

Pair to play last games Saturday

By Jayson Jacoby
Emerald Sports Reporter

They don't look at all like sisters, but spend five minutes talking with Tracey Simmons and Kim Manning and you'll be convinced they're related.

The two started playing softball together in the fifth grade, and this weekend they'll take the field for the last time as teammates when the Ducks close out their season at home with two double-headers.

Oregon will start with a 2:30 twin bill this afternoon against Sacramento State at Howe Field, followed by an 11:00 a.m. doubleheader Saturday against third-ranked California.

By the time Simmons and Manning reached Roseburg High School, both had advanced enough to play on the varsity as freshmen.

"That was the point where it became more than just recreational," Simmons said. "I think that was the big turning point."

The Roseburg coach at the time, Ed Eaton, said he had watched the pair before they reached high school and wasn't surprised at their success.

"They'd played a lot of summer league ball," Eaton said. "They looked like they had the skills and the background."

Eaton said both showed a rare competitive streak even at that age.

"They're both highly competitive people," he said. "I imagine they're competitive at the dinner table. They have great talent for leadership, both of them."

After standout careers, both enrolled at Oregon in 1988.

"I think we both wanted to play in Oregon," Simmons said. "We wanted to stay near our families."

The pair said the strong relationship they formed while growing up played an important role in their decisions, as well.

"We've always fought like sisters," Simmons said. "But we've always come out of it like sisters, too. I think it meant a lot to us to play together."

It didn't take long for each to make a major impact on the Oregon softball program.

Manning hit .324 as a freshman, drove in 30 runs and set a school record with 19 stolen bases. She was named to the all-Pacific-10 Conference first team and was a second-team all-American.

"When I first got here I didn't expect to play," Manning said. "I think that was why I was so successful. There were no expectations of me, and I was just relaxed and I just played like there was nothing to lose."

Simmons hit .245, drove in 17 runs and com-

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mitted only four errors.

"When I look back at my freshman year in college it reminds me of my freshman year in high school," she said. "There's no way I expected to play as a freshman in high school, and we both did."

Eaton said he wasn't surprised his former stars stepped right in at the NCAA level.

"Whatever the challenge, they're going to get there," he said. "The higher the competition level, the harder they go."

Manning suffered through a slump her sophomore season, when she batted .206. She's hitting a career-best .378 this year.

"Like I said, I didn't have any expectations my freshman year. My sophomore year I felt like I had to do just as good as the year before or I would get cut or whatever. I put so much pressure on myself."

"It's hard when everyone is saying you're batting 60 points under what you did last year," said Simmons, who batted a career-high .292 her sophomore season. "Everyone's concerned about it and then you're concerned about it. All you want to do every time you go up there is get a hit."

"You're thinking that," Manning adds. "And then you don't do it."

Despite having a storybook feel, neither of their careers has been without hardship.

Simmons underwent surgery on her throwing shoulder once in high school and again after her freshman year at Oregon. And Manning's father passed away while she was in high school. One of her few regrets is that he missed her success at Oregon.

"I think about that a lot," she said. "I try to do things that I think he would want me to do. I wish to God he could be here, because I think he would be really proud of me."

Then Manning shows how close her friendship with Simmons has been through the years. "And her too," she said, nodding at her friend.

No, Tracey Simmons and Kim Manning aren't related. But they sure are good at it. After all, they've been practicing for years.

Golfers ready for Pac-10 showdown

By Steve Mims
Emerald Contributor

Two favorites, three top contenders and five spoilers make up the field for the Pacific-10 Conference Men's Golf Championship in Corvallis today.

Top-ranked Arizona State and No. 3 Arizona are the clear favorites for the 72-hole tournament, which tees off this morning at Trysting Tree Golf Course and continues through Sunday. The Wildcats and Sun Devils have finished in first and second at each of the past three championships, with Arizona winning last season.

Oregon, ranked 30th in the country, is one of the top contenders in the field, and the Ducks feel they are ready for a run at their first ever conference title.

"I think we'll do well," Oregon junior Jeff Lyons said. "Everyone is practicing hard and hitting the ball good."

One advantage the Ducks have over the Arizona schools is course familiarity. Oregon played in tournaments at Trysting Tree in 1990 and 1991, but Arizona and Arizona State have never seen the course.

"We have always played the course well," Oregon head coach Shawn Aicher said. "We won the Oregon State tournament two years in a row."

The Duck's six-man squad is led by Lyons, who has placed in the top five at four of his last five tournaments. The conference championship is a big tournament for Lyons because it gives him a

chance to play against some of the top players.

"I'm in elite company this weekend because there are going to be a lot of good players in the tournament," Lyons said. "I have to play some career rounds to win."

After Lyons, the Ducks need seniors Mark Aldrich, Doug DuChateau, James Chrisman and Troy Tamiya to step up and make sure it is not the final tournament of their career. Walk-on Randy McCracken will fill the final spot for the Ducks.

USC and 19th-ranked Stanford are the other top contenders in the field who will be trying to pull off the upset.

"We have to putt if we want to be in contention," Cardinal head coach Wally Goodwin said. "Putting is a mental frustration that can grow on you, but we feel if we had putted better, we could have won a few tournaments."

The individual race will include three of the top five amateur golfers in the country.

The favorite to win is two-time Pac-10 Golfer of the Year Phil Mickelson, the top-ranked amateur in the country who has already won a PGA Tour event and is considered by many to be golf's next superstar. Mickelson won the conference title in 1990.

Arizona's Manny Zerman and David Berganio should also be near the top of the leader board. Zerman won last season's conference title and is looking to become the first player to win back-to-back titles in over 20 years.

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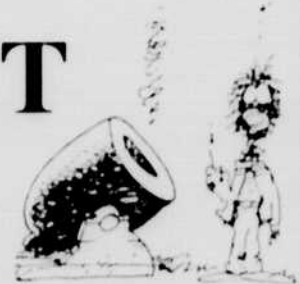
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Oscar the Freshman



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