

Oregon tennis to face tough Arizona teams

■ **MEN:** Oregon's leading player returns to court after being sidelined with an injury

By Joel Hood
Freelance Sports Reporter

When you're one of the second-tier men's tennis teams in the Pacific-10 Conference, the conference schedule is less about competition and more about survival. With four schools currently ranked among the nation's top 20 and four more in the top 50, Oregon's pathway to a conference title could hit a few snags.

The Ducks (2-1 overall, 0-1 Pac-10) can pull themselves back into the race with road wins over 17th-

ranked Arizona on Friday and Arizona State on Sunday.

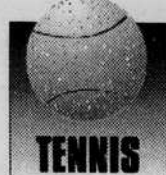
"Arizona is one of the best teams in the country, and they always play tough at home," head coach Chris Russell said. "We're going to try to take that [their home court advantage] away this weekend."

Despite a loss to Washington in the conference opener on Jan. 17, Oregon coaches remain confident, in part because Oregon will be at full strength this weekend for the first time all season.

"We played Washington real tough and were in almost every match," Russell said. "It's going to help us having our No. 1 guy

(Dougal Williams) back."

Williams, a senior, is back after an injury sidelined him for the team's first three matches of the season.



Williams will play in the No. 1 spot in singles and pair with junior Carlos Navarro on the No. 1 doubles team.

"Williams is an important guy for us to have out there," Russell said. "We're a lot better team, we're a lot deeper. He raises the level of performance for this team — he also raises the level of ex-

pectations." Oregon will return home next weekend for matches against Portland on Feb. 14 and UC Santa Barbara on Feb. 16.

— Chris Russell
head coach

Rugby team to battle for respect in Northwest

■ **TOURNAMENT:** The Oregon club rugby team will face the top teams in the Northwest this weekend

By Alex Pond
Freelance Sports Reporter

Looking to establish itself as one of the elite teams in the Northwest, the Oregon club rugby team will compete in the Pacific Northwest Rugby Tournament on Saturday in Portland.

"This tournament is critical because the outcome determines our standing in the Northwest," said student coordinator Alex Sroka.

The round robin tournament features Oregon State, Washington, Washington State, Victoria, Reed, Lewis and Clark, Evergreen and Oregon.

With Oregon State being at the top of Pacific Northwest rugby the past six seasons, Sroka said the Beavers are the favorite to win the tournament.



"They are a team we really want to beat," he said.

Sroka said Victoria and Washington will also be teams to watch this weekend.

"Victoria plays top-notch rugby," he said. "They are as good or better than [Oregon State]."

"Those three teams are the elite teams in the Northwest right now, and we want to shoot to the elite."

After struggling in recent years, Sroka thinks Oregon is now in a position to compete with the better teams.

"We've come a long way," he said. "Our

forwards are big and strong and match up with pretty much any of the scrums in the Northwest. Our back line also has come a long way. We have experienced players at every position."

— Alex Sroka
student coordinator

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Hockey will celebrate playoff berth against Idaho

■ **CLUB SPORTS:** Oregon hosts a two-game series against Idaho as a final tune-up for the Pac-8 Tournament later this month

By Alex Pond
Freelance Sports Reporter

The Oregon Club hockey team heads into a two-game series against Idaho this weekend, on an emotional high after learning this week that it has qualified for the Pacific-8 hockey conference tournament.

"I am so happy," assistant captain Robert Wasson said. "Last year, we were 7-17-2. We've really turned it around and have a chance to go 17-6-1 if we win both games against Idaho, which

would be a total flip-flop from last year."

Right now, though, the Ducks are 15-6-1 with reason to be confident against the Vandals. Oregon beat Idaho 7-3 on Nov. 2 in Spokane.

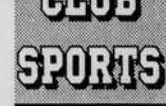
"They're kind of a rag-tag team," Wasson said. "They play kind of brutal, with lots of sticks and elbows."

Oregon will be using these games, which are at 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the Lane County Ice Arena, as a tune-up for the Pac-8 tournament on Feb. 22 and 23 at Disney Ice in Anaheim, Cal.

Although the Ducks felt confident they would make the tournament, it wasn't official until Wednesday, when the conference announced the top four teams

based on a complicated ranking system.

Stanford was ranked first with a Pac-8 record of 9-4, followed by California (7-6-2), Oregon (7-5-1) and Southern Cal (8-6).



Oregon will play Cal in the first game of the tournament, followed by Stanford vs. Southern Cal. The winners will meet for the championship the following day.

Wasson said the Ducks definitely deserve to be in the tournament and will be a force to be reckoned with.

"The guys have worked so hard, put so much sweat and money into this team," he said. "We've got a really good chance of

winning the tournament."

Making the Pac-8 tournament is a compliment to a program that has been building in recent years, and the impact should last beyond this season.

"Just being there is great exposure," Wasson said. "Being in the Pac-8 [tournament] makes us one of the top four teams in the west."

"I feel great about a team that grew from basically a recreational team about six years ago, to a team that is this school's equivalent of a varsity hockey team."

While it's great to be there, Wasson made it clear that the Ducks aren't satisfied with just making an appearance.

"The guys are excited, and we will take the whole team down," he said. "But we want to bring back a trophy."

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