

Volleyball team looks to reverse fortunes against UW, WSU

By Jayson Jacoby
Emerald Sports Reporter

It's still early in the Pacific-10 Conference volleyball season, but Oregon faces an important crossroads this weekend when the Ducks play Washington and Washington State at McArthur Court.

Oregon, 1-3 in the Pac-10 and 11-5 overall, has dropped out of the national rankings and needs at least a split this weekend to stay in the race for an upper-half conference finish.

The Ducks take on Washington (0-3 in Pac-10 and 9-5 overall) tonight and Washington State (2-1 and 14-4) Saturday. Both matches start at 7:30.

Oregon Coach Gerry Gregory expects two tough matches.

"It will be another tough challenge," Gregory said. "Washington State runs one of the best offenses in the Pac-10."

The Cougars, who split two matches with Oregon last year, return an experienced front line, anchored by seniors Kelly Hankins (sixth last year in Pac-10 kills) and Carrie Couturier (fifth in blocks, 10th in hitting percentage).

Junior setter Kerri Killebrew (seventh in assists, ninth in hitting percentage) also is back from last year's team that tied the Ducks for seventh place in the conference with a 6-12 league mark (13-18 overall).

"We've had some knock down, drag out fights with that team in the last couple of years," Gregory said.

Washington, which finished next to last in the Pac-10 last year, was picked to finish eighth this campaign in a pre-season coaches poll. The Huskies' top returner is 6-foot-2 sophomore Dawn Austin, who was named to last year's all-conference freshman team.

"I think Washington is a really powerful team," Gregory said. "They have a big block, and they're a little taller than we are."

"We have good chances to win, but we must play well."

After beating Arizona on Thursday in what Gregory called Oregon's best match in some time, the Ducks narrowly missed a sweep, losing a tough four-game match to ASU.

"The match against Arizona

State was both encouraging and disappointing," Gregory said. "We dominated them in every statistical category, the problem was that we had a couple of lapses. We had leads in all of those games and playing as well as we can, we were clearly the better team."

The Ducks' injury situation improved against the Arizona schools as junior middle blocker Marcie Price played for the first time this season after suf-

fering a broken finger in a pre-season practice.

"It's great to have Marcie back," said Gregory. "She's really a fine blocker." Price led the Ducks with 12 blocks against Arizona, a game-high for the season.

Gregory said when Price has her rubberized cast removed in two weeks or so, her offense will improve as well.

Oregon's other casualty, senior captain Mindee Adams,

will likely be out at least another two weeks, as she recovers from a stress fracture.

Adams did some light exercise Monday, Gregory said, but she experienced pain in the injured ankle.

"It takes time to heal," said Gregory, "and the quicker you bring a person back, the more likely they are to have continued problems. We want her back strong for the second half of the season."

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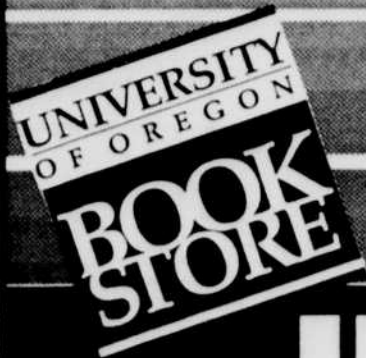
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