

Men

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having another champion," Fein said.

"Coach has a focus of trying to get the program back to the top of the Pac-10. I think we've done a lot with the team we have now,

"It is important to be patient when you're developing a distance runner and a cross country team. I think our progress through the first half of the season has been excellent."

Martin Smith
head coach

more than some expected, but we're not at the top, yet."

Coach Smith knows that a championship may be out of reach, but he is looking forward to the possibilities that the conference championship presents.

"It will be another exciting step for our young team [to see] how it stacks up at this level of competition," Smith said.

"Our focus will be for our team to maximize its performance. We've always been of

the philosophy to just prepare as intelligently as we can and see how we react on meet day."

The Ducks hope to react especially well against Arizona State.

Oregon beat the Sun Devils at the Roy Griak Invitational on Sept. 25, but Arizona State got its revenge when it "walloped" — according to senior Andrew Bliss — Oregon at the Pre-NCAAs.

"It'll be tough to knock off a team like Stanford because it's on another level," Bliss said. "We can beat ASU though, and if we do that, we'll try to go after Arizona, too."

Co-captains Fein and Bliss will be leading a Duck lineup that features juniors Sam Hill, Michael Kasahun and Lincoln Nehring; and freshmen Tom Becker, Jason Hartmann and Kris Martin.

As the team hits the home stretch — consisting of the Pac-10s, the Nov. 13 Western Regionals, and probably the NCAA Championships on Nov. 22 — coach Smith is pleased with the way his team has come along.

"We are a very young team," Smith said. "It is important to be patient when you're developing a distance runner and a cross country team. I think our progress through the first half of the season has been excellent."

No. 23 Ducks take on Pac-10

■ The women's cross country team prepares for the Pac-10 Championships

By Jeff Smith
Oregon Daily Emerald

The team may be nationally ranked for the first time this season, but now it faces the challenge of staying there.

The No. 23 Oregon women's cross country team impressed the pollsters with its 16th place tie at the Pre-NCAAs. The Ducks hope to continue making noise tomorrow at 12 p.m. at the Pacific-10 Conference Championships.

It will not be an easy assignment. Oregon faces a field that includes five teams currently ranked in the top-25, and with three of those teams in the top 11.

Those teams include No. 1 Stanford, No. 9 Washington, No. 11 Arizona State and No. 14 UCLA.

The obvious favorite is the defending champion Cardinal, who will be looking to capture its sixth title in seven years.

Head coach Tom Heinonen knows that his Ducks will have trouble if they try and go after Stanford, so instead he has set more realistic goals for his squad.

"We want to stay ahead of Arizona and take aim at UCLA,"

Heinonen said. "I think we can be a lot better than we were at the Pre-NCAAs and a fourth-place finish would be great."

The Ducks ran into some misfortune in Indiana at the Pre-NCAAs, but Heinonen doesn't expect such bad luck to continue.

"We had three runners get knocked down in the race at the Pre-NCAAs," Heinonen said. "Tara [Struyk] will run a lot better and won't fall twice. Eri [Macdonald] will run better on a flat course and Kylee Wells should improve, too."

The course at El Dorado Regional Park in Long Beach, Calif., will be a far cry from the hilly course the Ducks ran at the University of Indiana. The 5,000-meter course is predominantly flat and grassy and has several road crossings.

Oregon's lineup will not feature its top returner. Junior Katie Crabb will be held out because of an Achilles aggravation. She has been suffering with the injury throughout the season and is hoping to be ready for the Western Regionals on

Nov. 13.

"It's a huge impact with Katie out of the race," Heinonen said. "It changes our score substantially to not have Katie in the mix. We'll have her train in the water, but it's not the same as running."

The Ducks that will be running include senior Lisa Jansen; juniors Rhiannon Glenn, Chrissy Ruitter and Wells; sophomore Pam Fields; and freshmen Erinn Gulbrandsen, Macdonald, Struyk and Amy Nickerson.

Nickerson has nursed her way back to near full strength after suffering a mild Achilles aggravation earlier in the fall. She led the Ducks at the Pre-NCAAs with her 32nd place finishing time of 18 minutes, 1 second.

"Amy is doing a lot better," Heinonen said. "She hasn't done all the training that she's wanted to do, but she's done most of everything that she can."

Oregon is still in search of one of the 13 at-large berths for the NCAA Championships and can't afford a letdown in Long Beach.

"This is the conference championships so it's very important," Heinonen said. "If you screw up in your own conference and finish behind a team that you should have beaten, then it could affect the at-large process."



NICKERSON

Reloaded Blazers shoot to take step further into NBA Finals

By Landon Hall
Associated Press

PORTLAND — Usually the speculation about who will win the next NBA championship begins right after the horn sounds on the Finals, when a reporter jams a microphone into the star player's face and asks, "Can you do it again?"

The San Antonio Spurs have received all the consideration befitting the defending champions, but the Portland Trail Blazers have stolen a considerable portion of the thunder.

"We're going to be a formidable team," Portland guard Greg Anthony said. "How formidable remains to be seen. We still have a lot of growing to do. To even speculate about how far we're going to go, it really does us no good because

we've got a marathon to run."

The Blazers are reviled by many teams around the league because of the perception that billionaire Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen has purchased the best NBA team money can buy, like a new computer loaded with cool graphics and gizmos.

Version 99-00 of the Blazers features a starting lineup with a combined salary of \$53 million: Scottie Pippen, the small forward acquired from Houston for Kelvin Cato, Walt Williams and four guys the Rockets didn't even want; power forward Brian Grant; center Arvydas Sabonis; point guard Damon Stoudamire; and shooting guard Steve Smith.

The Blazers' reserves — guard Greg Anthony and Stacey Augmon, forwards Rasheed Wallace,

Detlef Schrempf and Bonzi Wells, and center Jermaine O'Neal — actually have outplayed the starters much of the time, helping the Blazers breeze through the preseason.

Seven players averaged in double figures, and even more impressive, Portland out-rebounded its opponents by a wide margin, even without Grant, who is recovering from knee surgery and likely won't play his first game until the opener Tuesday at Vancouver.

"We realize we have yet to even scratch the surface of what we're capable of doing as a team," Pippen said. "Especially when we don't have a guy like Brian in the lineup."

Mike Dunleavy, the NBA coach of the year last season, may have the NBA's most versatile lineup.

Pippen can play either forward or guard position, and new hires Smith and Schrempf can play both shooting guard and small forward.

One of Dunleavy's few problems may be at center. Sabonis is 35 and slower than ever, and he simply can't guard the NBA's more aggressive big men like Shaquille O'Neal, Tim Duncan and David Robinson. Still, Sabonis remains one of basketball's best-passing centers, and if he begins to wear down, the position will be filled by either Wallace or O'Neal, who has bulked up for his fourth pro season and just signed a four-year, \$24 million contract.

Entering last season, Portland had lost in the first round of the playoffs six straight years. Dunleavy had played in more NBA Fi-

nals (two) than anyone on his team. But that all changed when Grant, a powerful rebounder who had a star-making season, led the Blazers to the Western Conference finals.

The Spurs won in four games, but the experience changed the Blazers. They have learned to expect more.

"I think last season is a tremendous building block for us," Dunleavy said. "We know the work we put in last year was a great time to get through the regular season competing for the best record in the league, and to make it as far as we did in the playoffs, I think helped our guys a great deal. It gives them confidence, but also a measuring stick on what they need to do this year in order to take it another step further."

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