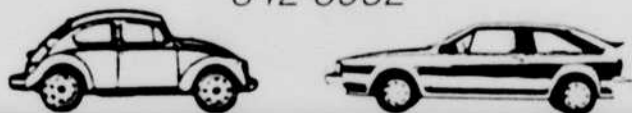




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Ducks finish third in NCAA meet

By Ashley Conklin
Emerald Sports Editor

Bob Gray and Art Skipper were having two very different seasons this year.

Gray was having his best season ever, becoming an NCAA scoring threat in the 110-meter hurdles and looking strong in the 400 hurdles once he started running that race.

It was a different story for Skipper, who had been suffering from a severely sprained ankle all season and had thrown only 231-9, off his school record of 246-5.

So while Gray was counted on for points in the NCAA Track and Field Championships this past week at Hayward Field, few gave Skipper much of a chance to do anything.

But both came through with clutch performances to help lift Oregon to a third-place team finish with 36 points, finishing behind only Tennessee (51 points) and Washington State (42 points) and barely ahead of Brigham Young (35 points).

Gray finished second in the 110 hurdles Saturday after Skipper came through with a third-place finish on Friday.

At first, Gray thought he might have won his race but the winner was Texas A&M's Greg Williams in 13.55. Gray was clocked in 13.63, his fastest time ever despite the race being wind-aided.

"At about the seventh hurdle I thought, 'I'm going to win this,'" he said. "For a second I thought I won, but I couldn't tell who was on the outside."

Washington State's Tony Li, the pre-meet favorite, was in lane four and was banging hurdles that forced him into lane three where Pittsburgh's Elbert Ellis was. Gray was next to Ellis in lane two and was lucky he wasn't taken out of the race.

"I'm glad I kept my composure out there," Gray said. "Tony forced himself into Elbert and Elbert forced himself into me. Everybody was hitting the hurdles and it kind of caused a chain reaction."

Skipper made up for a frustrating season by finishing third with a season-best throw of 234-9.

"With my ankle I haven't been able to throw correctly all season," Skipper said. "I know I can throw a lot farther and (throws coach) Stewart knows that but a lot of other people don't know that."

Thanks to pain killers and deadner, Skipper was able to shake off the bad ankle injury Friday.

"When I planted, I couldn't feel it and that helped tremendously," he said.

The third-place team finish for the Ducks was their highest since they won the NCAA title in 1984, also at Hayward Field.

"This kind of makes up for some bad things that happened this year with Brian Wright getting mono and our pole vaulter (Mark Vanderville) suffering a stress fracture," Oregon Coach Bill Dellinger said.

Oregon's Scott McGee was unable to successfully defend his NCAA title in the hammer against Southern Methodist's Christophe Epalle, but did finish second with a throw of 224-5, nearly seven feet farther than his winning throw of a year ago.

"I never like second, but with the way Epalle was throwing, second's not bad," McGee said. "I thought I could compete with him but I didn't have a good day."

McGee stood fourth going into the finals with a preliminary best of 215-3, but threw 224-5 on his first throw of the finals.

Muhammad Oliver and Pedro daSilva placed fourth and sixth, respectively, in the decathlon.

Oliver tied his personal record of 7,709 points while daSilva had 7,527 points. Both were looking for more, particularly Oliver after having a first-day PR of 4,017 points Friday.

"As far as the second day, I didn't do what I wanted," Oliver said. "I had a worse second day than at Pac-10s which prevented me from qualifying for TAC."

DaSilva had the fourth-best score coming in and likely would have had a shot at the title had he cleared more than 6-4 1/4 in the high jump and 14-2 1/4 in the pole vault, two of his better events.

"I'm not trying to be negative, but everything that could go wrong went wrong," daSilva said.

Rick Mestler became an all-American for the third straight year with his fifth-place finish in the 3,000-meter steeplechase Friday while Tye Van Schoiack was an all-American for the first time by placing seventh.

Both also had PRs with Mestler clocking 8:37.12 and Van Schoiack running 8:40.15 behind a torrid pace set by Ohio State's Mark Croghan.

Both ran their own race, however, not allowing themselves to be carried away with the fast pace.

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