

UO tennis teams face Northwest opponents

■ The Duck men face a young Portland State squad while the women continue their road trip

By Robbie McCallum
Oregon Daily Emerald

After 63 years in the making, the men's tennis program is deeply rooted in Oregon athletics. Oregon has fielded a Division I tennis team every year since 1933, except during World War II, and has established itself as a traditional top-100 team.

This weekend, the Ducks face a team that is going through the build-

ing process Oregon went through 63 years ago.

Portland State, in only the second year of varsity tennis play, visits Eugene this weekend for its first-ever match against a ranked Division I opponent.

The Vikings will have their hands full against the No. 69-ranked Ducks, who are 7-6 overall and 5-5 at home. Portland State will be looking for not only its second win of the season, but its second win in program history.

The Vikings defeated NAIA foe George Fox 7-0 on Feb. 5 for their first win in school history.

Portland State has gone through many growing pains since starting in the fall of 1999. After an 0-20 inaugural campaign, the Vikings are 1-7 this year. The majority of Portland State players are freshmen from the greater Portland vicinity or junior college transfers.

Leading the Vikings are sophomore Corey Bennett (3-5) and senior transfer Luke Schroeter (2-6). Portland State's growth is shown in its top two players, who have already won more sets this season than the entire team last season.

To find an Oregon team that went through what the Vikings are going through, you have to go back to the 1952-53 season, when the Ducks went 1-7.

The Ducks have come a long way

since then, with most of their recent success coming under head coach Chris Russell. In five years at the helm of Oregon tennis, Russell has guided two teams to the NCAA Tournament (1997-98 and 1999-00), the first two in school history. He has also helped two singles players and a doubles team to the national tournament.

This weekend, Russell plays his final home game of the season in the Student Tennis Center, Oregon's first indoor tennis facility.

The Ducks and Vikings clash at noon on Saturday.

Women to face Washington schools

The first round of the Northwest tennis rivalry takes place this week-

end when Oregon travels to Washington and Washington State.

The No. 49-ranked Ducks (3-7, 0-5 Pac-10) hope to end a five-match losing streak in Seattle today or in Pullman, Wash., on Saturday.

No. 17 Washington will pose the biggest challenge for the Ducks. The Huskies are 9-4 on the year after returning four starters from last year's team. Oregon lost to Washington twice last season.

A more evenly matched contest will take place Saturday against No. 48 Washington State. The Cougars are 5-5 and led by junior Erica Perkins, who is ranked No. 41 in the latest ITA polls.

The Washington schools visit Oregon March 30-31.

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Women's

continued from page 7A

thing else would be icing on the cake."

The Beavers have won five straight games, including a sweep of first-place Arizona State and Arizona last weekend, and are thirsty for their first postseason trip since 1996. "If we just come out and play our game and stay focused for 40 minutes, I think we'll have no problem beating them," Cook said. "I don't think there's any bad blood; it's just a rivalry."

The first meeting of the season set the tone for Saturday's at Mac Court, a place where the Beavers have not won since Feb. 5, 1993.

"Our defense needs to be a lot better than when we last played them, and I think that our balance will probably be a lot more balanced than when we played them before," Spoelstra said. "We're both different teams right now; it was such a long time ago."

As for the Ducks, who are averaging a Pac-10-best 4,845 fans per game at The Pit, another win for the most successful class in program history — the senior class of 2001 — would put a nice coat of wax on a tumultuous season and perhaps breed life for a new beginning next weekend.

"We definitely want to be in the [NCAA] Tournament, and this is definitely a big turning point for us," Wolvert said. "It would be awesome to end a senior season on a win, even if we don't go to the tournament."



Laura Smit Emerald

Senior Lindsey Dion, averaging nearly nine points per game, will play her final game at Mac Court on Saturday.

Shocking!

That word can be applied to the situation involving the Oregon women's basketball team this week, as players have criticized and berated head coach Judy Runge behind Athletic Director Bill Moos' closed doors.

Of course, that word can also be applied to this week's Peter Hockaday weekly Emerald sports poll, which has soared to unprecedented heights this week. By Thursday afternoon,

more than 100 people had already voiced their opinions on whether Runge should be fired, and the race is tighter than a Speedo.

So, join the masses. Go online to www.dailymerald.com and click on the "sports" link and cast your vote. Or click on the link just below the news poll on the front page. Either way, you have until Sunday to make your opinion heard.

Happy voting!

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