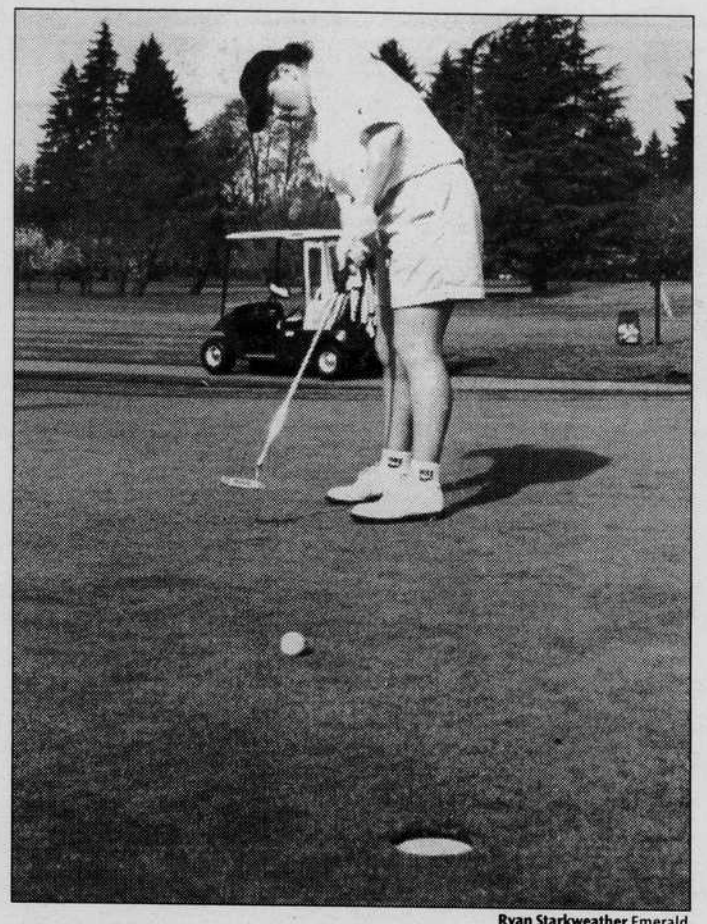

Ryan Starkweather Emerald
Senior Pam Sowden is one of five team members that will not return next year.

Oregon finishes emotional year

■ The women's golf team ends its season on a high note despite a disappointing NCAA Tournament

By Peter Hockaday
for the Emerald

The Oregon women's golf team's 1999-2000 season reads like the plot to a choose-your-own-adventure novel — the Ducks never knew where they were going to end up.

Now, reflecting on a season that saw many peaks and equally as many valleys, it's easy to see why, at times, Oregon, which finished the season ranked at No. 18, looked like one of the best teams in the country and at other times looked overwhelmed.

Take the NCAA Championships, for example, which just concluded this weekend in Sunriver. The Ducks were the best of the field after the first round, mediocre after the next two, and then slipped up, falling to 11th on the final day.

At the NCAA West Regionals two weeks before the championships, Oregon was precariously on the brink of elimination at 10th before a late charge put them into the championships and seventh place.

These tournaments are microcosms of the Ducks' entire emotionally charged season, but a season that ended successfully for the team no matter the results.

"The whole emotion of the thing overwhelmed us," head coach Renee Baumgartner said after the final round at the NCAA Championships. "But you're not going to remember this round, you're going to remember the friendships."

The reasons for the Ducks' emotional high this season, and especially at the final round of the NCAAs, were near the surface since the very beginning.

For one, the Ducks knew that Baumgartner would retire from coaching at the end of the season to take over as associate athletic director and that four seniors would be lost to graduation. Baumgartner even redshirted Anika Heuser and Kylie Wilson last year so they would have a chance to play on this team, which the coach called her "dream team."

Secondly, a trip the Ducks took to Australia and New Zealand last summer gave the team a chance to bond in a way most teams couldn't.

"It was a great trip," said senior co-captain Wilson, a New Zealand native. "We've got a lot of players from other countries, so it's a family kind of thing."

Finally, the Ducks tasted success early in the season and right before the postseason, which may have contributed to their pushes at the end of the regionals and the start of the championships.

In the fall the Ducks won the Fall Nittany Lion Invitational in October and had two second place finishes at the Oregon Invitational and Hawaii Golf Classic.

This spring, Oregon took the team titles at the Colby/ Santa Clara Invitational and the Lady Aztec Invitational, both in March.

As for individual accomplishments, the Ducks had many. Wilson won an individual title and senior co-captain Pam Sowden added two of her own.

Junior Jerilyn White had the team's lowest stroke average all spring and ended the season ranked 60th in the country. Heuser was a strong candidate to win at the Pacific-10 Conference Championships and could have contended at the NCAAs as well.

All this emotion doesn't mean the team will fall apart when it loses the four seniors and the coach. White will most likely remain the Ducks' leader next year on the course.

"The next tournament I play in, I'll forget this one," White said after the championships.

The Ducks' roller-coaster season came to an end last weekend, and they will return a whole new team, coach included, next fall. But the Ducks' emotion should carry over for many years to come.

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