

Hayward hosts high-powered championships

■ The Oregon men and women's track and field teams face some of the nation's best this weekend at the Pac-10 Championships at Hayward Field

By Mirjam Swanson
Oregon Daily Emerald

The best track meet in the world this weekend is at Hayward Field.

All nine Pacific-10 Conference schools with men's and women's track and field teams will be represented.

Heading into the meet, the Stanford men and UCLA women are favored, although Southern California is the reigning men's champion. The UCLA women are aiming for their fourth straight conference title.

Oregon's men's squad hopes to capitalize on strong efforts by sen-

ior Steve Fein (5,000 meters) and sophomores Jason Boness (high jump, 7-3 1/2) and Ross Krempley (800, 1:49.76) to place as high as possible.

The Duck women hope the campaigns of senior 1,500 meters runner Katie Crabb (4:19.88) and a strong cast of throwers are enough for them to improve on the fifth-place performance they've had for three years running.

But even at home in the friendly, familiar confines of Hayward Field, Oregon has its work cut out for it.

"The level of competition is going to be extremely high," women's head coach Tom Heinonen said. "Our athletes have to be ready to compete well in the face of some competition that is truly overwhelming. That's not easy, but I think our kids can do it."

The No. 2 Stanford men come with an excellent — and colorful — distance corps. The Cardinal hope that a few good runs out of those guys is enough to claim its first-ever Pac-10 championship.

The No. 5 Trojans field an potent arsenal of sprinters and throwers, including the Pac-10's top-ranked pole vaulter Dennis Kholev (18 feet, 3 inches), triple jumper Djeke Mambo (53-10 3/4) and hammer thrower Norbert Horvath (228-2). Expect sprinters/football players Sultan McCullough (10.22 in the 100) and Kareem Kelly (10.33) to figure into the scoring as well.

Fourteenth-ranked Arizona's Esko Mikkola aspires to become the only Pac-10 javelin thrower to win consecutive conference titles.

No. 24 Arizona State has Dwight Phillips, who's attempting to repeat as long and triple-jump champ.

Bolota Asmeron, a 5,000 specialist (13:32.48), leads No. 16 California.

The No. 18 Bruins need Jess Strutzel to continue his dominance of the 800 (1:49.76).

Washington's Ja'Warren Hooker — now focused solely on track, rather than football and track — leads the Pac-10 in the 200 (20.23) and 400 (44.91) and ranks second in the 100 (10.18).

Thrower Ian Waltz stars for No. 20 Washington State, with a best-in-conference mark in the shot put (63-3 1/4) and a second-best mark of 197-2 in the discus.

Competition will be stiff. But Oregon's athletes said they won't mind. They wouldn't have it any other way.

"Having Pac-10s at home is going to be exciting," said the Ducks' primary thrower, sophomore John Bello. "It's our chance to show people what we can do against all the other Pac-10 schools. That's going to be fun for me."

The women's field is as stacked as the men's. Not surprisingly, UCLA leads the charge. In fact, the Bruins have posted the conference's best marks in seven of the eight field events this season.

The only athlete to be ranked

first in a field event who isn't a member of that illustrious UCLA squad is the Ducks' red-shirt junior Karis Howell, who won the javelin in 1998 as a sophomore.

She's joined by six fellow throwers in the javelin, discus and hammer throw.

"We're pretty strong in all of our throwing events," Howell said. "And if some amazing things happen, we could really push the points for the team. That's definitely possible."

The fourth-ranked Women of Troy will try to fend off other teams' prowess in the field by scoring as much as possible in the sprints and hurdles. Angela Williams is the Pac-10's fastest woman going into the meet, with a 100 time of 11.03. Natasha Danvers is the conference-leader in the 100 (13.19) and 400-meter hurdles (57.61).

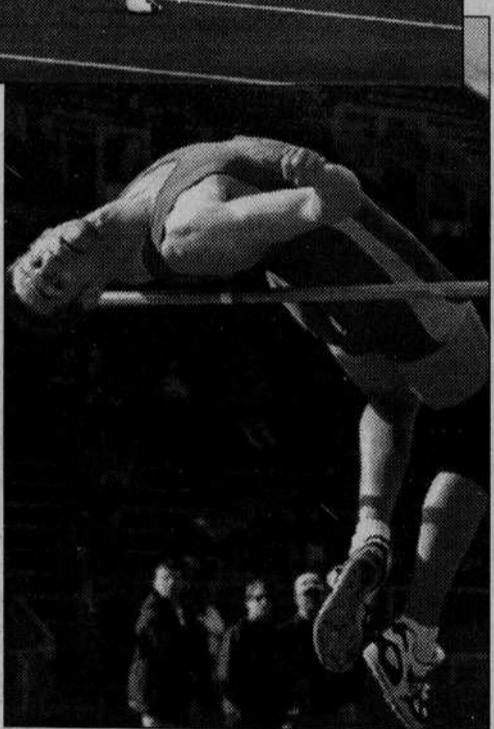
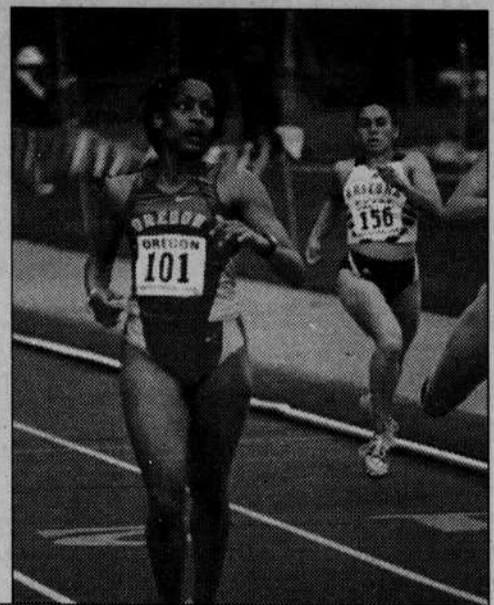
If No. 3 UCLA's junior Christina Tolson (56-10 3/4) can hold off the rest of the conference in the shot put, the Bruins' will claim their 11th straight title in that event.

No. 15 Arizona will be led by sprinter/long jumper Brianna Glenn. The versatile sophomore ranks second in both the 100 and 200 in addition to holding third in the long jump. The No. 17 Cardinal star a group of distance runners, including Lauren Fleshman, who ranks first and third in the 5,000 and 3,000, respectively.

Oregon's Endia Abrante, one of several underclassmen who constitute the Ducks' 24-member limit for this meet, applied her usual sprinter's mentality toward the situation.

"The other teams in the Pac-10 might be underestimating us," Abrante said. "This is where we take the next step, take that deep breath and say this is for the team, and for the personal goals. This is where we really show what we can do."

The Oregon women already upset heavily favored rival Washington in an April dual, the same



Kevin Calame Emerald
(top) Endia Abrante runs the 400 and both relays. (middle) Steve Fein competes in his first 5,000 of the season. (bottom) Jason Boness is favored to win the high jump.

day the men narrowly lost in the day's final event.

Both the men and women are going to need similar — and probably better — efforts at the Pac-10 Championships.

"We're fighters," Crabb said. "Everyone gives it their all, competes with a lot of heart. Yeah, we'll get after it this weekend."

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