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— Oregon Daily Emerald Sports —

Ducks hope success against Cal holds up

By Steve Mims
Oregon Daily Emerald

Oregon softball coach Tami Brown's most important responsibility this week may be to get her best team on the plane to Fresno, Calif. for regionals. That's the team that beat California in three of four matchups this year, not the one that was beaten 10-0 in five innings at Berkeley.

"We've had confidence against Cal," Oregon first baseman Rose Imbriano said. "Even when we lost to them, we know we shouldn't have. They beat us pretty bad, but that wasn't us that played that day."

After Cal shutout Oregon in the first game of a doubleheader in Berkeley, Calif. in March, the Ducks came back to win the final three matchups between the two teams. First, Oregon earned a split of the doubleheader at Cal with a 1-0 win in the nightcap.

Then last month the Ducks pulled off a sweep of the Golden Bears, who were ranked No. 10 at the time, by scores of 2-0 and 3-2. Oregon won the second game of the doubleheader when catcher Laura Schmidt hit a two-out, two-run home run in the bottom of the 10th inning.

"In the two wins up here we had excellent clutch plays like Laura hitting the home run," Brown said this week. "I thought we played very well. We played errorless softball against them here, and it's going to take that to beat them again."

Oregon, 35-21 and ranked 14th in the nation, and Cal (39-19) open the Region 6 action in Fresno this afternoon at 1 p.m., followed by No. 1 seed Fresno State (45-14) against Central Michigan (32-22) at 3 p.m. Play continues in the double-elimination tournament until a champion is crowned Sunday and advances to next week's College World Series in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Although the previous four matchups between Oregon and California is an interesting study in contrast, both coaches say they will pay little attention to what happened in the regular season.

"In postseason people rise up, so it's going to be a brand new season," Brown said. "I think we're peaking and that's the key, to peak at the right time."

California coach Diane Nine-mire said the 16th-ranked Golden Bears are confident and not dwelling on their 1-3 mark against the Ducks.

"When you get to regionals, it doesn't matter if you are 50-2 or 30-30," she said. "At regionals

the team that puts it all together will advance."

Offensively, Oregon and Cal are similar statistically and in terms of personnel. Cal holds a slight advantage over Oregon in batting average (.274-.270), extra base hits (82-80) and runs (229-219).

Each team looks to their shortstop and catcher to get the offense on track. California boasts first-team all-Pacific-10 Conference selections Kendall Richards and Gillian Boxx at those slots, respectively. Richards hit .425 with a team-high seven home runs this season, while Boxx leads the team with 42 RBI's to go along with a .374 batting average.

Oregon will look to offset the Golden Bears with their own shortstop-catcher duo of Kathy Stahl and Laura Schmidt. Oregon's hitting has improved late in the season, and Oregon gained confidence by racking up eight hits against Arizona's Susie Parra and five off UCLA's DeeDee Weiman, two of the nation's top pitchers.

"If our hitters hit the way we can, yes, we can play with the best because we hit DeeDee Weiman and that wasn't a fluke," Brown said. "It was a well-earned game. If we make things happen and put pressure on people, we'll do fine."

The favorite at the regional will be sixth-ranked Fresno State, one of only two teams to have competed in every NCAA Division I Women's Softball Championship tournament. The Ducks lost to the Bulldogs 3-2 in eight innings in their season opener this year. That win for Fresno State ran its all-time record against Oregon up to 23-1.

"Fresno State is going to be an excellent team," Brown said. "Our first game against them this year was a well-fought battle. They have a good lineup, a young lineup, but a very talented one. They have a lot of speed, but also good power."

"We need to feed their weaknesses and that's hard because they don't have that many weaknesses."

Infielder Kim Mahar paces the Bulldogs offense with a .435 batting average and 50 runs. Fresno State's offense hit .318 with 30 home runs during the season. On the mound, junior Maureen Brady should see most of the action after compiling a 32-9 record and a 1.03 ERA.

The longshot at the regional is Central Michigan from the Mid-American Athletic Conference. The Chippewas hit .274 while their pitchers gave up an average of two earned runs per game.

Snavelly tied for 44th

Oregon's Ted Snavelly shot a 2-over-par 74 to join a nine-way tie for 44th place after one round at the NCAA West Regional at the Tucson National Golf Club in Tucson, Ariz.

Playing as an individual, Snavelly must register one of the lowest two scores among players whose team's don't qualify for the NCAA Championship to

advance to the NCAA tournament.

UNLV holds a two-stroke lead over Fresno State at 279 in the team race after round one Thursday. Fresno State's Joe Acosta grabbed the individual lead with a 7-under-par 65.

Play continues with 18 holes today and Saturday.