

Opinions vary on playoff pairings

By Steve Mims
Oregon Daily Emerald

Oregon head softball coach Tami Brown would rather be playing somewhere back east. California head coach Diane Ninemire is just happy to still be playing.

Such is the range of emotions that resulted when the NCAA revealed its brackets for the eight regional tournaments Sunday. This year 32 teams advanced to regionals, 12 more than in past years, and teams were unsure how the NCAA would divide up the excess spots.

Brown admitted before last week's doubleheader split with UCLA that "I think we are in regionals, but that's just a guess. A lot of politics goes into the selection process."

There were questions about whether the NCAA would put more of an emphasis on record, location or other factors. When the brackets were announced, it seemed to be a combination of all factors that led to the separation of different regions.

The NCAA took into consideration travel expense by trying to keep most teams close to home. For example, Region 8 games in Bloomington, Ind., feature DePaul, Illinois-Chicago, Notre Dame and Indiana. However, UCLA was sent to Columbia, S.C., to be the No. 1 seed, where it could face local favorites South Carolina and Georgia St.

Meanwhile, Oregon will head down Interstate 5 to face Fresno, where it will meet up with host Fresno St. and neighboring California, along with Central Michigan. The Ducks open the postseason Friday against the Golden Bears, a team they've already faced four times this year, and could meet Fresno State, a team they opened the season against, down the line.

"I would like to be in the midwest or back east," Brown said. "Being in a region with California is kind of weird. I wish they'd split us all up, but it's almost impossible to do."

Brown was thankful to have avoided a region with No. 1 Arizona, and her team let out simultaneous applause at the pairings party when the Wildcats, Cal State Northridge and UCLA were

sent elsewhere.

"To be totally honest, I didn't want to go to Arizona or UCLA," Brown said.

Ninemire said she didn't care where her team was sent or who they played.

"It doesn't really matter who we play," Ninemire said. "I'm just happy to have the opportunity to be in regionals."

Reaction was split among Oregon players, but all agreed they were just happy to be part of the postseason for the first time in their careers.

"We were kind of wanting to go to Indiana, that would have been nice," Oregon pitcher Rachelle Taylor said. "But I was just wanting our name to be up there and it was."

"I'm glad we're going to Fresno because it's close for us," Oregon right fielder Kim Kampfer said.

There are also different opinions about teams that played in the regular season being matched up again at regionals. Some people see it as an advantage to know the opponent; others say it can work against a team. Some players would rather venture away from home to see new parts of the country, but most Oregon players thought their experience against Cal, whom they beat in three of four meetings, would be an advantage.

"It's great to know what to expect," Kampfer said. "We know what they have and what they don't have and what to practice this week."

"It's going to be good for us because we played Cal and Fresno," Oregon first baseman Rose Imbriano said. "We know what were up against."

Brown took a different opinion.

"I'd like to get some new competition instead of these teams we've already faced," she said. "But we've only faced Fresno State once and played Cal only in the Pac-10, so that's it. We're in this to play, so we might as well play the best."

Ninemire said she believed location was the key to California's destination but believed it was different for Oregon.

"No matter where Oregon went, they were going to have to fly," Ninemire said. "For us, I think one factor was that we are within driving distance of Fresno."

Men's track seeks NCAA qualifiers

By Scott Simonson
Oregon Daily Emerald

For athletes on the Oregon men's track team, it's the time of the year when being among the best in the nation is no longer good enough.

Oregon has six athletes ranked on provisional qualifying lists for the NCAA championships in Boise, Idaho, June 1-4. However, a provisional qualifying mark doesn't ensure an athlete a trip to the national championships.

After the NCAA invites everyone who has met its automatic qualifying standard for the big meets, it looks down the list and invites the best provisional qualifiers to fill out the field.

Not all provisional qualifiers get to go. As a result, five of Oregon's six NCAA provisional qualifiers may have to improve their marks in the last two weeks of the season in order to qualify for the NCAAAs.

Gordon Johnson is Oregon's strongest candidate for a berth at the NCAA meet. His time of 3:41.53 at 1,500 meters is better than the times of 13 runners who qualified for the national championships last year.

Bad weather at last week-end's Pacific-10 Conference decathlon championship prevented Ray Livingston from

improving his provisional qualifier. The sophomore will have to wait to see whether his total of 7,194 points will be good enough to send him to Boise.

For four other Oregon athletes, this weekend's Pac-10 championships and next Wednesday's Martin Hawkins Open give them two more chances for improvement.

Karl Keska has a provisional qualifier at 5,000 meters. The last time Keska checked, he was ranked between 10th and 15th in the nation. Some of the athletes ranked ahead of him will probably opt to run the 10,000 meters, Keska said, and should improve his chances of making the field in the 5,000.

Keska said he knows he's capable of running a faster time with the right field. The Pac-10s provides a competitive field, but the races don't normally provide times that are as fast as in the regular season.

"I don't feel they're as fast. They tend to be tactical races. I've got to think of it as being a race that's important to win," he said. "Of course nationals are my major goal for this year ... (but) the team is trying to score as many points as possible."

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