

Ducks' leading golfer is shooting for the stars

By Steve Mims
Emerald Contributor

When Jeff Lyons was 15 years old, he had to choose between playing golf or baseball. He picked golf and neither he nor the Oregon Ducks are disappointed with the choice.

Lyons, a native of Antioch, Calif., has become the top golfer on the Oregon squad by winning two tournaments and finishing in the top five in four other tournaments this year.

The junior was recruited by many colleges after a standout high school career at Antioch High School. He helped lead his team to the Northern California championship with a sixth-place finish his junior year followed with a third-place finish his senior year. Lyons was a three-time all-league selection and was twice named to the all-state team.

Lyons signed with Arizona after high school but transferred to San Joaquin Delta Community College after deciding that he would not play immediately for the Wildcats. After leading Delta to the league title and winning team MVP honors, Lyons signed with Oregon.

Lyons was second on the team last spring with a 74.7 scoring average and finished in the top 15 at three tournaments.

This fall, Lyons got off to a good start when he finished fourth in two tournaments and third in another. However, that would only be the start to a sensational spring season.

Lyons won his first college tournament in March at the Duck Invitational. He led

the tournament by only one stroke heading into the final round but shot a third-round 69 to win the event by four strokes.

His next victory came at the Southwest Intercollegiate earlier this month, a win that Lyons calls the highlight of his career. He beat Arkansas All-American Dean Pappas for the victory.

"I played bad there last year and wanted to do better this time," Lyons said. "I played the final round with the leaders and shot a 70 to beat Dean."

Lyons almost made it a hat trick this season when he finished second at the Western Intercollegiate two weeks ago. He is still looking for his third victory of the year and hopes to get it in the post-season.

"I want to win the Pac-10 championship," Lyons said. "It is a high goal, but I have to set my goals high; they have to be tough to reach. I don't like top five as a goal. I want to be the best."

Jeff knows that a good postseason could vault him into All-American contention, a goal he has had for two years. His scoring average this year is 72.33, but if his only poor finish at Hawaii is thrown out, that average would fall to 71.33.

"Jeff has carried us during the last four tournaments," senior Mark Aldrich said. "He is playing as well as anyone in the country."

The strength of Lyons' game is his short game, especially putting. When talking about his weaknesses, Jeff is confident but not cocky in his approach.



Jeff Lyons

"I don't have any weaknesses," Lyons said. "I try to keep everything strong."

Lyons hopes to play on the PGA Tour after his college career ends, but he knows it will be tough to make it. For a player to join the tour, he must first pay \$5,000 to attend qualifying school, and from there he has to finish well in three tournaments before he gets his playing card.

Lyons will next lead the Ducks into action this weekend at the U.S. Intercollegiate at Palo Alto, Calif. It is a big tournament for the Ducks as they will compete against Arizona, Stanford and Fresno State, three of the top teams on the West Coast.

Jeff is confident about the Ducks'

chances but said, "We have a great team, but some people don't put forth the effort."

Oregon's team performance is important for Lyons' individual goals; for Lyons to gain postseason awards, his team will probably have to compete in the regional and NCAA championships. The Ducks must finish near the top at the Pacific-10 Conference Championships in order to advance further in the season.

Oregon qualified this week for the final two spots on the squad for this weekend's tournament. Aldrich shot the lowest rounds and is confident that he and the rest of the team will be ready to play.

"Considering I won earlier in the year, if I put everything together I can win again," Aldrich said. "If there is one team in the tournament that thinks they can beat us, it is Arizona, but we know we can beat them."

As well as he is playing, Lyons feels his game still needs improvement.

"I am not playing as good as I should," Lyons said. "I am just consistent. I take my bad rounds in stride with the good ones."

The thought of Lyons' game improving is scary for the rest of college golf, but he has no doubts that his golf career is just beginning.

"I can accomplish anything. I have the talent to do that," Lyons said. "Hopefully I will make All-American this year and then player of the year next season. Come to think of it, I can be player of the year this season."

Women's golf to face tough struggle in strong Pac-10 field

By Steve Mims
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The Oregon women's golf team will face its toughest competition all year at the Pacific-10 Conference Championships in Tempe, Ariz., beginning today.

The Pac-10 is considered by most golf observers to be the toughest women's conference in the country. Five teams from the conference are included among the nation's top 11

teams, with Arizona on top of the polls.

Oregon head coach Renee Baumgartner knows how tough the field is and has set the team's goals accordingly.

"I think top five is realistic," Baumgartner said. "It would be a great way to end the season."

The Ducks, currently ranked 46th in the country, are coming off an impressive showing at the Oregon State/Nike Invitational, where their two teams finished first and fourth. Baum-

gartner said the first team's score in the final two rounds was a school record for lowest team total over 36 holes.

Oregon will take youth and veteran leadership along this weekend as the five-woman squad includes two seniors, one junior and two freshmen. The two seniors are Beth Manczak and Leigh Hornung, who will both be playing their final college team tournament.

Hornung could qualify for the national championship

with a strong showing this weekend. Baumgartner said Hornung needs to shoot "three 77s or better to advance" to the NCAA Championships.

Junior Shannon Maier and freshmen Shannon Hare and Karly Mills will fill out the squad.

Top-ranked Arizona is the favorite to win the conference title, and even Baumgartner concedes that "Arizona will probably walk away with it." The Wildcats have won six of the

seven tournaments they entered this year and finished second in the other.

Arizona has the nation's top player in sophomore Annika Sorenstam, who finished second in last year's conference championship before going on to win the NCAA title.

The tournament gets under way this morning and continues through Sunday at Karsten Golf Course, the same course where NCAA Championships will take place in late May.

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