

Track: Sprinter needs to regain confidence

Continued from Page 7

a fifth-place individual finish in the Pac-10 400 and a third-place effort in the Canadian National Championships and Commissioning was racing through a stellar career.

Her third 100 meters on Saturday also went well, as did most of her junior season during which she won the Harry Ritchie Award as the top female scorer for Oregon and finished third at the Canadian Olympic Trials in both the 200 and 400.

But when she rounded the third turn and entered the final 100 meters at the Pepsi Invitational last week, Commissioning made a tactical error in her stride length that affected her entire race. Although the setback was merely mental, the timing eerily recalled the end of her junior campaign, when she began to feel a strange pain in her knee.

That pain, like the error on Saturday, ruined the final quarter of her career.

After first noticing the knee injury in July 1996, Commissioning spent the next few months frantically preparing for what she hoped would be an All-American senior campaign. The injury proved too much to overcome through conventional rehabilitation measures, though, and Commissioning elected to have surgery in December 1996 to relieve the pain of bone friction.

The procedure and subsequent arduous rehabilitation process forced Commissioning to sit out the entire 1997 track and field season, what should have been her fourth and final campaign for the Ducks.

But unlike her 400 meters at the Pepsi meet, Commissioning's race is not over. By using a medical redshirt option, she has been granted an extra 100 meters to prove her abilities to her teammates, her coaches and herself.

The challenges of returning from a year-long layoff are numerous. Although Commissioning believes her body to be in peak condition, the true test involves learning how to compete again and living up to the reputation she made for herself when healthy.

"A lot of people remember that I had a good year in '96, and then I vanished," Commissioning says. "I worked as hard as I have probably in my entire life last year, but you can't learn how to compete until you're out there doing it."

That process has hampered Commissioning's ability to reach the time standards she was setting as an underclassman.

"The hard part is being able to stay tuned in and focused and

Commissioning file



YEAR:
Senior Graduate Student
SIZE:
5-10
HOME:
Montreal, Quebec

CAREER NOTES:

■ **1998:** Recorded season best 54.81 for 400 meters at Stanford Invitational...ran season-best 24.32 for 200 meters against Washington State
■ **1997:** Missed season as medical redshirt after undergoing knee surgery in Dec. 1996
■ **1996:** Qualified for NCAA Championships at 400 meters...finished third at Canadian Olympic Trials in both 400 and 200 meters...Ritchie Award as Oregon's top female scorer
■ **1995:** Named All-American after anchoring Oregon's fifth-place 4x400-meter relay squad at NCAAs...ran leg on second-place 4x100 relay at Pacific-10 Conference Championships
■ **1994:** Competed in 100, 200 and 400 meters as a freshman...named to Pac-10 all-academic first team with 3.86 GPA

fearless, which I'm not yet and I used to be," she says.

Oregon assistant coach Mark Stream says Commissioning is technically fine but needs to regain that confidence.

"A lot of it is learning how to trust yourself again," Stream says.

When that happens, both Stream and Commissioning believe she can score valuable points at the Pac-10s and, hopefully, the NCAAs. Even more intriguing is Commissioning's goal of going back to the Canadian Olympic Trials and earning a spot as a 400 runner in Sydney for the 2000 Olympics, and possibly even the 2004 games.

Besides the 400, Commissioning is also an exceptional 200-meter runner for Oregon, and in essence the last two years of her career have resembled a sprint at that distance. After taking almost a full year off from running, Commissioning stepped back into the blocks last April, heard the starter's pistol fire once again, struggled to reach her top speed in rehab this past offseason season and is flying through that final, extra 100 meters in 1998.

Rob Moseley is a sports reporter for the Emerald.

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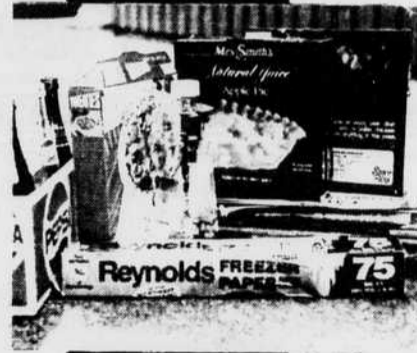
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