

Duck runners look for leader

By Dave Charbonneau

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Tom Heinonen hasn't had to worry for a long time.

The Oregon women's cross country coach has consistently had at least one — and sometimes two or three — of the top runners in the Pacific-10 Conference.

In the late 1980s, Stephanie Wessell and Liz Wilson were mainstays at the top in virtually every meet. Then it was the trio of Nicole Woodward, Lucy Nusrala and Lisa Karnopp who led the Ducks into the 1990s.

Woodward's graduation in the spring marked the end of that crew, and thus an era of Oregon cross country.

Heinonen is not sure who's on deck to continue the tradition of dominating Duck runners. But as he sees it, he has nothing to worry about and has every reason to believe this year's group will be able to successfully defend last year's Pac-10 title.

"I don't know if we have a front runner or not," Heinonen said. "The important thing is that we have four of our top seven runners returning from last season, and they're healthy."

The one setback could be that the fifth (and possibly most talented) of the top seven returnees, Heidi Van Borkulo, is nursing an injured hip and it's still questionable just how solid she will be able to perform this season, especially early on.

Van Borkulo is coming off of a second-place finish at the 1993 Pac-10 Track and Field Championships in the 10,000 meters, finished last year's cross country season with an eighth place at Pac-10s, a fifth at district and finished 61st at the NCAA meet, all in her freshman season.

"Heidi is our strongest returning athlete," Heinonen said. "We definitely won't be as good if she isn't able to run at full strength."

If that is indeed the case, the weight of the season will rest on the shoulders of juniors Jill Callero and Jenna Carlson, senior Joni Wareham and sophomore Niamh Zwagerman.

"Those four have all had their best summers as far as training goes," Heinonen said. "We will be relying heavily on them to carry us this season."

But a little help would be nice, and Heinonen is confident the new blood he's brought in will fill



Oregon will try to find a top runner to replace past stars (from left) Lucy Nusrala, Liz Wilson, Lisa Karnopp and Nicole Woodward.

that need.

Freshman Milena Glusac and sophomore Melody Fairchild are the most likely candidates to make an instant impact on the team.

Glusac won the California state championship in both the 1,600 and the 3,200 in high school and took second at the national cross country meet.

"Milena has been around the block, and competed against the best of them," Heinonen said. "There's no question she can step in right away for us and contribute. We just have to wait and see to what capacity she's able to help us."

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