

Oregon Daily
Emerald
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Sports

Best Bet
NBA Basketball
Portland vs. Philadelphia
5 p.m., TNT



Ducks hoping to begin season with payback



On Tap

Who: Oregon vs. Western Kentucky
When: Sunday, 1 p.m.
Where: McArthur Court

■ Oregon begins its pursuit for a second consecutive Pac-10 title Sunday against Western Kentucky at McArthur Court

By Mirjam Swanson
Oregon Daily Emerald

Back to business, the No. 17 Oregon women's basketball team plays its first regular season game against Western Kentucky at 1 p.m. Sunday at McArthur Court.

It's the first step in the Ducks' season-long pursuit of a second straight Pacific-10 Conference title, a seventh straight NCAA Tournament appearance and a bigger chunk of national respect. Basically, back to the business of winning.

The funny thing is, that's almost exactly what Oregon was trying to do the last time it met the Lady Toppers in 1997.

Only then, it was the Ducks making the cross-country trip. And it was Western Kentucky that was the nation's 17th-ranked team.

And Oregon turned in a performance prophetic of the accomplishments to come, giving the unsuspecting Lady Toppers all they could handle before eventually allowing them to escape with a 92-90 win.

"We have a little unfinished business with Western Kentucky," junior forward Lindsey Dion said. "We lost to them my freshman year, so the people who were here the first time are [thinking about that]."

Oregon is also thinking about starting the season right.

Currently No. 17 in both the Associated Press and ESPN poll, the Ducks also are listed between No. 14 and 18 in five of the six preseason college basketball publications.

"The kids appreciate it," head coach Jody Runge said. "It's a confirmation of their efforts. [But] we're just trying to keep focused. They have a lot of lofty goals but I don't think they're caught up in the hype of the ranking. They understand that the little day-to-day steps are the things that

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That first step is Western Kentucky — which might be rather road-weary after opening its season at Indiana tonight.

Nevertheless, the Lady Toppers field an impressive batch of quick, experienced guards.

"They have guards who can shoot from way deep and who can also drive," Dion said. "We've gotta give them room but we've also get up on those shots and play good perimeter defense."

Plans indicative of business as usual for Oregon, which set the Pac-10 record for scoring defense and field goal percentage defense last season.



RUNGE

Oregon stumbles, falls to Sun Devils



NELSON

■ The volleyball team loses an emotional game 3 to Arizona State, then is blown out in game 4 in its final weekend of play

By Scott Pesznecker
Oregon Daily Emerald

When one has been pushed too far, it's time to take a stand.

Down 11-2 in game one against Arizona State, a stand is exactly what the Oregon volleyball team took.

But instead of giving too little, too late, the Ducks gave too much, too early. Oregon (7-19 overall, 1-16 Pacific-10 Conference) fought the Sun Devils (13-11, 9-8) hard through three games of play but crumbled in the fourth and final game, losing the match at McArthur Court by scores of 8-15, 15-7, 14-16 and 1-15.

Oregon plays its final match of the season today at 7 p.m. against No. 19 Arizona (16-9, 10-6).

"We could have given up," Oregon head coach Cathy Nelson said. "We know there's nothing for us after this weekend, and I'm really proud of the team that they just played. They played hard, and played to get a win. We were in a really good position to get a win, but we didn't."

After losing game 1, Amy Banducci opened game 2 with a kill before the Sun Devils answered with a pair of their own. The lead changed four times before Arizona State called timeout with Oregon holding a 7-5 advantage.

The lead never changed again. Carli McCord hit a service ace, setter Julie Gerlach had a kill and the Sun Devils committed three errors. Oregon took the game.

"We were really communicating well as a team and working together," middle-blocker Laura Norton said. "Everything seemed to work out."

The Sun Devils opened game 3 with a 6-1 lead before the Ducks called for a timeout. After the huddle, Annie Pogue came to the rescue, contributing two kills to a 5-0 scoring run.

The game remained close. Oregon had a chance to win with the score at 14-13, but Pogue — who had 9 kills, no errors and 13

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Senior Steve Fein strides to become the nation's top distance runner.

By Jeff Smith
Oregon Daily Emerald

Find this week's Sports Illustrated and turn to page 40.

Placed atop the left corner of the page — featured in the weekly "Faces in the Crowd" section — and sporting a slight smile is Oregon senior cross country runner Steve Fein.

Fitting that the two-time All-American gets featured in such a section, because to Fein, that's all he strives to be. Just a regular face in the crowd.

But make no mistake about it, when it comes to running, Fein is a one-of-a-kind.

He tries to deflect praise, but it's hard to do when he has captured the individual title in the last four meets he's raced in, including last Saturday's Western Regional 10,000 meters run in 30 minutes, 30 seconds — a full 36 seconds ahead of his closest competitor.

Take for example, halftime of the Oregon Ducks football game against Washington State on November 6. There Fein was, standing at the 50-yard line with Athletic Director Bill Moos. The P.A. announcer boomed out his name as he was being recognized for his Pacific-10 Conference title the week before. Fein accepted the award from Moos, and graciously waved to the applauding crowd, but promptly left as soon as his time in the spotlight was up.

That's the type of guy he is. Never one to attract attention to himself or think much about his accomplishments.

"Once you start getting carried away with your success and enjoying it too much, then you don't make the necessary improvement you need to make," Fein said. "You begin to rest on your laurels a bit too much."

As Fein prepares to lead his 12th-ranked Ducks in the NCAA Championships on Monday in Bloomington, Ind., it can be easy for fans to take such an athlete for granted.

But Fein didn't begin his college career in Eugene. In fact, as one of the most decorated distance runners coming out of the prep scene in 1995, he wasn't even recruited by Oregon.

He went to Wisconsin, where current Oregon head coach Martin Smith was at the helm. Smith's coaching style idealized what Fein looked for, and as the two put together successful seasons,

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