

Women get psyched to kick start season

■ Oregon women's soccer prepares for a season minus eight graduated seniors, but with budding stars in the wings

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

The Oregon women's soccer team is young in every sense of the word. The program is young, the coach is relatively young, the players are young, the field is ... well, you get the point.

“If we want to be a nationally ranked team, we'll have to find out what it takes.”

Bill Steffen
women's soccer
head coach

In a season after the team graduated eight starters, head coach Bill Steffen dealt with breaking this young team in by lining up the toughest preseason schedule in team history.

Before they even prepare for games against traditional Pacific-10 Conference powerhouses like No. 17 Southern California, No. 14

UCLA and No. 7 Stanford, Oregon first tangled with national powerhouses Duke (No. 22), Santa Clara (No. 3) and North Carolina (No. 1).

Steffen insists his ultimate goal is a trip to the NCAA Championships, which would be the Ducks' first ever, even if it appears he scheduled suicide for his team.

“If we want to be a nationally ranked team,” Steffen said, “we'll have to find out what it takes.”

If Steffen's gamble pays off, the dividends could be significant. The Ducks have the talent to challenge the premier teams, but the next step is winning those types of games—something they tasted last year with a victory against UCLA.

Repeating such an accomplishment could come at the feet of Oregon's forwards and midfielders. Junior midfielder Chalise Baysa will easily pass Erin Anderson, who graduated last year, as the Ducks' all-time leading scorer. She is the biggest offensive weapon Oregon has this season.

“When Chalise has the ball, people pay attention,” Steffen said.

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Granted, Harrington would end that drive with two incomplete passes, a sack and then an interception, but the character of the 2000-01 Ducks was evident.

“There wasn't any doubt in my mind that we were going to score on that last drive,” said Harrington, who admitted in his soft, emotional voice that he didn't quite know how to react to this loss as he'd never lost a game as an Oregon starter before. “We've done it so many times before. We're going to fight down to the end and never give up. It just didn't happen this time for us. But that's what Oregon football is all about.”

For most people who experienced last season's wild ride, it was a message that was not new. But for highly touted junior college tailback Maurice Morris, it was a great sign to him that enforced in his mind that he came to the right place to play college football.

“The one thing I learned about this team is that we're not going to quit,” said Morris, who was regarded as the No. 1 junior college prospect in the country last year. “I'm pretty sure that everyone's disappointed, but we're not going to let this one game have an effect on the rest of our season. I was excited to see us play like this and am glad to be here.”

While the hype leading up to the Wisconsin game was big, the hype on Morris was even bigger. The tailback didn't play spring ball because he was finishing up classes at Fresno City College, and didn't get a lot of chances to show his stuff during fall camp.

Which meant most of the focus would be on him during Oregon's season-opener. And the junior didn't disappoint, rushing for 166 yards on 20 carries.

His most impressive run thus far in the season occurred in the second quarter against Nevada. All Harrington had to do was pitch it out to Morris, and the speedster took care of the rest. Morris followed one-block and then turned on the after-burners, enroute to a 66-yard touchdown sprint.

Against Wisconsin, he was somewhat held in check, but still managed to show off his speed and strength by picking up 95 yards in 20 carries.

“I am very pleased with Maurice,”

head coach Mike Bellotti said. “He showed the full gamut out there in that first game, and did a great job here in Wisconsin in a very tough environment.”

While Morris' success is not a huge surprise, the sluggishness of the Oregon passing game certainly is. In the first two games, the Ducks only completed a total of 30 of 79 passes, as well as giving up a total of four interceptions.

Still, Harrington has resumed the starting quarterback role for his junior year, and left senior A.J. Feeley on the sidelines with a backwards hat and a headset. Feeley did get in briefly in the fourth quarter against Nevada, but only attempted four passes.

While mistakes such as dropped balls and missed reads plague the offense, the Duck defense continues to shine. In the first game, the defense came out inspired and held Nevada to minus-3 yards rushing, as well as giving up only 103 total offensive yards — its best such performance since 1962.

“I know there were some worries about us before the season started,” said Smith, who returned back an interception against Wisconsin for a 47-yard touchdown. “But we are very confident in our abilities. It's a challenge every week to stop an opposition's offense and I would put us up against anybody right now.”

Saul Patu — he of the billboards along Eugene streets with the slogan “Tu Tough” on it — and Nikolao help Smith lead a pride-filled defense. Nikolao recorded Oregon's first points of the season when he stuffed Nevada running back Adrien Dugas in the end zone of Autzen Stadium for the safety.

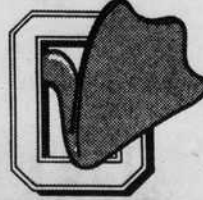
After the first two games, the three big guns have a combined 40 tackles, four sacks and one interception.

Another huge addition to the defense is cornerback Rashad Bauman, who missed all of last season with a knee injury. Bauman made an immediate impact this month with an interception against the Wolfpack and by playing a tightly covered game against Wisconsin.

His return lets the Oregon defense have more options because defensive coordinator Nick Aliotti can put him on the opposing team's best receiver, leaving the rest of the defense

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