

Experience breeds expectations for Oregon golf squads

Both the Oregon men and women hope to return to the NCAAs

By Joel Hood
Oregon Daily Emerald

Rene Baumgartner knows what pressure is all about.

Two seasons ago, the Oregon women's golf team established a new benchmark for success with a seventh-place showing at the NCAA Championships — the highest national ranking in the history of the program.

"Last year we felt a ton of pressure after our break-through year in 1996," said Baumgartner, who enters her 10th year as head coach of the Ducks. "That's not something I'm going to miss."

After a disappointing 14th-place finish at the NCAAs last season, and after losing its scoring leader to graduation, Oregon's preseason expectations have come down a little in the eyes of the national media.

But not in the eyes of its coach. "It's just a different season for us," Baumgartner said. "Talent-wise we've got just as much or more as we've had the last two seasons. I feel very good about our chances this year."

So do her players. "We've all got high individual hopes for the season," Pam Sowden said. "I feel good about where this team is at. We're all excited to get the season started."

One big reason for the team's optimism is the addition of Claire Hunter, who begins her first season of Division 1-A competition after capturing the first-

ever junior college national championship a year ago.

"Everything is really new to me," said Hunter, who is a native of Scotland. "My only real goal is to qualify for the traveling team and play my best. I know that the competition is a lot higher than what I'm used to, but I feel like I'm ready for the jump."

With Hunter and a talented veteran corp of returning players that includes Jerilyn White, Karen Bristow, Sowden and sophomore Dawn Berry, Baumgartner said the Ducks' preseason No. 10 national ranking is a fair one.

"We lost a great player in Paula [Patterson]," Baumgartner said. "But I think we've got a chance for a couple more All-Americans on this team. Arizona, Arizona State and Stanford look like the Pac-10 front runners at this point, but I'd say we're right in there with them."

The women begin tournament play on Sept. 28 at the University of Portland Invitational in Aloha, Ore. The Ducks have also been invited to attend the prestigious National Intercollegiate Match Play Championships Oct. 31 through Nov. 2 in Vero Beach, Fla. It will mark the second straight year Oregon will be among the eight-team field that this year includes No. 1 Duke, No. 2 Arizona, No. 5 Southern California and five other nationally ranked schools.

The men's golf team finds itself in an unfamiliar role — one

of the early season favorites to challenge traditional Pac-10 powerhouses Arizona, Arizona State and UCLA for the conference title.

"I think it might be a surprise to others who don't know much about our program," redshirt-senior Jeff Barney said. "We're as good as any team in the conference. If we played in seven-person tournaments we could probably win every one."

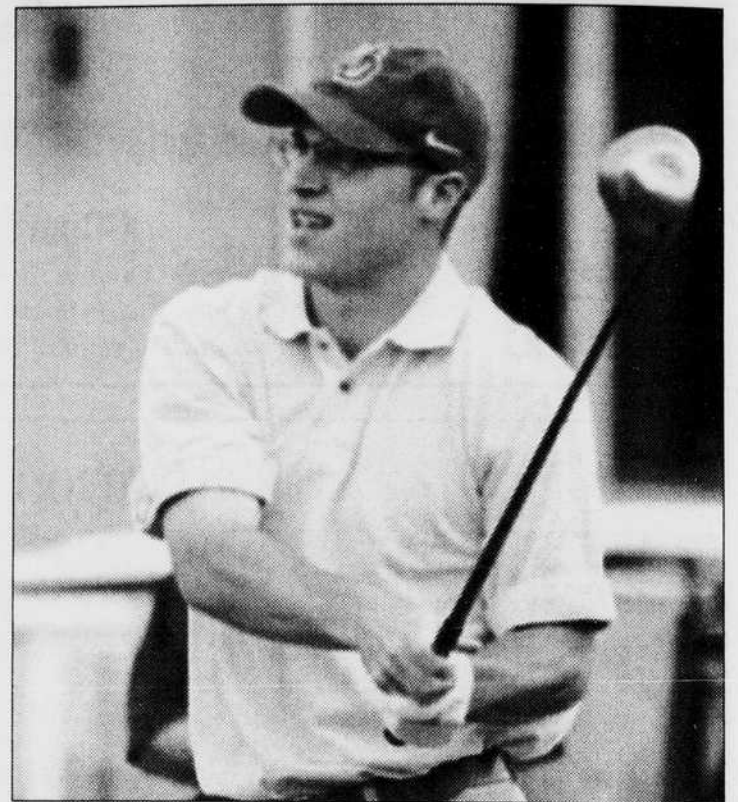
Barney returns after redshirting last season and is one of four key veterans that head coach Steve Nosler said he hopes can lead this team into the postseason.

Along with Barney, Oregon returns its scoring leader in senior Ben Crane, and veterans Derek Croskrey and Ryan Lavoie, each of whom competed at the NCAA Championships last June. Lavoie received second-team All-Pac-10 honors after registering a 73.6 scoring average during the regular season.

"We've had pretty deep teams the last couple of years," Nosler said. "But this one looks like it could be one of our best. With the people we have returning, I think that we have the potential to be very good."

Oregon begins its fall season on Sept. 21 at the Pacific Invitational in Copperopolis, Calif. The Ducks also host a tournament at Eugene Country Club later this winter, the Oregon Duck Invitational on March 22.

The Pac-10 Championships will be held in Seattle at Broadmoor Country Club on April 26.



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Senior Ben Crane leads a veteran group of golfers into the season.

Men's Fall golf schedule (tentative)

Sept. 21-22	Pacific Invitational	Copperopolis, Calif.
Sept. 28-29	Husky Invi.	Bremerton, Wash.
Oct. 5-6	Nike Invitational	Corvallis, Ore.
Oct. 12-13	Nevada Wolfpack Classic	Reno, Nev.

Women's Fall golf schedule (tentative)

Sept. 28-29	University of Portland Inv.	Aloha, Ore.
Oct. 5-7	NCAA Fall Preview	Tulsa, Okla.
Oct. 12-13	Northwest Invitational	Corvallis, Ore.
Oct. 23-25	Stanford Invitational	Stanford, Calif.
Oct. 31-Nov. 2	Rolex Match-Play Champ.	Vero Beach, Fla.



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