

Ducks fly home for softball game

By Jayson Jacoby
Emerald Sports Reporter

Oh, how good home must look to the Oregon softball team right about now.

The Ducks — once ranked as high as 16th in the nation — are coming off a two-week road trip that saw them lose 12 of 14 games, including the last 10 straight.

Oregon (13-17 overall, 1-3 Pacific-10 Conference) returns to action this afternoon at Howe Field with a 1 p.m. doubleheader against rival Oregon State (9-12, 1-3).

Tami Brown, Oregon's head softball coach, said she's glad to be back home.

"Everyone ... learned a lot," she said. "What we did on that road trip was buy experience. Next time I think we'll react differently in those types of situations."

The Ducks started the road swing well enough, downing Southeast Louisiana 11-2 March 20 for their fourth straight win. But Oregon won just one of its next 13 games, a



Rachelle Taylor

5-0 victory over Texas-San Antonio March 21.

Part of Oregon's difficulty was the level of competition. During the trip the Ducks lost to fourth-ranked Fresno State, fifth-ranked UNLV — a team they beat 1-0 in the season opener Feb. 28 — and suffered two defeats at the hands of No. 20 Cal State Northridge.

Oregon hurt its chances for

wins with costly mistakes as well. The Ducks dropped a 3-2 decision to Western Illinois March 27 after scoring two runs in the bottom of the sixth inning to take a 2-1 lead into the final frame.

But Rachelle Taylor's wild pitch allowed the winning run to score, giving Oregon's sophomore hurler her seventh straight loss after a 6-3 start.

Brown said the pitching was what let the team down in the end, but she added that "we've worked hard on it this week and I think it will improve."

"It's up to the hitters to get runs and that makes the pitcher and the defense more comfortable, and then the defense has to play well to make the pitcher relax," Brown said.

The Ducks split a doubleheader with Oregon State March 14, the Beavers 3-2 win in the opening game being their first conference victory since 1989.

Oregon will travel to Portland Saturday for a 1 p.m. non-conference doubleheader against Portland State.

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Another deadly combination for the Ducks will be in the steeplechase, where seniors Rick Mestler, a three-time All-American, and Tye Van Schoiack return. Both runners scored at the NCAA meet a year ago, placing fifth and seventh, respectively.

Senior hurdler Bob Gray should also be a standout on the team this season. Gray owns the fastest automatic time in Oregon history in the 110 hurdles and was second in the event in the NCAAs last year. He should also compete in the 400 hurdles this spring.

Javelin thrower Art Skipper is the final returning NCAA scorer for the Ducks. The senior, who finished third at the NCAAs last season, has already thrown a provisional toss of 241-9, just a foot off his own school record.

Pat Haller will likely lead coach Bill Dellinger's dis-

stance corps. The senior won the Pac-10 title in the 10,000-meter run and competed at the NCAA meet.

Seniors Shannon Lemora scored in the 800 and Alan Foster in the 1,500 at the Pac-10 meet last season. Sophomore Coley Candaele will also help out in the middle distances.

Other returning Pac-10 scorers include senior Nick Anastasiades in the hammer throw, sophomore Todd Bleakney in the triple jump, Ronnie Harris and Devon Hoseny in the 400-meter relay, and LaVon Pierce and Bryan Walls in the 1600-meter relay.

Heath Howington will practice in both football and track this spring, but the sophomore should be the Ducks' most solid performer in the shot and discus.

The schedule seems to favor Oregon this season. Following Saturday's dual meet at Washington, the Ducks will compete at home for the rest of the season.

Oregon rugby gears up for playoffs

By Steve Mims
Emerald Contributor

It's playoff time for the Oregon rugby team, as the Ducks face Southern Oregon on Saturday with the winner advancing to the regional championship.

"I like our chances; they're beatable," said coach Bob Snyder. "We can certainly beat them."

Oregon finished second in the Northwest League with a 3-2 record, qualifying for post-season play.

Southern Oregon has recently recruited several members of the football team to join their squad, so Snyder expects a big team but doesn't know how smart the Raiders will play.

The Ducks are currently suffering from injuries to Sean Morris and Brad Nelson but should have the depth to make up for it.

Oregon will rely on a strong performance from the front line of Bob Pierce, Ian Williams and Steve Knaust. That line, considered by many to

be the best in the league, will be counted on to counter-balance the big Southern Oregon line.

Saturday's game kicks off at 11:30 at Southbank Field, with the winner advancing to the West Coast Championships in Los Angeles.

In other Oregon Club Sports news:

- The Oregon men's club soccer team jumps back into action with two games this weekend. Friday the Ducks travel to Corvallis to face Oregon State, followed by a home game against Willamette on Sunday at 1 p.m. at Southbank Field.

The spring season is a preparation for the fall, head coach Mike King said. The Ducks will play 10 games during the spring against other universities and community colleges.

Oregon lost a couple of players to graduation, the most important of whom was Skip Weintraub, the team's leading scorer in the fall. The core of the lineup is back, led by Andy Gagnier, who led the Ducks in scoring during the indoor season.

"We looked good during tryouts; I was impressed," King said. "I expect good things."

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