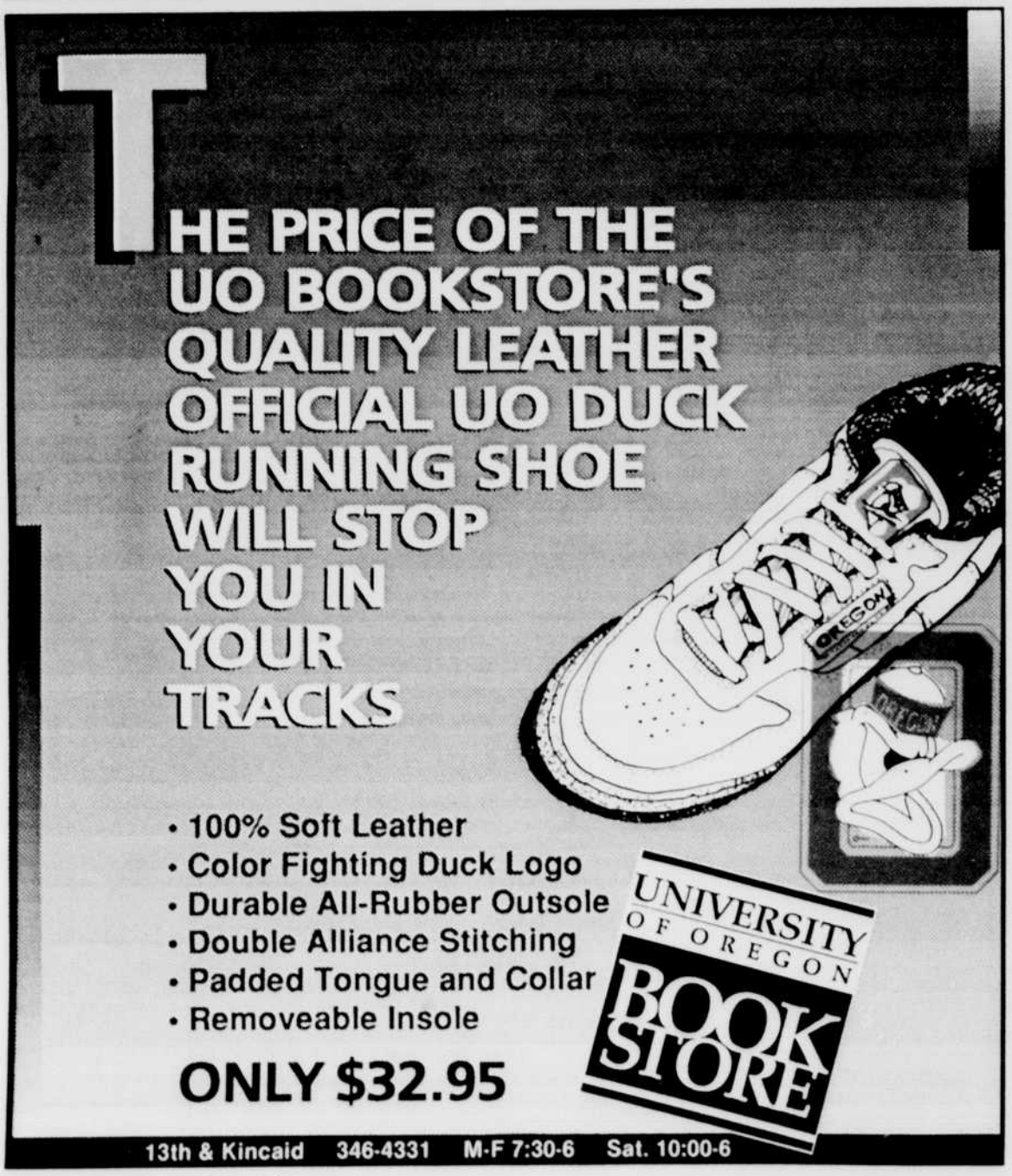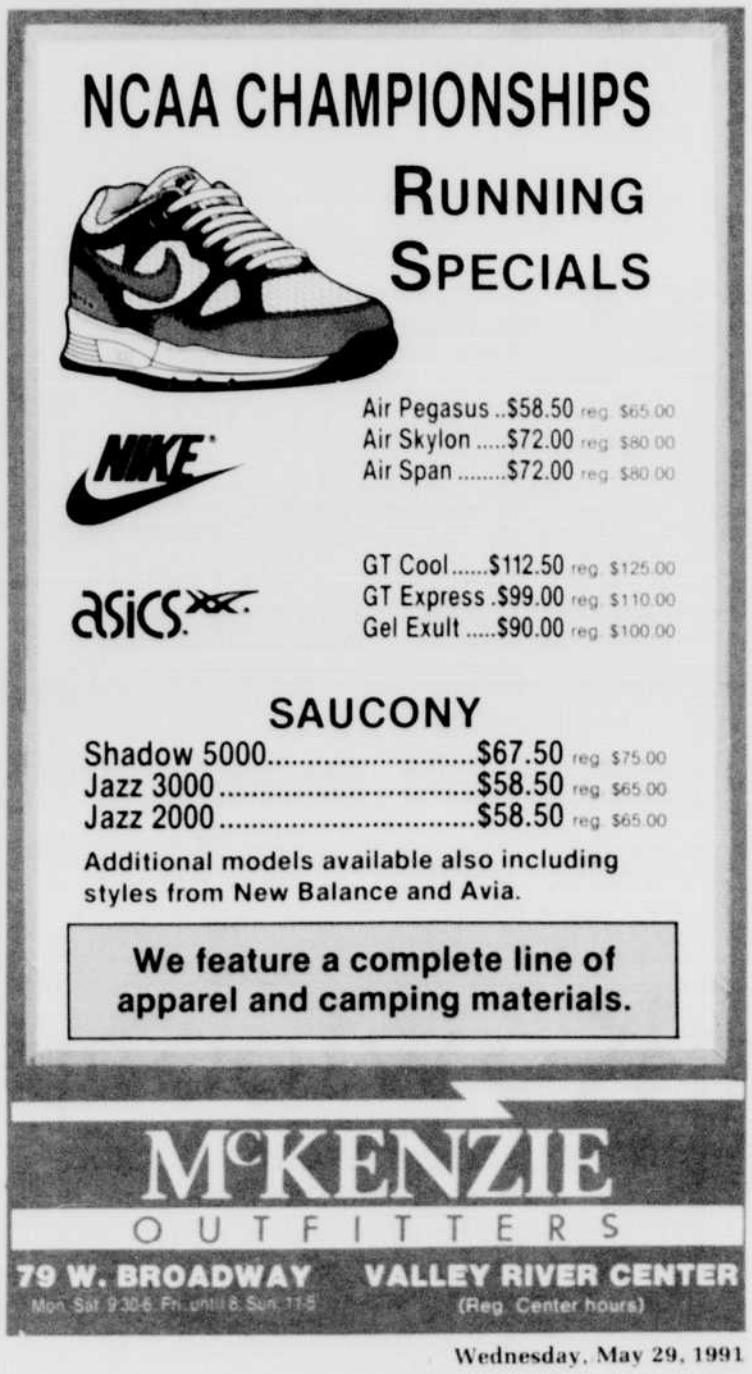
UCLA's Tracie Millett will defend her national championship status in the shot put and discus at Hayward Field this week.