

Strong performances highlight Duck meet

By Scott Simonson
Oregon Daily Emerald

The marquee names helped bring the fans to the Oregon Invitational. The Oregon track teams helped bring the fans to their feet.

Names familiar to Oregon track fans performed solidly at Hayward Field on Saturday. Maria Mutola, Art Skipper, Danny Lopez and Muhammad Oliver won events. However, the Oregon track teams helped create many of the competition's closest and most exciting races.

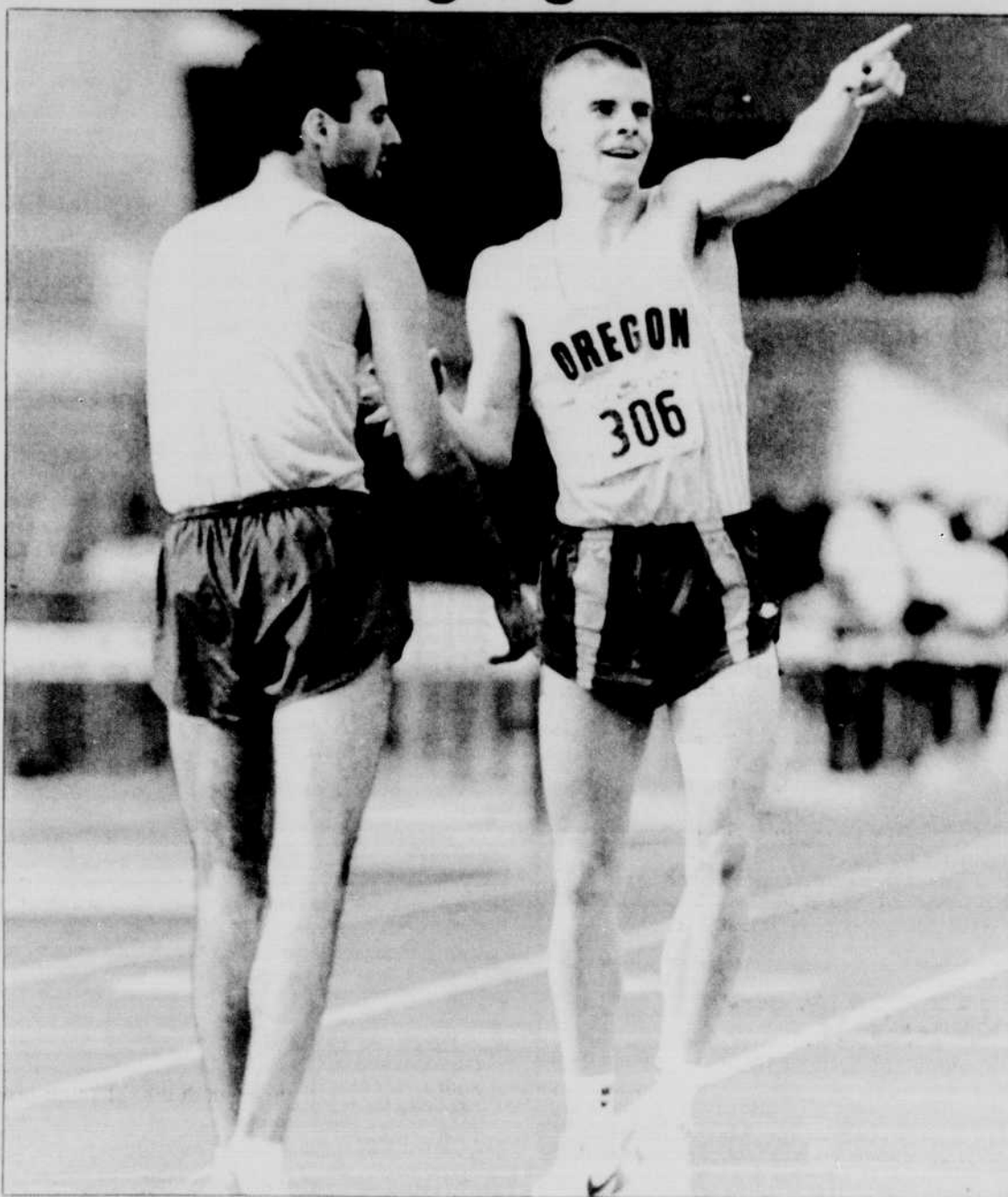
Close races produced some impressive times. Three athletes on the Oregon men's team surpassed NCAA provisional qualifying marks. On the women's team, Milena Glusac did likewise.

Oregon's Gordon Johnson overhauled teammate Scott Nicholas on the final lap to win the 1,500 meters. Johnson won in a time of three minutes, 41.52 seconds, a time that beat the NCAA provisional qualifying standard. Johnson, whose best times had come at 800 meters, improved on his previous personal best by more than seven seconds and was only .12 seconds from reaching the NCAA automatic qualifying standard.

Nicholas finished second with 3:43.84, also below the provisional mark. Nicholas already had beaten the provisional standard earlier in the season.

Johnson and Nicholas said they looked at the clock as they came down the home stretch. Both thought what they saw on the clock was a mistake by the timer.

