

Heinonen runs in father's footsteps

■ Erik Heinonen said his decision to join the Ducks was not forced by family ties

By Scott Pesznecker
Oregon Daily Emerald

Tracktown fans will see a familiar face racing around the Oregon campus next cross country season.

Distance runner Erik Heinonen, son of Oregon women's track and field coach Tom Heinonen, announced Nov. 16 that he would run with the Duck Harriers next fall, and then with the track and field squad in the spring. He said he may choose to exercise his redshirt season.

Heinonen is one of the state's best prep athletes in the 1,500, 3,000 and 5,000 meters.

"Since I was a freshman in high school I wanted to go to Oregon as long as I improved enough,"

Heinonen said. "Obviously, the facilities are unequaled in the country, and I'd be hard-pressed to find a coach who has been as successful as Martin Smith. I feel comfortable with him — we both appreciate and expect hard work."

The South Eugene High School senior finished third at the 4A state cross country finale two weekends ago. Heinonen finished 21st as a junior, third as a sophomore and 30th as a freshman.

Heinonen is now preparing for the Foot Locker West Regional qualifying meet at Mt. SAC in two weeks.

On the track, Heinonen is a two-time, 4A state-meet participant. He finished sixth in the 1,500 as a sophomore with a personal-best time of 4:01.29, then finished third in the 3,000 with another PR of 8:32.61. As a junior, he placed 12th in the 1,500 and third in the 3,000.

He posted solid performances at several of the nation's top track meets, including a fourth-place, 5,000-meter finish at the 2000 U.S. Junior Championships, and an eighth-place, 3,200-meter finish at the 1999 Golden West Invite.

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Erik Heinonen
high school senior

Heinonen seems poised to follow in his father's footsteps. As an All-American distance runner at Minnesota, Tom Heinonen went on to be a post-collegiate AAU marathon champion. Erik's mother, Janet, is

also a marathon veteran and former sports information publicist for the Ducks.

"Choosing Oregon was all my decision," Erik Heinonen said. "My parents have been exceedingly careful not to push me in any way. They made sure that I was doing it for the right reasons and that it was always fun."

Heinonen's announcement to join the Ducks marks the beginning of Smith's third signing campaign. Last year, freshmen Eric Logsdon, Noel Paulson, Chris Clancy and Aaron Emery signed with Oregon. In Smith's first year, All-American Jason Hartmann and Michael Kasahun joined the team. Hartmann and Kasahun led the Ducks this cross country season.

"I liked the team," Heinonen said. "The guys don't have big egos. They're all blue collar, hard-working guys."

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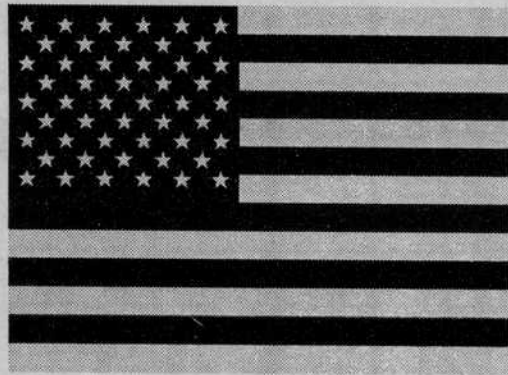
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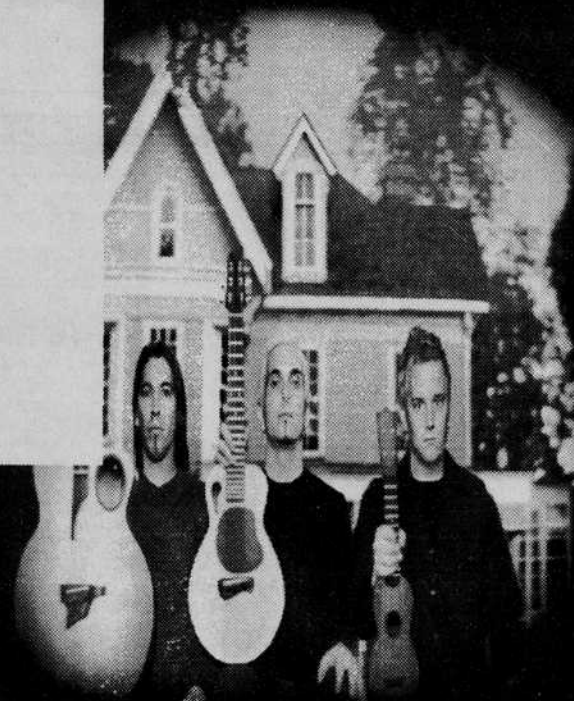
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