



Rick Gamez says after surviving the Pac-10, his squad is ready for whomever it faces.

Softball

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10, the team feels that they can take on anyone.

"I don't think any team in the Pac-10 is going to see anybody better than what they've already seen," Gamez said. "Now we can focus on a whole new season and take it one game at a time."

The Ducks just finished a road trip where they faced two of the best pitchers in the country in Jennifer Spediacci and Amanda Freed. Now they must contend with yet another tough hurler in Blades, who is both the season

LSU has been tough all year. They've got the whole ball of wax. They've got good hitting, good pitching and good defense. There's a reason why they go in as the No. 1 seed.

Rick Gamez
head coach

and all-time NCAA strikeout leader.

But that's something that Jill Robinson, Oregon's all-time home run leader, said does not concern Oregon.

"We started getting better down in UCLA," Robinson said. "We were hitting off Courtney Dale and Amanda Freed. Those are the best pitchers in the Pac-10, and we weren't intimidated."

Intimidated or not, the Ducks had a rough time trying to figure out Blades earlier this season when the team faced her in a tournament in Arlington, Texas. Blades held Oregon to only one hit, while striking out 14 in the 3-0 win for the Golden Eagles.

"We need to stay disciplined, and we'll be okay against this pitcher," Robinson said. "If I remember correctly she didn't throw a lot of strikes. It was just a lot of rise balls that we swung at. We're going to be our worst enemy if we swing at them."

Robinson and Gamez both feel that the team is starting to gel offensively despite being swept in the last three games of the season. Robinson said the Ducks are starting to string some hits together, and the selection couldn't have come at a better time for the team.

"That's going to be the key,"

Gamez said. "You get some runners in scoring position, and all it takes is a hit here and a hit there, and before you know it, you've got some hits back-to-back, and you've scored some runs."

While Southern Mississippi is the No. 8-ranked team in the country, Robinson thinks that the Ducks are capable of upending them.

"I do remember that they were average hitters; there wasn't anything great," Robinson said. "On defense I think they had a couple of errors, so I'm not really worried about their defense."

Gamez seems to see things the same way as his star slugger.

"They're a feisty group; they come out aggressive," Gamez said. "They scrap for runs and do everything they have to get some runs because they know they only need one or two runs with Blades on the mound."

Other than Southern Mississippi, the Ducks are in a region with some high-powered offensive teams.

No. 7 Louisiana State hosts the region. Last year the Tigers lost to Southern Mississippi in the regional semifinals, 4-3.

This year LSU is more focused and a better team, according to Gamez.

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Also on the potential horizon is No. 17 Louisiana-Lafayette, a team that may pose problems for the Ducks.

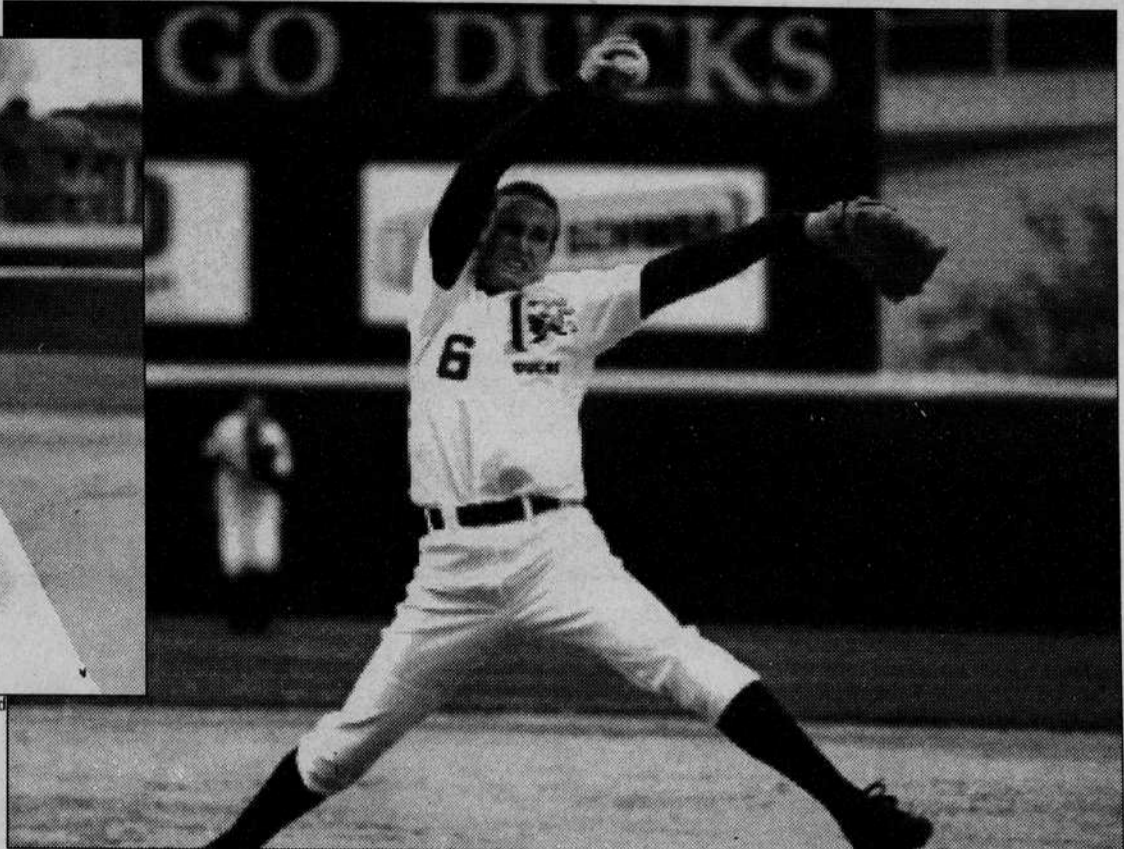
"Louisiana-Lafayette is another very good team," Gamez said. "They've been ranked in the top-15 all year. So there are some good teams in the region."

Rounding out the region is Northwestern State and Hofstra, neither of which Oregon is familiar with.

The format of the regional tournament is double-elimination with the winners of each region going to Oklahoma City to play in the College World Series, May 25-29.

That's something that is in reach for the Ducks, Robinson said.

"We need to play our game down there and not overlook them," Robinson said. "We need to drill them into the ground, not just beat them, but beat their pants off."



Oregon's ace, sophomore Connie McMurren, brings a 1.78 earned run average and 143 strikeouts into postseason play.

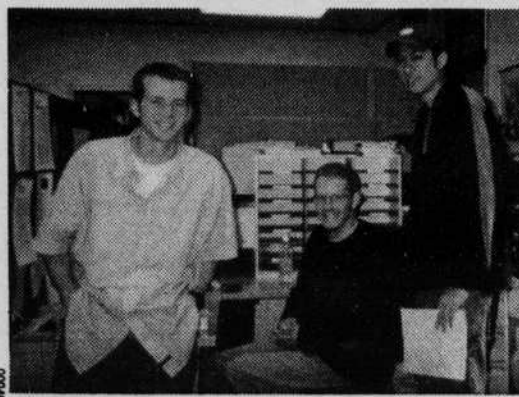


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