

Drake Relays next hurdle for Oregon's track athletes

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The Drake Relays provides another ultimate test of teamwork and ability for Oregon as it enters the twilight of the track and field season today and Saturday.

The women's team will take part in the 86th annual prestigious event without a full complement of athletes.

Regardless, the Ducks' desire to build on last week's outstanding efforts in the Pepsi Invitational should be enough to carry the depleted squad in their efforts.

"I don't think we've ever performed that hard and well and yet come up short in so many races and events," said Oregon women's head track and field coach Tom Heinonen, about the Pepsi meet. "The Drake Relays are going to be good for us because it will give us chances to run people in relays only."

Heinonen will accompany 15 of Oregon's select female athletes to Des Moines to compete in the two-day meet.

Attention for the Ducks will be placed primarily on the relay events, as their sprinters in the 4x100 and 4x400-relay quartets will attempt to better their NCAA provisional qualifying marks.

Oregon's Tonia Brewer will be competing in the Drake Relays for the third year in a row while Jenna Carlson, Nicole Commissiong, Christie Engesser, Jamila Godfrey, Kelsey Stellick and Nilka Thomas all will be returning for the second time. Camara Jones, LaReina Woods, Kaarin Knudson, Melody Fairchild and Tamara Schurch will also be on hand.

Missing from the usual Ducks'

contingent will be Sara Jessie. The Pacific-10 Conference triple jump leader will be forced to remain in Eugene with a badly bruised heel.

The Drake Relays also includes 17 athletes from the Oregon men's team, competing not only against Olympians Carl Lewis, Danny Harris and Steve Lewis, but tough teams from Eastern Michigan, Baylor, Arizona and Georgetown.

Led by freshman sprinter Pat Johnson, the Oregon contingent includes last year's winning 4x1,600-meter relay team composed of juniors Scott Nicholas, Karl Keska and Rick Cantwell, as well as sophomore Ben Andrews, who wasn't a part of the race last year. Also competing are senior Sol Sollos, who will run in the 400-meter hurdles, junior decathlete Ray Livingston and freshman steeplechase entrant Rob Aubrey. Nicholas will also compete with freshman Matt Davis in the 1,500-meter race.

The Ducks' field event entrants will be senior Dan Zorich in the discus, sophomore Dusty Carlson in the shot put and junior Jim Lile in the javelin. In addition, Zorich and sophomore Jeremy Robinson will compete in the hammer, and sophomore Chris Nelson will compete in the high jump.

Johnson will compete in the 100-meter sprint on Friday, a race that will include Lewis, the defending Drake champion in the event, as well as Sam Jefferson, the NCAA champion last spring. On Saturday, Johnson will compete in the distance medley relay along with three of the 4x1,600 relay entrants, probably Nicholas, Cantwell and Andrews. The Ducks took second place in the race last year.



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