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UO: Ducks still confident despite losses

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After a 4-0 start, the No. 20 Ducks (4-2 overall, 3-1 in Pac-10) have lost two straight matches to top-20 opponents: 21-18 two weeks ago against No. 17 Lock Haven and a disappointing 29-13 loss to rival Oregon State in Corvallis last Saturday.

But the Ducks have been able to put those losses out of their minds and are focused on this weekend's crucial homestand, head coach Ron Finley said.

"There's no question that this is an important weekend for us," Finley said. "I think the team was a little down after the losses, but they are ready to compete again. We need to get a win streak going and prepare ourselves for the final stretch."

Cal-State Bakersfield (5-1, 3-0) features the nation's top-ranked heavyweight, Stephen Neal, who has compiled a 21-0 record this season. Other key matchups will be at 134 and 178 pounds, where the Roadrunners feature two of the Pac-10's best in Mike Mendoza and Lionel Halsey.

However, the Ducks remain confident after an undefeated start to a tough fall schedule, Rich Polkinghorn said.

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Ron Finley
UO head coach

"We're just as confident as we were when we had that great start," Polkinghorn said. "We need to wrestle smart and hard and find a way to get ourselves back on the winning road."

As good as Cal-State Bakersfield is in the heavyweights, Fresno State is equally as strong in the lower weights.

Saturday's battle with the Bulldogs will match-up Oregon's John Taylor, who ranks first in the Pac-10 at 118 pounds, and Fresno State's Stephen Abas,

who ranks second in the country at that weight. Despite a knee injury that kept him out of the Ducks' first six matches this season, Taylor has climbed into the conference's top spot at 118 pounds.

"He'll probably be nursing the knee the rest of the season," Finley said. "But he wrestles hard and always gives us a great start. He really solidifies the lower half of our lineup and is capable of giving us extra points or major decisions."

The match-up will also feature the Bulldogs' Markese Nelson, a junior college All-American last season, against the Pac-10's third-ranked wrestler at 167 pounds, Kevin Keeney.

Oregon leads the Pac-10 with nine wrestlers ranked in the top four in their respective weight classes, which is two better than No. 6 Arizona State and three better than No. 18 Oregon State, according to the new conference rankings released this week.

Oregon returns to the road next Friday for a match with Brigham Young and two pivotal conference matches with Arizona State, the defending Pac-10 champ, and Boise State.

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