



Oregon handles bad conditions well on first day

The Ducks are in fifth place heading into the final round of action at the Western Intercollegiate today

By Brett Williams
for the Emerald

The Oregon men's golf team concluded its first round at the 53rd Annual Western Intercollegiate Tournament on Monday night in Santa Cruz, Calif., after play was suspended for five hours because of intense weather conditions.

The Ducks' fifth-place finish could have been better if north of the wind and rain front. Oregon lost, in head coach Steve Nosler's opinion, "seven to eight strokes" in the final six holes that were played after the layoff.

"When play was halted, the course was flooded, and there were chip shots that would hit a mud puddle and stop," said Nosler, in his seventh season as head coach. "But we're not making any excuses. Everyone had to play in the same conditions."

The Ducks' score of 304 was five strokes back from Pacific-10 Conference opponent Washington, who is currently in first place.

Oregon enters its final 18 holes today with four-, six-, and eight-stroke leads over Pacific-10 foes Oregon State, California, and Stanford, respectively.

Nosler believes the Ducks are still in a good position to win the tournament.



"Scores were high for the quality of teams, but this is a difficult course," said Nosler, who compares the course with Augusta National. "I'm not 100 percent pleased, but we're still in striking distance, and if we play well, we are capable of winning."

Oregon's Adrian Burtner was the top performer for the Ducks on Monday. The Salem native, who received medalist honors at the Duck Invitational two weeks ago, shot a 73 in the two rounds. Teammate Ben Crane finished the day in a deadlock with Oregon State's John Lepak and eight others

at 12th place.

Nosler applauded the attitude of his players.

"Everyone played as hard as they can, and their attitude is great. I can't stand it when people walk around feeling sorry for themselves," Nosler said. "With the rain and the fog, you couldn't even see where the ball was going. But the kids still had a great attitude."

The Ducks, in Nosler's opinion, know what it takes to win this tournament.

"We can only do what we can do; we have no control over other teams," Nosler said. "Our kids need to come out mentally prepared and mentally tough to win tomorrow."

A win today would only help Oregon's cause for a bid into the West Regional after the season.

"I am the wrong guy to ask about rankings," Nosler said. "All I know is our ultimate goal is to make it to the 'Big Dance.'"

The Leader Board

Teams:

1. Wash. 299
2. Pepp. 301
3. Nevada 303
- UTEP 303
5. Oregon 304

Individuals:

1. Stephenson, CSU 72
- Kribel, Stan. 72
- Kearney, SJSU 72
- Gonzalez, UTEP 72
5. Burtner, UO 73

SPRING FOOTBALL

Ducks aim to replace the irreplaceable

With Akili Smith gone, UO looks for a new starting quarterback

By Tim Pyle
Oregon Daily Emerald

Along with new uniforms, Oregon football may have an entirely different composition next season.

As spring practice began Monday afternoon, Ducks head coach Mike Bellotti foresaw a team that will probably be easily discernible from last season's edition.

Gone is record-breaking quarterback Akili Smith, a probable top-10 pick in the April 17 NFL Draft. With his departure, Oregon's wide-open passing offense may disappear, as well.

"We want to reload the offense," Bellotti said, "continue to rebuild the defense and improve, and then be standouts on the special teams."

Defensively, the Ducks figure to be significantly better for the third straight season.

Nick Aliotti, the esteemed founder of the 1995 Rose Bowl squad's Gang Green defense, is back with the Ducks as defensive coordinator after a four-season hiatus, and he will have eight defensive starters returning, plus linebacker Peter Simon, the Pacific-10 Conference's leading tackler in 1997 who missed most of last season with a torn pectoralis muscle.

"I'm excited about Nick coming back," Bellotti said. "He's a proven quality coach at this level."

"I do expect our defense to be better. We have eight or nine returning starters coming back, and it's a group that has improved dramatically from year to year. Last year, they improved five places in scoring defense in the conference. So I am excited about that."

"I feel like certainly there's unfinished business there, and some things we need to get better at. I feel like it should happen."

Once again, however, the biggest news during spring practice will be the battle for the starting quarterback spot.

Unlike last season, when incumbents Jason Maas and Smith were already experienced and proven in game situations, top candidates A.J. Feeley and Joey Harrington have received little playing time to this point.

"I expect it to be a battle," Bellotti said. "Certainly, once we get out there, we see them go, and they start to operate the offense and do the physical skill work, we'll have a better opportunity for evaluation. Right now, [the favorite] would be a guesstimate on my part, and I have no guess. I'm just excited certainly to see it because that is one of the focal points on our team."

Feeley, a junior from Ontario, did not throw a single pass last season, but he did complete eight-of-10 passes for 137 yards and one touchdown in 1997. In Oregon's blowout loss at Arizona State that season, Feeley completed all four of his passes for 90 yards and one touchdown and also scored a rushing touchdown.

Harrington, a sophomore who attended Gresham's Central Catholic, has attempted just one collegiate pass, and it was not even as quarterback.

In the Ducks' home win over Southern California last season, Harrington lined up at tailback, received a pitch from Smith and ran to his right while looking downfield. But he ended up having to throw the ball away as Trojans All-American linebacker Chris Claiborne anticipated the trick

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Nick Medley/Emerald

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Mike Bellotti
UO head coach

Tailback Reuben Droughns, who rushed for 824 yards before breaking his right ankle last season, will ease his way back into playing shape this spring.