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**Oregon riled up, ready to go**

■ The Ducks hope their hard work and youthful exuberance will lead to a winning season

By Brett Williams  
Oregon Daily Emerald

After a turbulent season that left Oregon 4-10 in dual-meets and facing allegations of violating NCAA weight-loss methods, the Ducks welcome a fresh start to the 1999 season with dual matches today at UC Davis at 1 p.m. and Stanford at 7:30 p.m.

Oregon's youth this season could give the Ducks a spark. The Ducks wrestle only two seniors and one junior this weekend, leaving the other seven weight class divisions occupied by underclassmen.

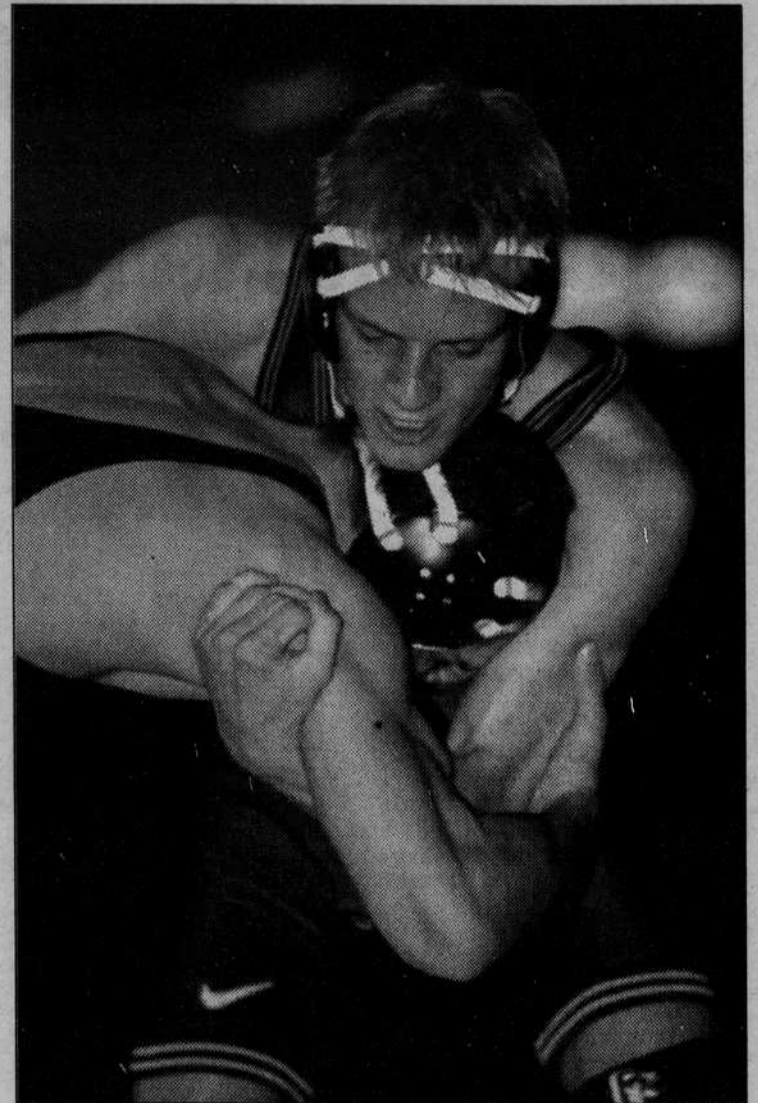
"We're in transition," said Oregon head coach Chuck Kearney, who in his second season at the helm. "We're a really young team. When they become seasoned, they have the ability to be top-level wrestlers. It's just hard to tell when it will happen."

"This group is real serious, and we have nine new faces. The guys are getting to know each other and the attitude is real positive."

Last season's team leaders, Sean Morgan and Chael Sonnen, will be sorely missed. Morgan, who finished ninth in the nation at the 165 pound weight level, graduated. Sonnen, who has one year of eligibility remaining, is redshirting this season to practice with the U.S. Olympic team.

With Morgan and Sonnen gone, Kearney is anxious to see who will emerge as the Ducks' leader this season.

"It's an individual sport, but the team component is so important," Kearney said. "They can help each other become better



The Ducks need Mark Castle, Oregon's most improved player last season, and his teammates to continue progressing for them to win this upcoming season.

wrestlers, or they can drag each other down, so leadership is very important."

One wrestler Kearney expects to establish himself as a team leader is Doug Lee. The junior from Central Point won the Pacific-10 Championship at 184 pounds last year.

"He's a brawler and a real physical wrestler," Kearney said. "If he gets things done at the national tournament, he's capable of winning it all."

Another top returnee for the Ducks is Mark Castle, who will wrestle in the 149-pound weight class. The senior won Oregon's most improved wrestler award after coming on strong at the end of the season to finish 9-18.

"[Castle] had a tough season last year," Kearney said. "We'll have to see how he improves and how he'll do this year."

Kearney also expects big things from David Watson. The sophomore from Canby finished last season with a 17-13 record that included a lot of close losses.

"Of David's 13 losses, eight were by two points or less," Kearney said. "Usually when someone's been through that experience, the losses translate into wins the next season."

Watson's brother, Brian, will wrestle at 133 pounds. The red-shirt freshman is the winningest wrestler in Oregon prep history, and Kearney said he is "capable of being in the Pac-10 finals."

A key pickup in the off-season for Oregon was the addition of sophomore Eugene Harris. Harris had an impressive junior college career at Lacene last season, where he wrestled well against a handful of Division I wrestlers.

"Last year he beat nationally ranked kids and All-Americans," Kearney said. "I believe he is capable of being in the top three or four in the country."

Another big addition to the team is true freshman Jason Hairless, who wrestles at 125 pounds.

According to Kearney, the sky is the limit for one of his biggest recruits.

"He will get his baptism by fire, but he is very talented and he goes out there and makes people wrestle," Kearney said. "He's a kid that could qualify for the national tournament. Anything can happen there."

Redshirt freshman Mike Sills has the dubious task of filling in for Sonnen at 197 pounds.

"He's a big strong kid who works real hard," Kearney said. "How he adjusts and handles adversity as a starter will determine how good he can be."

Rounding out the Ducks' starting lineup is Leif Williams at 165 pounds, Jesse Culp at 174 and heavyweight Eric Webb.

For the first year of Kearney's tenure, the Ducks participated in workouts during the fall to prepare for the season. The team lifted weights on Tuesdays and Thursdays, ran on Wednesdays, and finished with circuit training on Fridays.

"We've all invested a lot more time this year than in years' past," Lee said. "We're definitely more focused."

"This group worked extremely hard during their two-a-days," Kearney said. "What they do and what they continue to do will impact their season."

David Watson said the Ducks' youth is countered by the overall attitude of the team.

"We've got a good core group of kids. We're young but really focused," Watson said. "I think we're going to do just fine."

In a season that is unpredictable, Kearney said that only time will tell how good his team will be this year.

"Guys are working hard in practice, and a lot of them are still learning," Kearney said. "Around Christmas we'll sit down as a group and assess where we are and set team goals."

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