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Holmen key to successful NCAA finals

By Dave Charbonneau
Emerald Sports Reporter

Last weekend the Oregon women's cross country team turned a potential bad into a good.

When junior Nicole Woodward dropped out of the Region-VIII meet because of fatigue, it could have hurt the heavily favored Ducks' chances to make the NCAA Championships. That's when junior Carol Holmen stepped in.

Holmen, who has consistently improved throughout the season, picked up the pace and finished fifth in the meet.

Her strong showing coupled with yet another 1-2 finish by seniors Lucy Nusrala and Lisa Karnopp helped propel the Ducks to the title and a berth in today's national meet at Arizona.

Coach Tom Heinonen couldn't have asked for more.

"Carol ran her best race ever for us," he said. "She went out faster than she ever has and then ran away from a group of five at the end of the race."

As for Woodward, both herself and Heinonen feel she will be fine for the race. Woodward rested at the beginning of last week and trained at the end of the week.

"I think (the fatigue) was a result of overtraining," she said. "The rest is really going to help me."

Heinonen said Woodward has been in the position before.

"Last year she dropped out of the 10,000 at Pac-10s and came back the next day to run well in the 5,000," he said. "Then a week and a half later she ran very well at nationals, so I'm not that worried about it."

Oregon currently dropped to fifth in the rankings after a brief stint at No. 3. Heinonen said he could care less about where the team is ranked.

"If they think we're not that good, that's fine with me," he said. "The two teams that moved ahead of us — North Carolina State and Providence — I think we're better than both of them."

The heavy favorite in the meet is Villanova, who has been ranked No. 1 for the entire season.

After Villanova, it's anyone's race. Second-ranked Arkansas, who beat the Ducks earlier this season, will probably be the toughest obstacle for Oregon to overcome.

In order for the Ducks to finish higher than last year's fifth-place finish, its going to have to count on a strong performance from all of its runners, but especially from their fifth scorer.

The three runners who will be competing for that position will be freshmen Jill Callero and Jenna Carlson, and sophomore Sally Maier.

With all the pressure, Callero and Carlson are ready and excited to put in a good performance.

"I haven't had a race this season where I felt great," Carlson said. "I'm hoping nationals will be the race where I feel super."

Heinonen is optimistic that his top three runners will perform as well as they have all year. He said Nusrala, Karnopp and Woodward all could make All-American (a finish in the top 25).