"It seemed that from about two-and-a-half laps out, I was



Oregon's Scott Nicholas, right, points to the scoreboard after teammate Gordon Johnson set a PR in winning the 1,500 at Saturday's Oregon Invitational.

MICHAEL SHINDLER/Emerald

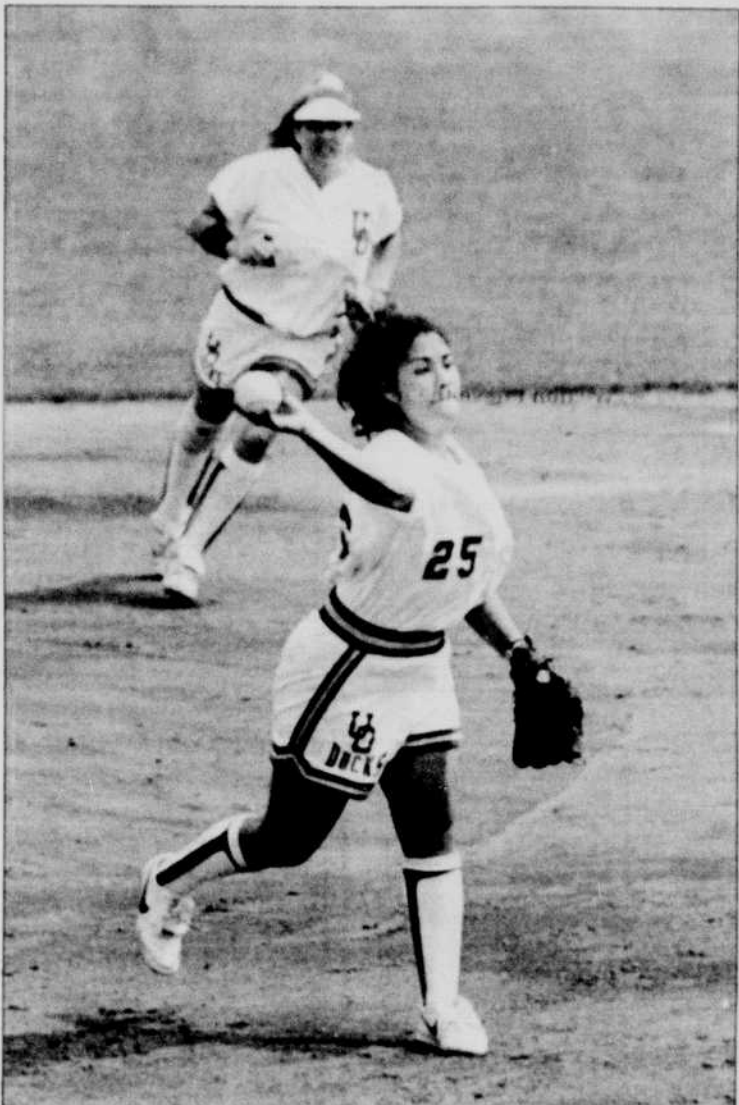
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Oregon third baseman Trina Salcido makes a play in the Ducks' double header sweep of California Saturday at Howe Field.

MARK McTYRE/for the Emerald

Schmidt's home run gives Ducks a sweep

By Steve Mims
Oregon Daily Emerald

The Oregon softball team got two strong pitching performances as well as a pair of two-run home runs on the way to sweeping 10th-ranked California in a doubleheader at Howe Field Saturday.

The sweep was a major statement by the Ducks, who are looking to advance to postseason play for the first time in four years.

"It's huge," Oregon head coach Tami Brown said. "This is going to have a huge effect on us, beating Cal three out of four times this year. It shows what type of team we're building. Sweeping Cal is not a fluke."

The 15th-ranked Ducks (22-12 overall, 8-4 in the Pacific-10 Conference) got big pitching performances from senior Rachelle Taylor and freshman Barbie Hickson, but would have had to settle for a split of the two games if not for catcher Laura Schmidt. Schmidt came up in the bottom of the 10th inning of the second game with the scenario that every kid dreams about: her team trailing by one, with a runner on base, two outs and two strikes.

California (32-17, 6-10) pitcher Anne Walsh had Schmidt,

Oregon's biggest power threat, in an 0-2 hole, but Schmidt was patient and three pitches later she drilled the ball deep over the wall in left-center field. From the moment the ball went off the bat there was no doubt the ball was gone, and Oregon had a 3-2 victory and doubleheader sweep.

"(Walsh) had been throwing me a curveball all day and I thought if she gave me something over the plate, I'd go with it," Schmidt said. "Honestly, I was thinking about (a home run)."

Brown knew she had the right batter up at the right time.

"It's nice to have her up in that spot," the coach said. "It was nice that Laura did that, she deserves that."

Schmidt was able to win it in the 10th inning thanks to a miraculous recovery and pitching performance by Hickson. Hickson, who hadn't pitched since suffering a stress fracture in her shins more than a month ago, pitched 10 innings, allowing seven hits and two unearned runs to go along with 10 strikeouts.

"We didn't know how many innings Barbie could pitch," Brown said. "As the game went

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